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Culture and cross-border cooperation at EU's Eastern borders

Corina TURȘIE*

Abstract

The paper aims to offer an overview of the specific situation of culture as an investment priority of cross-border cooperation, part of the European territorial integration process, in the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy. The research is focused on the cross-border programmes involving Romania and its neighbours during the last two multiannual financial frameworks. Two financial instruments are of interest: the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, for the period 2007-2013 and the European Neighbourhood Instrument for 2014-2020. The analysis is based on the European Union's INTERREG database (keep.eu), filtered for seven CBC programmes, highlighting the role of culture for CBC, the intensity of CBC and the leading territories (cities and countries) in cultural projects involving cross-border partners in the Eastern Neighbourhood.

Keywords: culture, cross-border cooperation, projects, Eastern Neighbourhood

Introduction

An important policy statement of the European Union (EU) highlights the fact that cross-border cooperation (CBC) on the external borders of the EU is a key priority in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). CBC is a part of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), a financial instrument of ENP during 2014-2020 (Regulation (EU) No 232/2014) and was a part of European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), the similar instrument for the previous multiannual financial framework, 2007-2013 (Regulation (EC) No. 1638/2006). While ENI/ENPI target external relations with neighbouring countries, CBC puts the focus on equal cooperation across the EU external borders at local and regional level. It builds on the INTERREG experience of cross-border cooperation at the EU internal borders, as EU developed CBC mechanisms since the 90s.

The underlying concept of CBC offers a new perception of the border: away from its traditional 'obstacle' dimension to the vision of the border as a place where people cooperate, develop a feeling of belonging to a shared cultural space and feel united in addressing common challenges together. In

*Corina TURȘIE is Senior Lecturer at West University of Timișoara, Romania, Department of Politics, e-mail: corina.tursie@e-uvt.ro.

this vision, the border is an ,asset' to be exploited, brought by the EU political construction, doubled by the economic globalisation.

The ,barrier' to cooperation perspective has historical backgrounds, border regions facing a perceived insecurity, being also isolated from the decision-making centres. Nowadays, it is particularly difficult to overcome the legal and administrative obstacles raised by the EU external borders and to have the 'barrier to resource' transition (Sohn, 2014). Moreover, the challenges faced by Eastern European border regions are different from the ones faced by Western European internal border regions, consequently shaping the content of CBC in those regions. In fact, the nature of CBC depends on the level of cross-border integration, which differs (Decoville *et. al.*, 2015) considering several variables: cross-border interactions (dynamic of commuters and residents in neighbour countries) and dynamics of territorial convergence (GDP/capita, labour market integration, cross-border public services etc.)

A complete cross-border integration allows inhabitants to meet and exchange with the 'other', and for that purpose, the cultural dimension of CBC is important (Perrin, 2015). Border regions could be seen as laboratories of European integration and of co-creation of European identity (Sassatelli, 2009; Simionescu, 2021). In this sense, cross-border cultural projects that are visible and tangible for border populations can bring Europe closer to its citizens by making its reality concrete in everyday life (Durand, 2021). Culture as a policy area belongs to the least integrated type of European policy fields and it is part of the support competencies of the European Union, according to the Lisbon Treaty. EU supports the European cultural diversity by financing different actions, such as the European Capital of Culture competition or the Creative Europe programme. At the cross-border scale, culture is addressed through the regional policy and more particularly through the INTERREG programmes, but little attention is paid to this specific area. Durand (2021) previously offered a general overview of INTERREG CBC projects in the field of culture, taking into consideration all internal border areas of the EU. Rădoi (2020) analysed the cross-border cooperation between Romania and candidate country, Serbia, in the so called cross-border ,region of culture', in the context of winning the European Capital of Culture title by Timisoara and Novi Sad. Cultural CBC projects are to be valued especially at the internal EU borders involving old and new member states and also at the external EU borders, where the rationale for such projects would be to contribute to a deeper European integration, by changing borders, from barriers to bridges.

The aim of this paper is to examine the specific situation of culture as an investment priority of CBC at the Eastern external borders of the European Union, during the last two financial frameworks, 2014-2020 (with the support of ENI) and 2007-2013 (with the support of ENPI).

Our research was mobilized by several questions: what differentiates the CBC programme areas in terms of priority given to culture? What is the intensity of CBC in the field of culture (number of projects, budgets) and which territories lead the most cultural projects using INTERREG funds?

For this purpose, our methodology consists of an analysis of the financed projects from seven programme areas, at the Eastern borders of the EU. The data has been extracted from the EU INTERREG database*, for the following seven CBC ENI/ENPI joint operational programmes: 2014-2020 Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC; 2007-2013 Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI CBC; 2007-2013 Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova ENPI CBC; 2014-2020 Romania-Republic of Moldova ENI CBC; 2014-2020 Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC; 2007-2013 Black Sea Basin ENPI CBC and 2014-2020 Black Sea Basin ENI CBC. For each programme area Keep.eu offers a list of projects, with data in terms of time (multiannual financial period), project theme, budget, lead partner (organisation, city and country) and partner organisations. From each programme database we extracted data on the project theme and budget, highlighting the importance of cultural projects among other types of financed projects. The data on leading organisations of cultural projects and their address (city and country) was used to highlight the territories where culture is most valued as a CBC topic. Moreover, the analysis was conducted in a comparative manner, between two multiannual financial frameworks 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, to capture the evolution of CBC.

Our paper is structured as follows: the first part consists in a brief presentation of the programme documents of ENI/ENPI programmes involving Romania and its CBC neighbours during 2007-2020; it concludes that culture was a strategic objective of CBC, being included in all the analysed areas. The second part consists in an analysis of the financed CBC projects during 2007-2020, for each of the respective programme areas; the thematic and budgets analysis shows the differences between timeframes and programme areas in terms of priority given to cultural projects. The third part concludes upon the intensity of cooperation in the field of culture (number of CBC projects and budgets) and discusses upon the leading territories (cities and countries) in CBC cultural projects.

A few terminological and procedural details are necessary. CBC programmes are open for cooperation between partners and Member States sharing a land or sea border. Cross-border cooperation actions are presented in joint operational programmes (JOPs), which are the implementation documents for CBC (Regulation (EU) No 232/2014). JOPs are prepared by participating countries following a consultative process, involving the local stakeholders, and are then

* Further information is available at keep.eu

adopted by the European Commission and managed by a joint authority established, in principle, in a Member State (Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006).

1. ENI/ENPI – financial tools for territorial cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood

Territorial Cooperation is one of the goals of cohesion policy and it was introduced since 2007-2013 (Council Regulation (EC) 1083/2006 on Structural Funds). The overarching objective of EU's cohesion policy is to promote a harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the Union as a whole. The additional territorial cohesion goal, added to the previous economic and social cohesion goals, provides a framework for the implementation of joint projects between national, regional and local actors from different Member States. The goal is to be achieved through three strands of cooperation: cross-border (INTERREG A), transnational (INTERREG B) and interregional (INTERREG C). As a rule, the eligible regions for CBC are placed at NUTS level 3 along all internal and certain external land borders and maritime borders, separated by a maximum of 150 kilometres.

CBC functions in the European Neighbourhood Policy in a complementary way to its functions in regional policy (Pop *et al.*, 2005). ENP extends the principles of CBC in the EU, as a specific strand of the INTERREG programmes, but adapted to the specificities of the EU external cooperation. ENPI CBC involves “cooperation between the Member States of the European Union and partner countries in regions adjacent to their shared part of the external border of the European Union for the development of an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness” (Commission Regulation (EC) No 951/2007). ENI CBC aims to “promote cooperation across the borders between EU Member States and the countries on the European Neighbourhood and Russian Federation” in order to contribute to an “integrated and sustainable regional development and cooperation between neighbouring border areas” and to achieve the general ENI objective of “advancing further towards an area of shared prosperity and good neighbourliness” (Regulation (EU) No 232/2014) between EU Member States and their neighbours.

1.1. Thematic objectives of territorial cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood

Both ENI and ENPI were based on EU Regulations mentioning the general thematic objectives to be reached through cooperation between the Eastern Neighbourhood countries. Even though they are financial instruments meant to support EU's external policies, they are built following the model of EU's structural funds, available for the EU territorial units. Structural funds have a general

Regulation, detailing EU's investment priorities (IP), updated each seven years. The 2014-2020 Regulation (EU) 1301/2013 on European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) mentions eleven IP of structural and investment funds. Among them, there is a specific investment priority mentioning culture: *conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage (IP 6(c))*.

Complementary, the 2014-2020 Regulation on ENI mentions eleven thematic objectives, among whom we highlighted culture as thematic objective number three: *promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage*.

Our interest lays in the CBC strand of ENPI/ENI. From the general Regulation, each cross-border area is selecting, following a participative process led by the regional offices of CBC, a mix of investment priorities or thematic objectives, according to the assessed local needs. In this way, border areas develop own cooperation programmes (JOPs) with their own selection of strategic priorities and allocated funding, respecting the EU principle of thematic concentration. Following this imperative, each cross-border area can select a maximum of four objectives to be reached in seven years. In the following part of the paper, we will investigate upon the position of culture, as a strategic objective in the seven targeted programme areas.

1.2. Culture as a priority for territorial cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood

In all the seven before mentioned programme documents, culture was a financed measure (Table 1) showing the importance given to it as an incentive for European integration across borders, at the Eastern borders of the European Union.

Table 1. Culture as a strategic objective for CBC projects

Multiannual Financial Framework	ENPI/ENI CBC Programme	Priority ,Culture'
2007-2013	Romania-Ukraine-Moldova	Priority Axis 3. Key area of intervention 3.2: Cultural, social, educational exchanges
	Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine	Priority 4. Measure 4.2 Small scale "People to people" cooperation
	Black Sea Basin	Priority 3: Supporting cultural and educational networks for the establishment of a common cultural environment in the Basin; Measure 3.1: Promoting cultural networking and educational exchange in the Black Sea Basin communities.
2014-2020	Romania-Ukraine	Measure 2.1 – Preservation and promotion of the cultural and historical heritage

Romania-R. Moldova	Measure 2.1 – Preservation and promotion of the cultural and historical heritage
Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine	Measure 3.1: Promoting local culture and historical heritage along with tourism functions.
Black Sea Basin	Measure 1.1.: Jointly promote business and entrepreneurship in the tourism and cultural sectors.

Source: own representation based on programme documents

While during the 2007-2013 culture was included in the ‘people to people’ type of CBC projects, meant to facilitate direct exchanges between the inhabitants on different sides of the borders, during 2014-2020 cultural cooperation across borders was to be found as a horizontal measure to be pursued in different priority axes, corresponding to the thematic objective no. three of ENI Regulation. If the document analysis offers an ex-ante perspective on CBC in the seven programme areas, the following part of this research, consisting in a quantitative analysis based on the keep.eu database, offers an ex-post perspective on the financed projects.

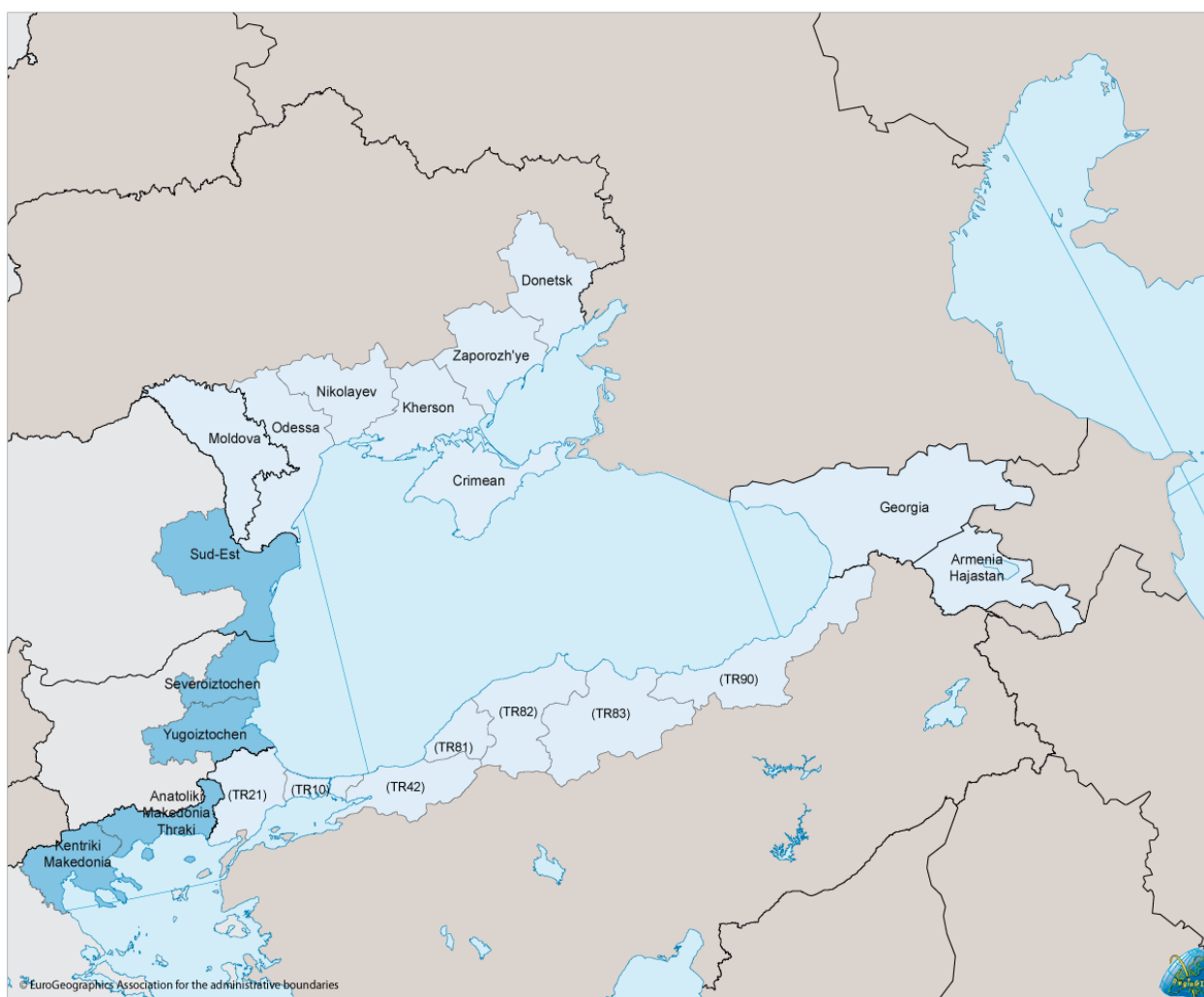
2. The importance of culture in CBC. An analysis of financed projects

In this chapter, we analysed each programme area in terms of financed projects, and we extracted from keep.eu data regarding the thematic objectives and corresponding budgets with the goal of offering a general overview of the importance of culture for CBC.

2.1. Black Sea Basin ENPI/ENI CBC

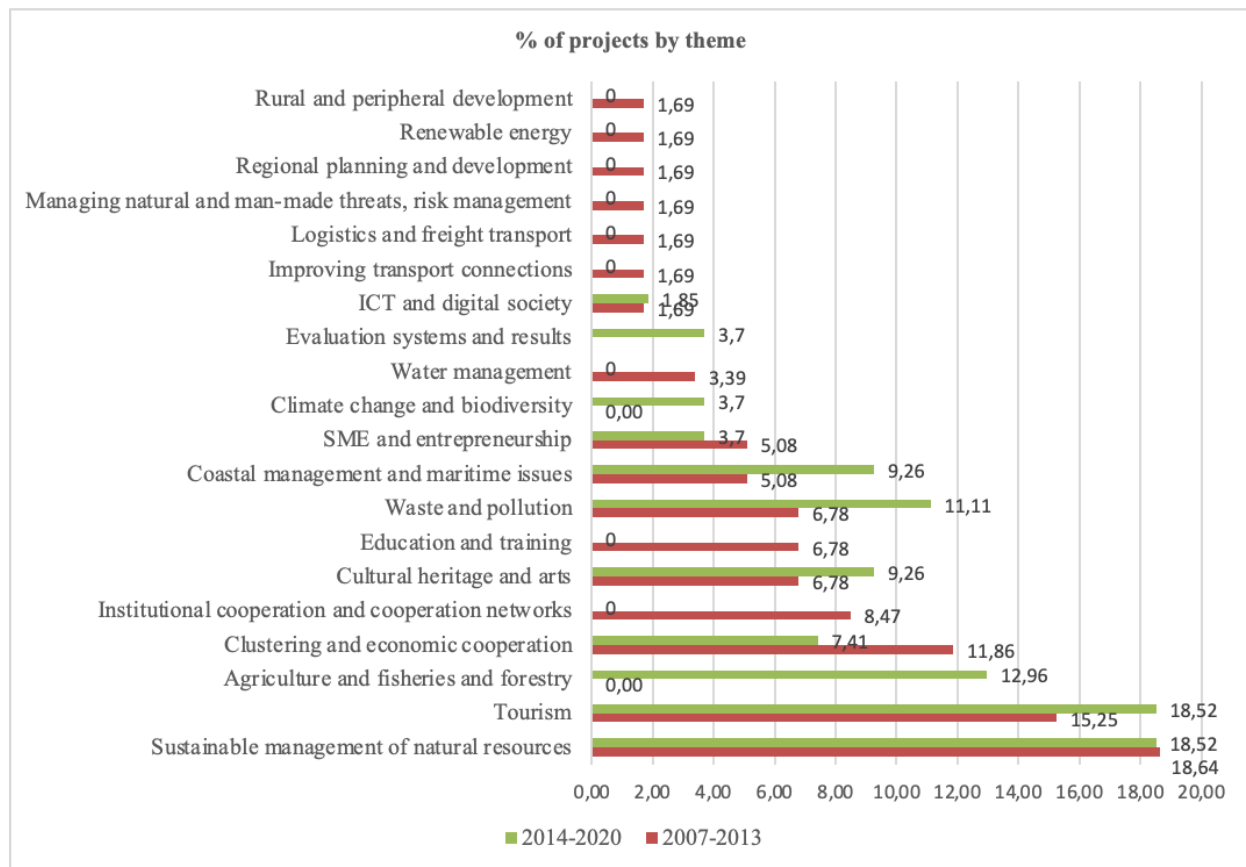
The Joint Operational Programme Black Sea Basin has a wide geographical coverage. Furthermore, larger, NUTS 2 units are eligible for CBC at maritime borders (Regulation (EU) No 232/2014, art.8). The eligible area for cooperation is composed by NUTS 2 regions from Romania (South-East) and Bulgaria (as EU Member States) and regions from Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, as well as the entire territory of Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (as partner countries). Despite the limited budget of the programme and the many challenges of the area, culture is one of the financed priorities, the region sharing a rich heritage, with 18 places recognized by UNESCO.

Figure 1. Black Sea Basin ENPI/ENI CBC programme area



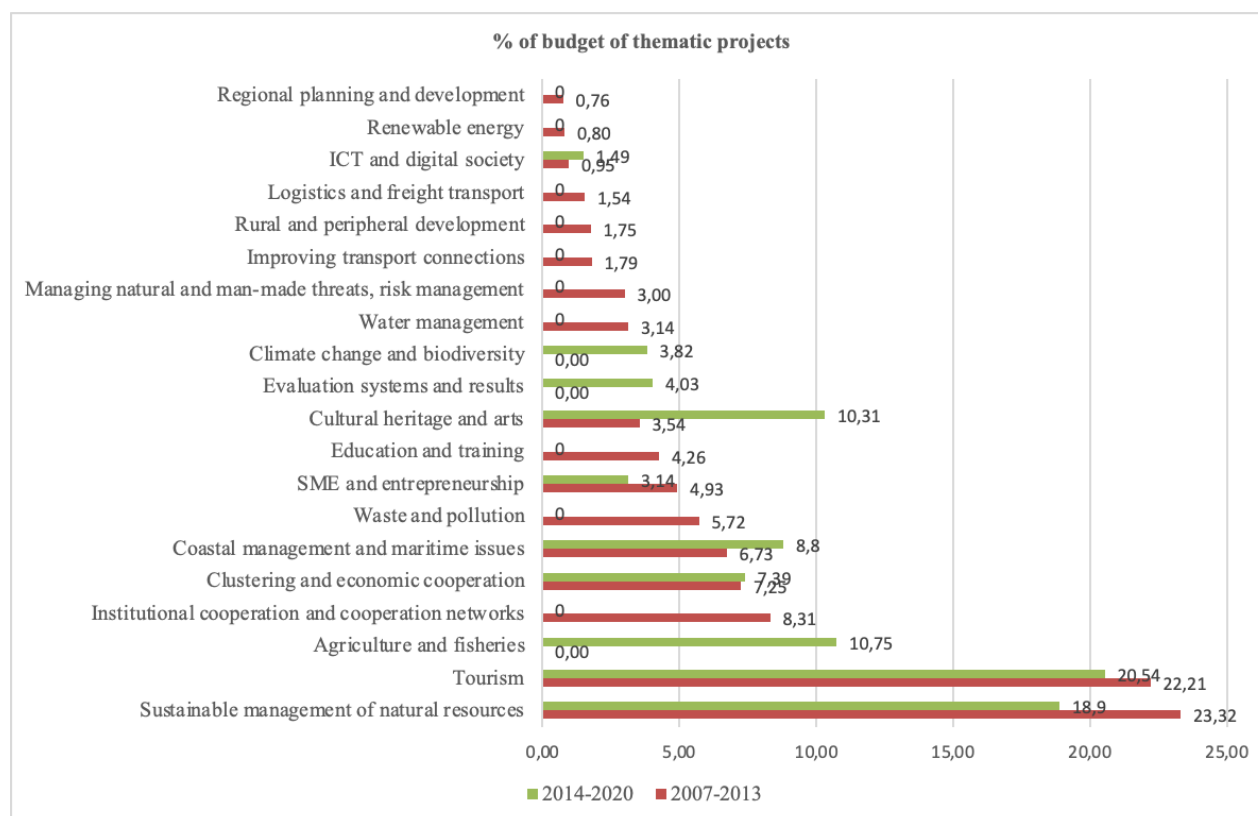
Source: Black Sea Basin Joint Operational Programme (2007)

During 2007-2013, 59 projects were financed through ENPI, while between 2014-2020 ENI financed 54 projects. Keep.eu database contains an inventory of projects labelled by the applicants, according to a hierarchy of three thematic objectives. The thematic analysis, consisting in sorting the database against the first thematic objective (Figure 2 and 3) shows that the share of projects labelled as contributing to ‘cultural heritage and arts’ was bigger in 2014-2020, compared to 2007-2013. The region also registered an increase of the share of projects aiming to enhance tourism, agriculture, fisheries and forestry, waste, pollution, coastal management and maritime issues.

Figure 2. Thematic analysis of financed projects in the Black Sea Basin

Source: own representation based on data from keep.eu (2021)

The thematic analysis was complemented by an analysis of budgets: starting from the already sorted database on the criteria of first thematic objective of each project in the programme area, we summed up the total budgets of the financed projects grouped by theme, and we calculated their share in the total financed projects. When analysing the budgets allocated to the financed projects (Figure 3), we observe that the share of budgets of cultural projects in the total amount of allocated money within the programme multiplied three times from 2007-2013 to 2014-2020, when around 10% of the programme budget financed cultural projects. In absolute terms, this means that the budgets of cultural projects increased from 1,2 to 4,8 mil. Euro, between the two timeframes 2007-2013, to 2014-2020. Still, those 10% of cultural projects are below EU average in terms of share of cultural projects in the total programme budget: 15% in 2014-2020 and 14,5% in 2007-2013 (Durand, 2021). Other priorities are more important for CBC in this area: the sustainable management of natural resources and tourism remains the main topic for cooperation in this both in terms of spent money as well in terms of thematic objectives of selected projects.

Figure 3. Share of budgets of financed projects, by theme, in the Black Sea Basin

Source: own representation based on data from keep.eu (2021)

As a detail, ENPI financed cultural projects having smaller budgets than other types of projects (min. 50.000-max 250.000 Euro, while other priorities, such as environment protection projects had budgets between 100.000-700.000 Euro). Also, cultural projects had a reduced period of implementation (12 months instead of 24). Moreover, CBC in the field of culture at the external Eastern EU borders appealed to significantly lesser budgets. In comparison, the EU average budget per cultural project was 1,4 mil. Euro (2014-2020), respectively 844 thousand Euro (2007-2013) (Durand, 2021).

Following ENPI experience, ENI programme documents acknowledged the need to concentrate on a limited number of themes in which concrete results can be obtained, such as business and development and environmental protection. Tourism has a rich potential to be encouraged, while culture represents a horizontal preoccupation for ‘people to people’ type actions in this programme area.

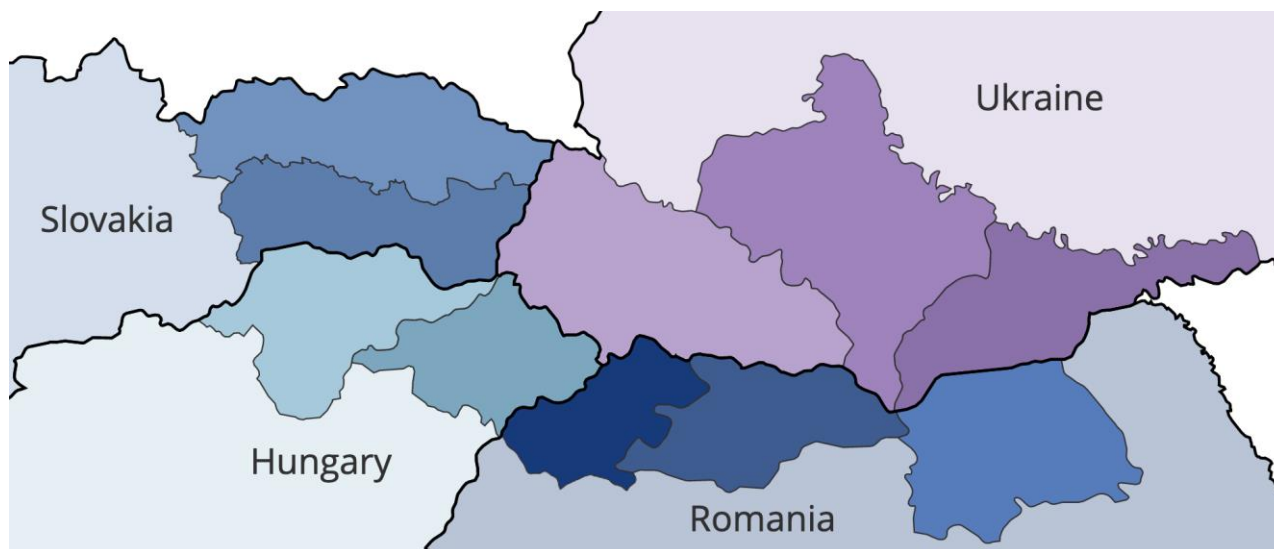
2.2. Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI/ENI CBC

The programme area covers NUTS 3 level units from three EU Member States and a partner country and it builds upon previous CBC between Hungary and Romania, which was highly seen as a success. There are seven UNESCO world heritage cultural sites in the cross-border area.

The programme area (Figure 4) is located on the Hungarian-Slovak-Romanian-Ukrainian border and includes the following territorial units: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (Hungary), Košický and Prešovský (Slovakia), Maramureș, Satu-Mare and Suceava (Romania), Zakarpatska, Ivano-Frankivska and Chernivetska (Ukraine). The programming area covers 32% of Slovak Republic, 14% of Hungary, 8% of Romania and 6% of Ukraine (Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine, Joint Operational Programme, 2008, p.9).

During 2007-2013 the programme financed 138 CBC projects, followed by 49 projects during 2014-2020.

Figure 4. Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine CBC programme area



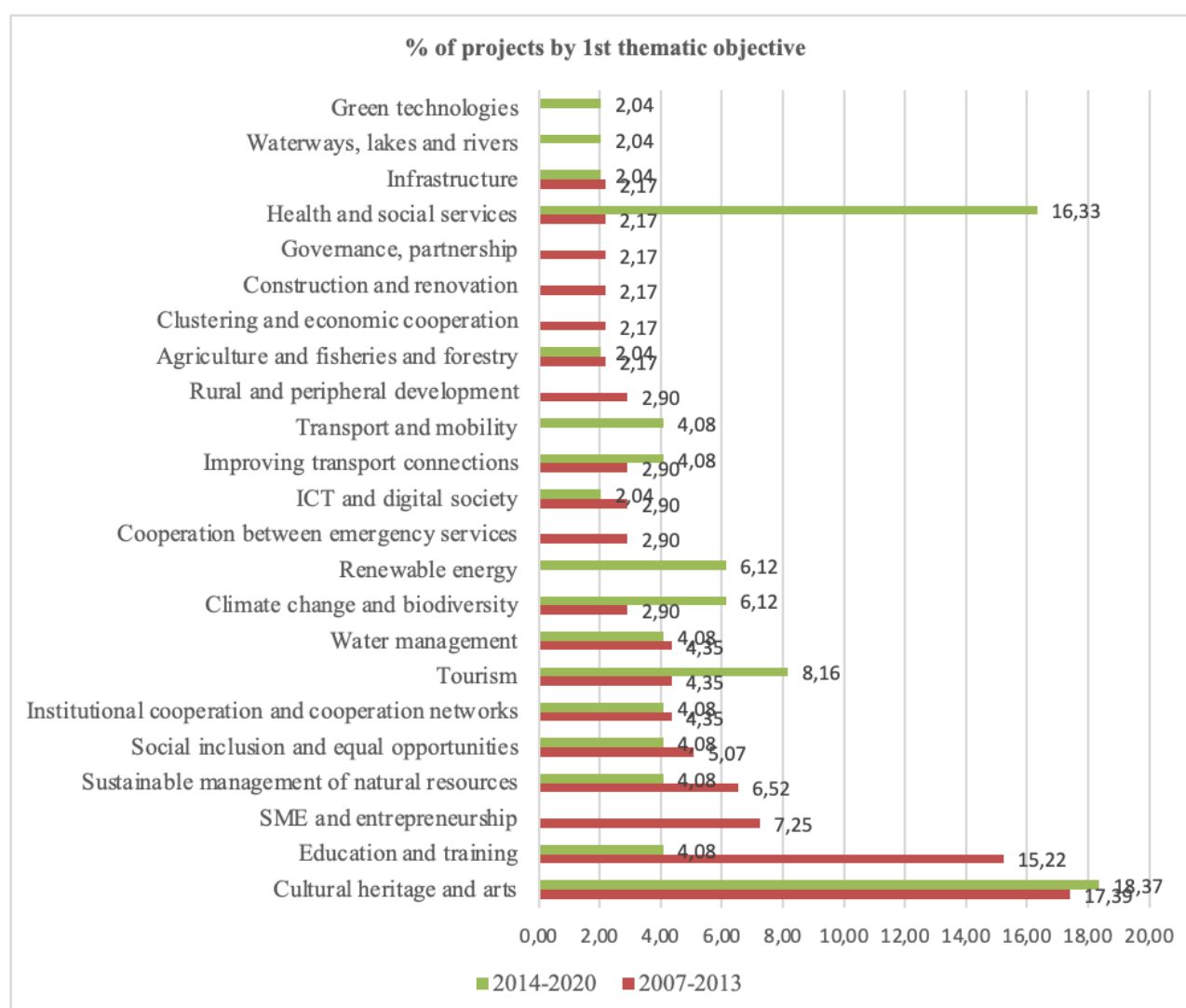
Source: Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Joint Operational Programme (2008)

The thematic analysis of the financed projects (Figure 5) reveals that culture was the main area of cooperation across borders in both timeframes, in terms of number of projects. The programme also allowed a significant increase of cooperation projects dedicated to health and social services, tourism, renewable energy and climate change, in 2014-2020 compared to the previous period. Almost 16% of the total number of financed projects were labeled as contributing to the development of health and social services in 2014-2020, compared to a significant smaller percent (2%) in the

previous financial perspective. Culture accounted as a thematic priority for 17-18% of the total number of financed projects, in both timeframes. For example, the most expensive cultural project, THRU-ART (1,2 mil. Euro) was led by the Slovakian city of Michalovce. The project aimed to save the cultural heritage monuments in the town of Michalovce and the city of Uzhhorod, filling them anew with a meaningful content and function; municipal galleries and professional tourist information centres of European standard were to be established.

The budgetary analysis (Figure 6) shows that, during 2014-2020 cultural projects had the largest share of spent money among all CBC projects, overpassing ‘improving transport connections’ – the CBC priority of the previous timeframe.

Figure 5. Thematic analysis of financed projects ENPI/ENI Hu-Slk-Ro-Ua

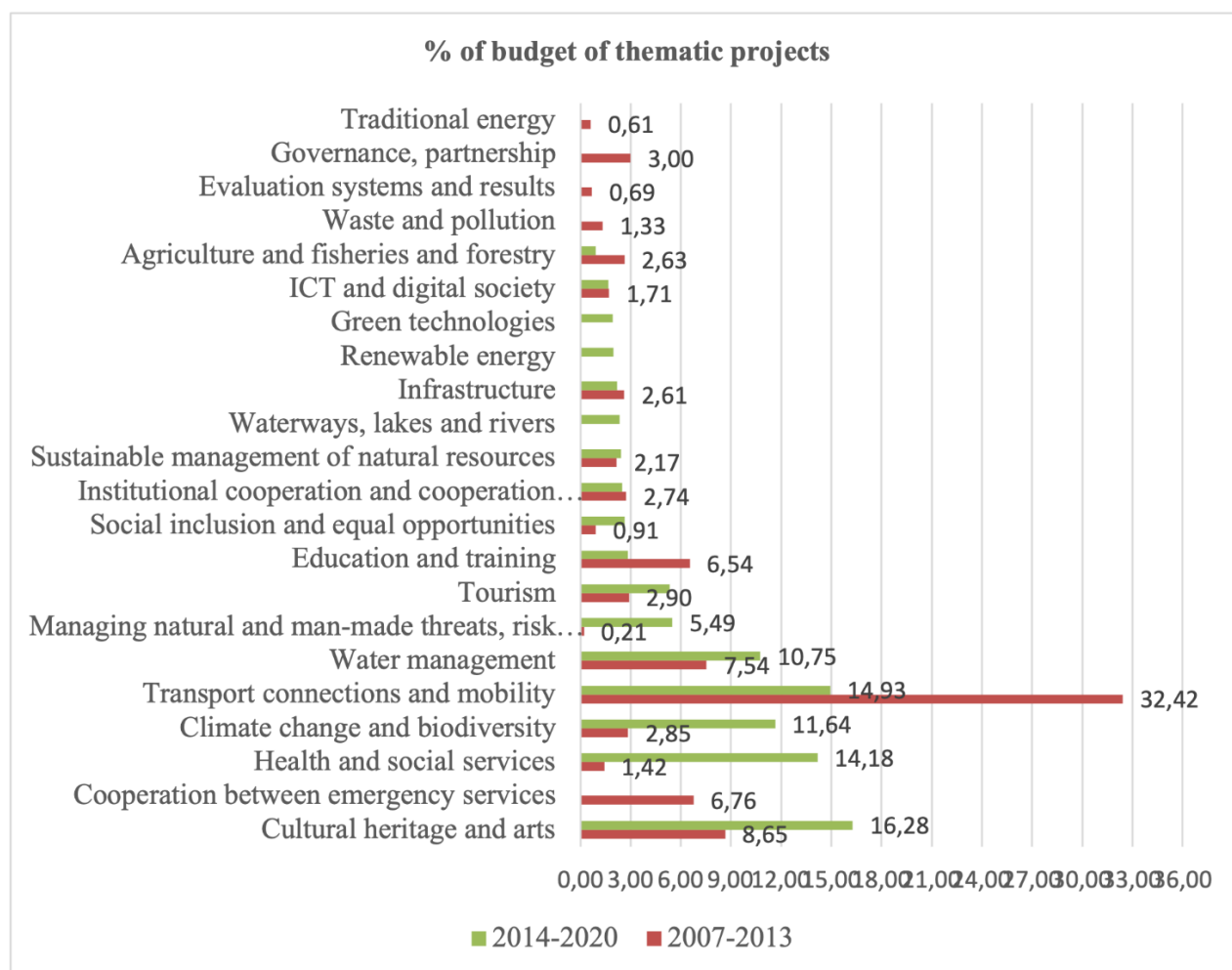


Source: own representation based on data from keep.eu (2021)

Cultural projects were mainly focusing on *soft, people to people measures* (organising meetings, events, training, etc.) which were very popular among the applicants, but there were only a few numbers of projects which were really innovative kind, while cooperation was hard to maintain (since they were focusing on one or a series of events).

During 2014-2020 the total budget of cultural projects had the biggest share in the total spent programme budget (16,28%, compared to 8,65%). Expensive projects, aiming to build cultural infrastructure, as the example above, reflect this status quo. In absolute terms this means that in 2014-2020 compared to 2007-2013 the budget of financed cultural projects increased from 6,1 mil. Euro to 7,9 mil Euro.

Figure 6. Share of budget of financed projects, by theme, in ENPI/ENI Hu-Slk-Ro-Ua



Source: own representation based on data from keep.eu (2021)

The financial importance given to culture in this programme area, above EU average (15%) could be explained by the acknowledgment of the fact that the main challenge for CBC was to

establish partnerships at local level based on strong commitments. The need for helping cooperation of people and organisations was strong, hence funds allocated to these priorities were considered relatively high in 2014-2020. Several other problems needed to be addressed and appealed to the programme budget: inappropriate condition and lack of preservation of historical sites; lack of infrastructure to reach the touristic destinations; lack of skilled experts, language barriers, not enough information on sites and programmes (ICT based supporting materials).

The data also reveals an increased amount of money spent for non-cultural projects in the field of health and social services or climate change.

2.3. Romania-Ukraine-R. Moldova ENPI CBC 2007-2013, Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC 2014-2020, Romania-R. Moldova ENI CBC 2014-2020

The Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine-R. Moldova, which was available during 2007-2013, was split into two CBC JOP in 2014-2020. Changing the area of the programme by splitting it in two different programme areas affects the comparability of our data and this a limit of the analysis. In this section we will compare them in terms of share of projects by priority theme and share of budgets of thematic projects.

Figure 7. Romania-Ukraine-Moldova ENPI CBC

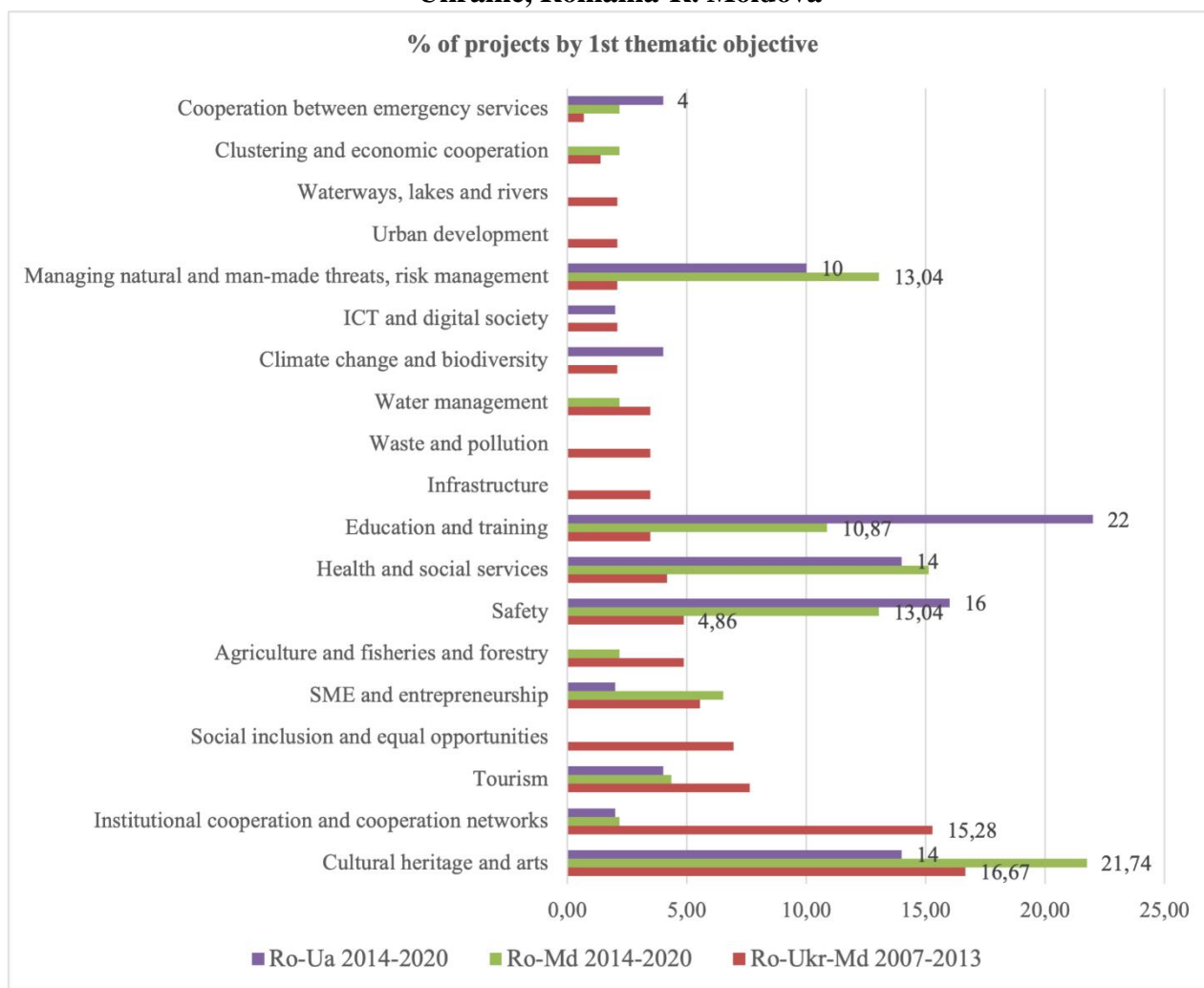


Source: Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova (2008)

The programme area Romania-Ukraine-R. Moldova was composed by a core area and several non-border adjoining regions. The core area covered, in Romania, the counties of Suceava, Botosani, Iasi, Vaslui, Galati, and Tulcea; in Ukraine, the oblasts of Odessa, and Chernivtsi, and in Republic of Moldova, the whole country. The programme area Romania-Ukraine consists of counties of Satu Mare, Maramures (both newly inserted), Botosani, Suceava and Tulcea from Romania, and from Ukraine, the oblasts of Ivano-Frankivsk, Zakarpatska, Chernivtsi, Odessa. The programme area Romania-R. Moldova consists of Romanian counties Botoșani, Vaslui, Iași and Galați and the whole territory of R. Moldova.

There was a number of 144 financed CBC projects in Ro-Ua-R. Moldova Joint Operational Programme 2007-2013, 46 financed projects in Romania-R. Moldova Joint Operational Programme 2014-2020 and 50 financed projects in Romania-Ukraine Joint Operational Programme 2014-2020.

Figure 8. Thematic analysis of financed projects Romania-Ukraine-R.Moldova, Romania-Ukraine, Romania-R. Moldova



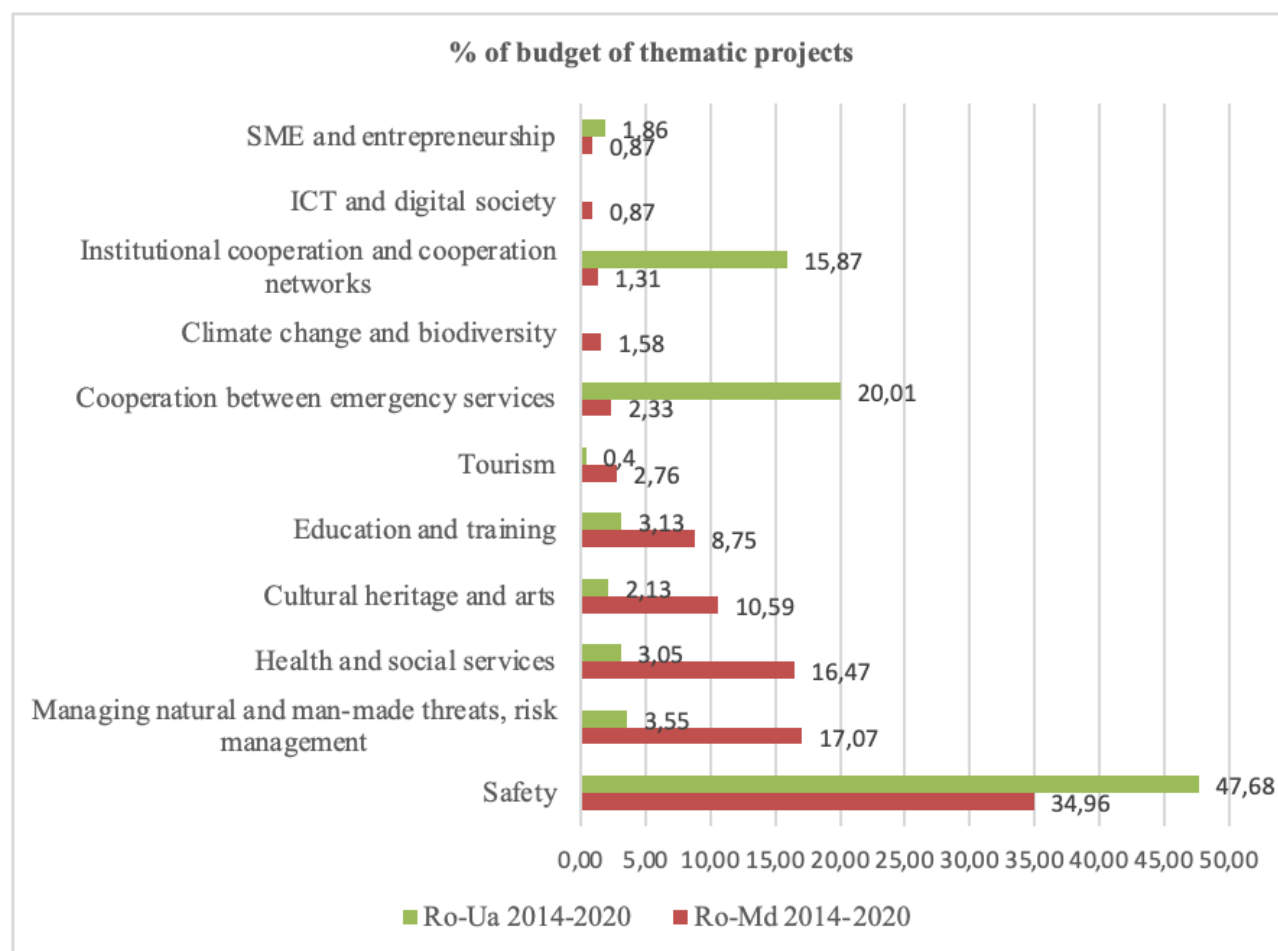
Source: own representation based on data from keep.eu (2021)

The thematic analysis showed (Figure 8) that culture was one of the main themes of cooperation in all programme areas in terms of number of projects. Still, the biggest share of cultural projects belongs to Romania-R. Moldova Joint Operational Programme 2014-2020 (21,74%), followed by Romania-Ukraine-Moldova JOP 2007-2013 (16,67%) and Romania-Ukraine JOP 2-14-2020 (14%).

The data also shows the significant increase between the two timeframes of the number of projects dedicated to education, health services and safety, especially in the case of Romania-Ukraine, due to the geopolitical troubled context. Moreover, eligible projects for the purpose of institutional cooperation were reduced (collaborations being supposed to be set in the previous timeframe).

In terms of projects' budgets (Figure 9), which are only available for the 2014-2020 period, the analysis confirms the strong preoccupation for CBC enhancing safety in the region. Safety projects accounted for 47,68% of the programme budget in the case of Romania-Ukraine JOP 2014-2020.

Figure 9. Share of budgets of financed projects, by theme, in Ro-Md ENI CBC and Ro-Ua ENI CBC



Source: own representation based on data from keep.eu (2021)

Cooperation between emergency services and institutional cooperation was also a preoccupation of stakeholders from Romania-Ukraine JOP. Cultural projects had a bigger share of total budgets in the case of Romania-R. Moldova JOP in 2014-2020, compared to the previous timeframe.

In the last part of this paper we will sum-up the data and conclude on the general overview of cultural CBC following the implementation of the seven joint operational programme areas. We will conclude on the intensity of CBC, measured as number of cultural projects and their budgets and also on the leading territories (cities and countries) in CBC cultural projects.

3. The intensity of CBC in the cultural field

A comparative analysis of the financed projects in the seven analysed CBC programmes, shows that during 2007-2020 Hu-Slk-Ro-Ua programme area registered the highest share of cultural projects among the total number of financed projects and the largest budget awarded to cultural cooperation.

Between 2014-2020 the intensity of cooperation, measured as total number of projects, was similarly low in all programme areas (between 5 and 10 projects), while the share of cultural projects in the total number of projects was bigger in Ro-Md programme area, confirming the special relationship Romania has with the Republic of Moldova, considering “the common historical past, culture, spiritual nation” (Rădulescu *et.al.*, 2020, p.63).

As a detail, when analysing the direction of cooperation, measured as ‘to which country belongs the project leader’, Romania directed a significant share of cultural CBC projects, with partners from R. Moldova, in Ro-Md programme area and was the only initiator of projects with partners from Ukraine, in Ro-Ua programme area. This situation could reflect an unbalanced financial and management capabilities between organisations placed on different sides of the borders.

Table 2. Number of and budgets (Euro) of cultural CBC projects

	Black Sea Basin		Hu-Slk-Ro-Ua		Ro-Ua-Md			
	No.	Budgets	No.	Budgets	No.	Budgets		
2007-2013	4	1.225.704	24	6.108.015	23	Not available		
2014-2020					Ro-Ua		Ro-Md	
	5	4.816.931	9	7.908.738	7	4.025.819	10	1.065. 151
Total	9	6.042.635	33	14.016.753	-	-	-	-

Source: own representation based on data from keep.eu (2021)

A limit of the analysis of intensity of cooperation as number of and budgets of cultural CBC projects, consists in the fact that the total number of projects depends on the total programme budget and on the types of projects (and their budgetary limits), as agreed by the stakeholders in the consultation phase of each JOP. For instance, in the case of Romania-Moldova programme area 2014-2020, a distinction was made between hard (expensive investment projects) and soft projects (not necessitating infrastructural work and investments, with budgets below 1 mil. Euro). Due to the limited programme budget, most of the projects, including cultural ones, were soft type. Still, a bigger number of projects, even with small budgets, represent an opportunity for networking, learning and building durable partnerships between stakeholders across borders, an important condition for successful CBC. The following part of the paper will highlight the leading territories (cities and countries) in CBC cultural projects.

3.1. Leading territories in cultural CBC

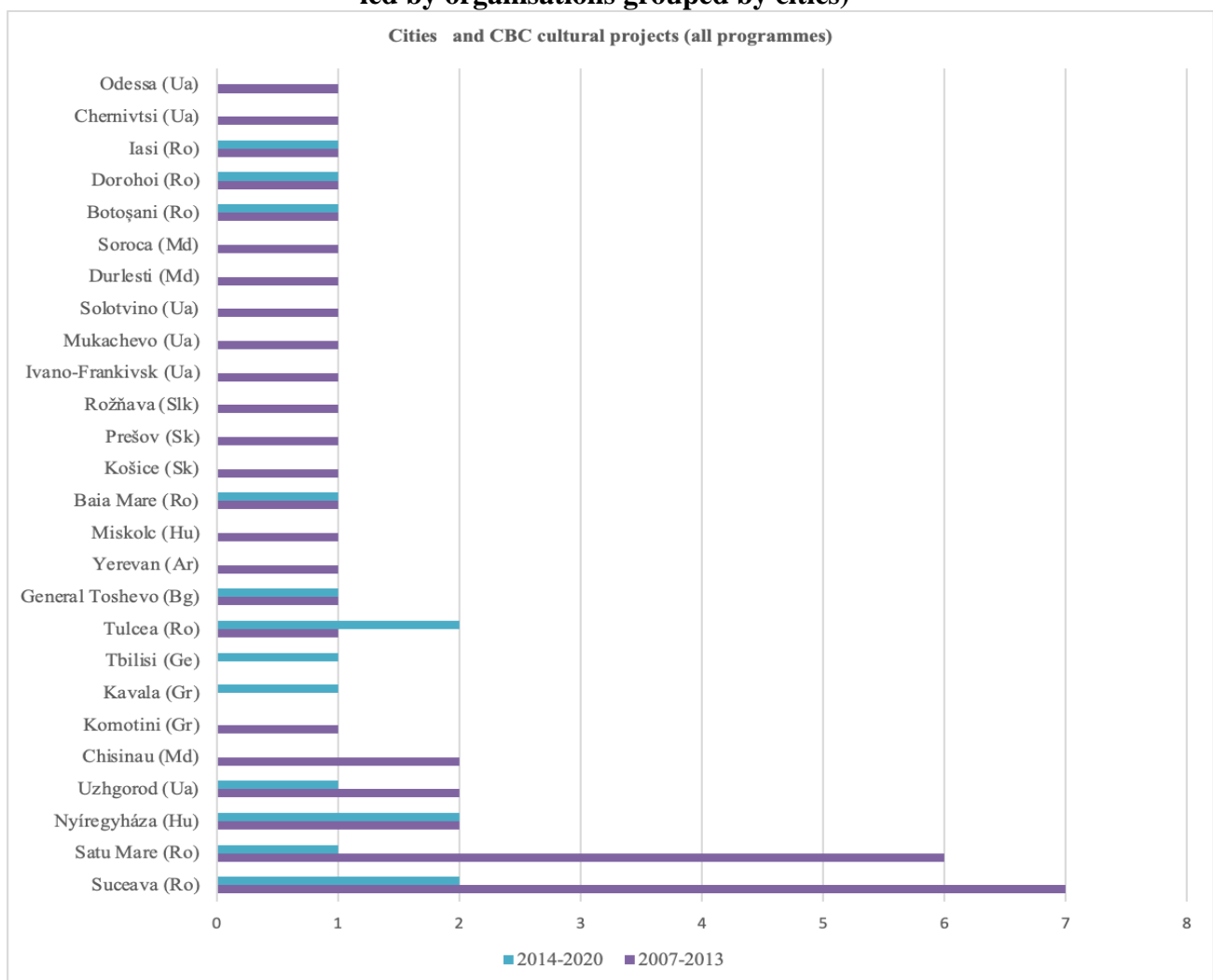
For this analysis, the leading territories in cultural CBC projects were counted as cities and countries hosting organisations playing most frequently the role of project leader of cultural projects during 2007-2020, in all the analysed areas. This understanding acknowledges the fact that the actual project leaders are public and private organisations (municipalities, NGOs, universities, schools, cultural public institutions etc.) placed in different cities and countries. A future more in-depth analysis would differentiate between types of organisations leading cultural projects across-borders, placed in different cities and countries.

As shown by Figure 10, the cities hosting the biggest number of organisations leading CBC cultural projects were Suceava and Satu Mare, with seven, respectively six led projects in 2007-2013. They are both Romanian cities, hence placed in an EU member state and the organisations placed there are eligible for financing from several programme areas' budgets. Suceava, for example, was a part of Hu-Slk-Ro-Ua (2007-2020), Romania-Ukraine-Moldova (2007-2013) and Romania-Ukraine (2014-2020).

For the timeframe 2014-2020, cultural projects were dispersed in territorial units hosting one or two organisations with leading roles, as it was the case of Suceava and Tulcea, from Romania and Nyíregyháza (Hungary). The situation reflects the dispersed presence of cultural projects in the analysed areas and the lack of strong preoccupations or capabilities of organisations from renowned cultural cities, with strong historical connections (such as Iași and Chernivtsi) to lead CBC projects in the field of culture. According to the stakeholders' analysis by Țigănașu *et. al* (2020) Romanian

beneficiaries are more critical towards the perceived effectiveness of CBC for cultural impacts, than their counterparts from Moldova or Ukraine. Another limit of our study is the fact that it analyses cross-border cultural cooperation only when financed through INTERREG programme, in order to exploit the useful keep.eu database, while other financing opportunities are also available, such as Creative Europe or the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) Programme.

Figure 10. Leading cities in cultural CBC projects in the analysed area (number of projects led by organisations grouped by cities)



Source: own representation based on data from keep.eu (2021)

This situation is contrasting with the one present at the Western borders of Romania, where Timisoara, future European Capital of Culture in 2023, has a higher intensity of connection in CBC projects, using INTERREG funds (Turşie and Boată, 2018) and a higher interest for the role of CBC for producing social and cultural impacts (Turşie and Perrin, 2020; Turşie, 2019). Organisations placed in Timisoara lead cultural projects developed especially with Serbian partners, financed

through the Instrument of Pre-Accession (IPA CBC). In this case, the ECoC title functioned as an effective tool to stimulate the enthusiasm of the local stakeholders and to generate CBC partnerships.

Figure 11. Leading countries in cultural CBC projects in the analysed area



Source: own representation based on data from keep.eu (2021)

When grouping the organisations leading cultural CBC projects by country, and not by city, the results show (Figure 11) that Romania is the main actor of CBC in these areas in both timeframes, followed by Ukraine (for 2007-2013) and Slovakia (for 2014-2020), even though the number of led cultural projects was decreasing between the two timeframes, in both cases. EU countries, such as Slovakia and Hungary, who are particularly active in cultural cooperation at the internal EU borders (such as Slovakia-Poland CBC, as pointed by Durand, 2021) and Bulgaria and Greece, have a limited eligibility in the analysed programme areas, compared to Romania. These areas are composed by two NUTS 3 regions from Slovakia, other two from Hungary and eight NUTS 3 regions from Romania; also, two NUTS 2 regions from Romania, two from Bulgaria and other two from Greece were eligible for financing in the Black Sea Basin programme area, who, as we have seen does not finance culture as a main priority. Also, the whole territory of the Republic of Moldova and parts of Ukraine are eligible for CBC with Romanian border regions, and this is an important incentive and responsibility for European integration in these areas, in the geopolitical context of the beginning of 2022.

Conclusions

The paper shows in the first instance that there are significant differences in the intensity of cross-border cultural cooperation among INTERREG programming areas over the two investigated periods. Some countries are more proactive and emphasize culture in their cross-border cooperation actions (Romania and Moldova), while others give it less importance (Black Sea Basin programme area). These discrepancies result mainly from political priorities and the dynamics of cooperation at the regional or local level.

Our analysis showed that the largest share of cultural projects in the total amount of CBC projects was present in programme area Romania-R. Moldova ENI CBC, having the long historical cultural ties between the two countries as incentives for cooperation.

An increasing share of CBC projects in the field of culture, in terms of number of projects and budgets, was also observed in programme area Hu-Slk-Ro-Ua. This programme area allocated the biggest amount of its budget to cultural projects. With a share of 16,28% (2014-2020), Hu-Slk-Ro-Ua scored above EU average (15%) at the proportion of cross-border cultural projects in the total INTERREG programme budget. This situation could be explained by the interest of the programme's stakeholders to increase European integration between three EU new member states (Hungary, Slovakia and Romania) and a non-EU state (Ukraine). All other programme areas scored below EU average at financing CBC cultural projects, dealing instead with other expensive border integration priorities: natural resources and tourism (Black Sea Basin), transport connections (Hu-Slk-Ro-Ua during 2007-2013), health services and safety (Romania-Moldova, Romania-Ukraine).

The actors in CBC in the field of culture (leaders of projects) were mostly organisations from EU Member States, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia, who experienced better financial capability for co-financing and better management capabilities, being more socialized in European projects than organisations placed outside EU. Among the partner countries, Ukraine was the most active in leading cultural CBC projects, even though cultural cooperation was overpassed in programme area Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC by more stringent issues, such as safety, risk management and health services.

More money was spent on cultural projects in Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC compared to Romania-R. Moldova ENI CBC (Figure 8 and 9): a share of 14% of cultural projects financed by Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC consumed 10% of the total programme budget; cultural projects had a share of 21% in the total amount of projects Romania-Moldova ENI CBC and they only accounted for 2% of the total programme budget. This situation has several explanations.

There were more low-cost cultural projects in Romania-Moldova (with budgets below 100.000 Euro/project) and more expensive cultural projects in Romania-Ukraine (with budgets towards 1.000.000 Euro/project, such as the revitalisation of theatres in Satu Mare and Uzhgorod), while, as we have seen, the EU average budget of cultural projects was 1,4 million Euro for the period 2014-2020. At the Eastern EU borders, money was allocated to a few expensive strategic safety projects in the case of Romanian and Ukrainian border regions (combating cross-border criminality or cooperation among emergency services); in the case of Romania-Moldova, three out of the total of 46 projects accounted for 65% of programme budget: they were one health emergency services project and two safety projects.

In several programme documents the previous developed projects were criticized for not being innovative enough. It is, of course, difficult to have innovative projects when basic needs are not met, such as hard infrastructure or facilities in hospitals. After all, the programmes priorities and measures are the result of a public consultation process, they are consistent with each programme area's needs and reflect the level of maturity of cross-border cooperation.

Finally, all analysed programme areas selected culture as an investment priority and horizontal preoccupation of CBC. Culture is an attractive theme for CBC cooperation, prompting regions to gain greater understanding one another through generally low-cost projects, which could create further cooperation opportunities in other areas. The strong concern for safety issues at the external borders of the European Union is only to be increased in the new multiannual financial framework 2021-2027, transforming CB safety and criminality prevention into a horizontal preoccupation of the European funds.

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