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Local Authorities' Involvement in Fostering Hungarian-Romanian Cross-Border Cooperation in Tourism

DANIEL BADULESCU, ISTVAN HOFFMAN, ALINA BADULESCU & RAMONA SIMUT

ABSTRACT Tourism can act as an important sector which captures both the attention of public authorities and the interest of people. It is also a main “target” for cross-border cooperation programs, aiming at fostering the role played by local and regional communities in addressing sustainable local development. This paper presents, both theoretically and by using a survey-based research conducted among public administration’s representatives and experts involved in tourism sector, across the Hungarian-Romanian border, some relevant issues concerning the interest and level of involvement of public authorities in cross-border cooperation actions conducted in tourism.

KEYWORDS: • public administration • local communities • cross-border cooperation • tourism • border area • Romania • Hungary

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1 Introduction

The specificity and attractiveness of a region do not stop at the state border, and this fact is epitomized by tourism. As tourists are interested to visit regions with specific attractions, not administrative areas, cross-border cooperation (CBC) could represent a unique chance for tourism development on both sides of a border area. The benefits for the involved stakeholders (e.g. individuals, companies, local authorities) are largely recognised, but the benefits will become effective only if the CBC is operational and the resources and touristic facilities are displayed uniformly everywhere. Moreover, management capabilities, and sufficient and flexible networks are needed to help tourists to "discover" the local and regional attractions.

CBC in tourism can provide means for a more efficient use of local advantages, for growth and consolidation of a regional tourist industry, based on sustainable consumption of resources (Hall, 2000). Often, joint initiatives in cross-border tourism development based on cooperative / collaborative tourism planning (Reed, 1999) have had a tangible success, generating substantial personal and organizational ties, and boosting economies of scale. They eased the way for CBC in other areas of local regional interest (e.g. infrastructure, environmental protection, health, transport, culture).

This paper contributes to empirically investigating certain issues of cross-border cooperation in tourism on a specific area, i.e. the cross-border area between Hungary and Romania. The paper is organized as follows. After presenting some general considerations regarding the emergence and legal foundations of the cross-border cooperation in Europe and especially between Hungary and Romania, we focus on the role of tourism within CBC local development strategies of the two countries. The important touristic potential and activities in the area, as well as the considerable number of CBC projects addressing the tourist sector have determined us to deepen this issue by using a survey-based research. Consequently, in the second part, we present the aim and research methodology, and the main findings and discussions. Finally, we present the conclusions, as well as the main limitations and further studies.

2 Overview on Hungarian-Romanian cross-border cooperation and local public administration involvement in tourism

2.1 Cross-border cooperation in Europe: euroregions, EGTCs. The Hungarian and Romanian cross-border cooperation

Cross-border cooperation in Europe: general considerations

The territory of the state is, along with people and power, one of the three elements of the state. As the state acts within its borders, therefore these lines have had an important role from the formation of the states (Kelsen, 1945: 207-208). Despite the prominent role of the borders, their importance has been changed by the transformation of the European Nation-States. The great challenges of the Nation-States were the internalisation (and globalisation) and the increasing power of the local communities, especially the local governments (Goldmann, 2001: 67-68). Thus, the significance and tasks of borders areas have transformed in the last decades in Europe. New structures have been evolved at the border areas by these transformations.

The legal foundations of these structures are relatively various. First, the local governments' right to associate was recognised by the European Charter of Local Self-Governments (hereinafter: Charter), by such recognition a widespread cooperation having internationally emerged, as well (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007: 8-10). The national legislations – which are based on the general regulation of the Charter – have typically permissive rules. Consequently, various forms of cooperation have evolved: several are ruled by the public law, but others are (private) associations which have been established as business organizations of the municipalities. The common framework of the cross-border cooperation of regional governments is the Euroregion, which does not have a legal definition regulated by an international convention, although the Association of European Border Regions has an interpretation about it (AEBR, 2000). After the formation and the spread of this form, a convention was initiated on the Euroregional Cooperation Groupings (EGCs) in 2009 (Council of Europe, 2009). Although these Euroregions are practically based on the convention of the Council of Europe (CoE), the formation and the function of this type of cooperation is strongly supported by the European Union. The impact of the European Union on the cross-border partnership is very significant in the new Eastern Member States, because of the high rate of financial aid in these countries (Heidbreder, 2011: 104-106). The second main form of the cross-border cooperation is the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, i.e. EGTC, which is defined and regulated by the Regulation No. 1082/2006/EC (which was significantly amended by the Regulation 1302/2013/EU). The EGTCs are directly supported by the European Union and can access financial sources of the regional and cohesion policies of the EU. The participation of the regions from third-party (non EU-Member) countries are permitted by the EU regulation, therefore this type of cooperation is one of the main elements of the pre-accession procedures, as well (Hoffman, 2015: 31).

Hungarian – Romanian cross-border partnerships

The governments of Hungary and Romania and the local governments of the border counties have formed several types of cross-border cooperation. The main element of the new Hungarian – Romanian partnership is the Hungarian –

Romanian Cross-Border Cooperation 2014-2020 (HU-RO CBC 2014-2020). The antecedent of this cooperation, i.e. the HU-RO CBC 2007-2013, was established in the last programming period, in 2007. The HU-RO CBC has had two priorities: Priority 1 - Improve the key conditions of joint, sustainable development of the cooperation area, and Priority 2 - Strengthen social and economic cohesion in the border region (Badulescu et al., 2014: 565). The new cross-border cooperation is an extended one; the program, which was approved by the national governments in May 2015, has now 6 priority axes. The first axis is "Joint protection and efficient use of common values and resources (Cooperating on common values and resources)", Axis 2 is "Improve sustainable cross-border mobility and remove bottlenecks (Cooperating on accessibility)", Axis 3 is "Improve employment and promote cross-border labour mobility (Cooperating on employment)", Axis 4 is "Improving health-care services (Cooperating on health-care and prevention)", Axis 5 is "Improve risk-prevention and disaster management (Cooperating on risk prevention and disaster management)" and finally, the 6th Axis is "Promoting cross-border cooperation between institutions and citizens (Cooperation of institutions and communities)".

The programme is complex, intending to promote the cooperation in the main common tasks in the border area, i.e. in the economic sector, in public services, and in risk prevention and disaster management. The promotion of the cooperation between institutions is a very significant element of the new program. The cumbersome cooperation between Hungarian and Romanian organisations is considered as one of the greatest problem in the Hungarian – Romanian Cross-Border Partnership. The participants in this cooperation are the national governments and the border counties. The HU-RO CBC counties belong, two by two, to different regions (NUTS 2) for each country (see Table 1).

Table 1: The component counties of HU-RO CBC area, by their administrative affiliation

Country	NUTS 3 (county)	NUTS 2 (region)		
Hungary (HU)	Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	Northern (HU32)	Great	Plain
	Hajdú-Bihar			
	Békés	Southern (HU33)	Great	Plain
	Csongrád			
Romania (RO)	Satu-Mare	North-West (RO11)		
	Bihor			
	Arad	West (RO42)		
	Timis			

Source: Eurostat (2015), NUTS - Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/overview>

The program is financed by the European Regional Development Fund ERDF – by the Sub-Program Interreg V/A. The total amount of the financial appropriation of the ERDF is 189,138,672 EUR from 2014 to 2020.

There are also other forms of cooperation involving the border areas of Hungary and Romania. Therefore, we would like to introduce the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihor Euroregion, which was established by the Hungarian Hajdú-Bihar County and the Romanian Bihor County. The two counties have common historical roots and similar economic, demographic and geographical features. Another common point is the relatively large (ca. 30%) Hungarian ethnic minority in Bihor County.

The other Hungarian – Romanian cross-border type partnerships have not only Hungarian and Romanian participants. Firstly, the Hungarian – Romanian border areas take part in the Carpathica / Carpathian Euroregion, which is one of the largest Euroregions of Eastern-Central Europe, grouping border entities (counties, regions) of Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. This Euroregion is a very large one, and therefore a lot of efficiency problems are caused by its large area (ca. 161 000 km²) and population (16 million inhabitants). Secondly, Romania and Hungary take part also in Euroregions and EGTCs which involve Serbian participants, as well. The Duna – Körös – Maros – Tisza / Duna – Criş – Mureş – Tisa Euroregion (DKMT Euroregion) was formed in 1997, and it has an area of 71,879 square kilometres, and a population of about 6 million people; its main ethnic groups are: Hungarians - about 41%, Romanians - 30%, Serbs - 19% (Badulescu et al., 2015: 562-564). Although the territory and population are relatively large, this Euroregion features several advantages, such as direct access to three rivers, which is important for transportation and irrigation, as well as the European transport corridor E4.

The EGTC became an important form of the cross-border cooperation and partnership in the European Union, which is, as noted above, supported by the European Union. Fifty municipalities of the Hungarian – Romanian – Serbian three borders area established in 2009 the Banat Triplex Confinium (Banat Three Borders) EGTC, which has an independent development program.

2.2 A review of the literature on local administration and tourism. Tourism in HU-RO CBC development strategy

In recent decades, local authorities have been challenged to facilitate and harmonize the interaction between various interests (i.e. local, regional or global) which tend to influence the direction of local development, “so that development achieves the shared vision of the local population” (United Nations, 1999: 2). The tourism is one of those external forces that can impinge on the direction and intensity of local development interests, especially when local communities serve as tourist destinations. For local communities, tourism could generate not only

direct economic results (e.g. new businesses, revenues, employment) but also intangible results, such as place-image and community identity (Kostopoulou et al., 2015). Tourism could emphasize the individual and local resources (e.g. personal contacts, authenticity, traditions, cultural heritage and closeness to nature), the cooperation among communities, neighbouring areas and regions, driving the economic development (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004).

This means that a new vision and a strategic orientation, on long-term, of local policies should require involvement in the planning and decision-making process of a wide range of stakeholders, such as: local, regional and national authorities and tourism organizations; entrepreneurs and operators in tourism industry; other business practitioners, cultural and religious institutions, local community groups and residents, experts (Hall, 2000; Simpson, 2001; Ruhanen, 2013; Johansson, 2009). Among them, the role of the public authorities and especially of the local ones is crucial (Bramwell & Lane, 2010; Godfrey, 1998; Weaver, 2006). Their role is effectively exerted through their prerogatives and competences (Elliot, 1997; Godfrey, 1998; United Nations, 1999; Ruhanen, 2013), through the possibility of including touristic initiatives in local / regional development plans (Timothy, 1998; Hall, 2000; Simpson, 2001), through the resources and influence on other policy-makers and stakeholders (Farmaki, 2015; Elliot, 1997; Hall, 1999).

The explanation for these positions that are special and full of responsibilities comes from the essence of the political and electoral processes. Local authorities are elected and appointed by the local community to represent common interests for welfare and safety. Public authorities bring more stability and continuity in the implementation of community master plans, compared to the private sector (Simpson, 2001), although there is an important influence of the electoral cycles and of the political groups represented in local councils (Johansson, 2009). Public authorities are supposed to be impartial and not to favour specific private business interests (Swarbrooke, 1998), even they have to encourage the development of existing businesses and the establishment of new ones in that community. Local authorities have a good knowledge of the economic, cultural and social profile of their region or locality (Timothy, 1998). Local governments have a larger panorama, enabling them to evaluate the effects, both positive and negative, of tourism, to reconcile economic goals with sustainable development, to avoid or minimize the adverse impacts of the economic activities on host community (Cameron et al., 2001). They can set and follow up the implementation of a tourism development agenda in the host community (Swarbrooke, 1998; Bramwell & Lane, 2010; Brown & Hall, 2000).

The role of local authorities in supporting tourism moves, therefore, from direct involvement (e.g. infrastructure, public services and facilities) to more active

involvement in achieving sustainable development. According to Cameron et al (2001: 2), "territorial local authorities (district and city councils) have two principal functions relating to tourism: the 'enablement' of tourism development, and the management of tourism's effects". Local governments have to prepare policy statements and develop management strategies and plans (Godfrey, 1998), based on best practices adapted to community priorities, to ensure sustainable forms of tourism (Elliot, 1997; Bramwell & Lane, 2010; Bramwell, 2011), or to protect and promote the rights of the community against central government and private interests (Elliot, 1997; Zahra, 2010: 84). Churugsa (2007: 456-458) considers that the local government has three essential areas of involvement in tourism: (1) to plan and integrate it into all relevant public sectors policies at local, regional and national levels, to provide and develop all tourism supply components (infrastructure, facilities and attractions) (Gunn, 2002); (2) to establish and enforce legislation and regulations to ensure effective sustainable tourism development, to protect the cultural and natural environment, and (3) to work with private, non-government sectors and communities to maximize tourism benefits and minimize duplicated efforts and conflicts (McIntyre, 1993).

This enrichment of prerogatives and the more active involvement of local authorities in tourism have generated a lot of criticism. For certain scholars, the local government involvement in sustainable (touristic) development is only a slogan and a mean to legitimize its authority (Hempel, 1999; MacLellan, 1997), a political rhetoric or formal strategy, mandatory in electoral campaigns (Slee et al., 1997; Gill & Williams, 2014). In the best case scenario, their involvement is limited to a list of exaggerated or unrealistic plans and expectations, without resources or willingness for effective implementation. Local and central government are criticized for their formal involvement of other stakeholders, and ignoring their suggestions and availability to participate (Simpson, 2001). In some cases, the public authorities' strategies are considered to be inflexible or outdated, top-down planned (Keogh, 1990), acting in contradiction, facilitating and inhibiting sustainable tourism development (Ruhanen, 2013). The strategies and the authorities' involvement seem rather emerging from political negotiations related to ensuring political continuity and sinecure positions, than from the real concern for local and regional development (Hall, 1998), or even intend to serve their personal interests (Farmaki, 2015). Moreover, even when the local government manages significant funding for the investment projects, there are opinions considering that these actions are actually focused only on tangible results, such as economic growth, financial returns and profitability, instead of environmental protection, sustainability or respect for the specific community traditions (Bramwell & Lane, 2010; Beaumont & Dredge, 2010; Ruhanen, 2013; Oplotnik et al., 2012). When the local governments fail "to embedding a new long-term governance path towards sustainability" (Gill & Williams, 2014: 557), "their political support for economic development could compromise

sustainability goals, as the power of entrepreneurs leads to a short-lived commitment towards sustainability” (Farmaki, 2015: 43).

The HU-RO border area represents a remarkable tourist destination, suitable for both nature-based and cultural-based tourism, while the most important types of tourism which could be practiced are spa and wellness, but also mountain tourism (including sports and speleology), cultural, rural tourism etc. (Mester et al., 2008). The accommodation capacity is unevenly distributed in the area: about two thirds of the number of bed-places are located in Hungarian counties, i.e. 50,000 out of the overall of 79,000. However, the number of tourist arrivals and the number of nights spent are relatively evenly distributed in the two counties, resulting in a level of the occupancy rate in Hungarian counties which is around half of the level reported in Romanian ones (National Institute of Statistics (Romania), 2013; Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2014).

The tourism sector in the HU-RO CBC has received significant attention within the cross-border financing programs, and consequently it has benefitted from important financial allocations, i.e. 8% of the total number of projects financed and about 9% from the allocated funds. Specifically, under PHARE CBC 2004-2006 there were six tourism projects funded, with a total value of EUR 834,000. In the HU-RO CBC 2007-2013 programme, a number of 34 projects supporting tourism were funded, with an aggregate value of EUR 18,112,000.

Table 2: The number and value of tourism projects, financed under the HU-RO CBC programmes during 2004-2013

Programme	Priority	Measure/ Key area of intervention	Number of tourism projects	Grant amount, (thousand euros)
INTERREG IIIA/PHARE CBC Programme 2004-2006, Hungary-Romania	Priority 2: Promotion of cooperation initiatives in order to facilitate the integration of markets and enhance coherence between local societies	Measure 2.2: Support co-operation of enterprises – (joint initiatives in the field of marketing, tourism and other business co-operation	6	834
HU-RO CBC 2007-2013	Priority 2: Strengthen social and economic cohesion of the border area (Cooperation in the	Measure 2.1: Support for cross-border business cooperation Action 2.1.3. Development of	34	18,112

	fields of business, RTD, education, labour market, health care and risk management)	tourism - small scale investments in tourism attractions and tourism infrastructure		
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Source: Regional Office for Cross-border Cooperation for Romanian-Hungarian Border (BRECO) (2015), Hungary-Romania Cross-Border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013 (2015)

3 Research on HU-RO CBC projects in tourism sector

3.1 Aim and research methodology

This study makes a contribution to a better understanding the CBC in the field of tourism, by using a survey-based research as instrument. Consequently, a questionnaire was designed and developed for the experts and managers of the development projects within the HU-RO CBC area. The survey has targeted representatives of local and regional public administrations, of tourism associations and NGOs with tourism activity, consultants (experts) in tourism, and academics with relevant research activity in the field of tourism and cross-border cooperation.

The main objectives of the research were the evaluation of the CBC's efficiency and effectiveness in tourism sector, the involvement of local and regional authorities in the implementation of the cross-border tourism projects, the future sustainability of the projects and of the tourism CBC cooperation in itself.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, out of which 10 were closed questions with unique answers, one closed question with multiple answers, two open questions and two matrix questions that collect multiple answers. For validating the survey's reliability, we grouped the questions referring to the perception about the HU-RO cross-border cooperation in tourism and used Cronbach's Alpha method. We found the alpha coefficient as equal to 0.774, which indicates a reliable scale. The removal of any item leads to a lower Alpha. The survey was carried out in October and November 2015, for 64 targeted people, who were personally approached and then the questionnaire was emailed to them. 49 answers were received, from various experts, policy makers and project managers from: local/regional public administration (28 respondents), academics (7 respondents), associations or NGOs' representatives (6 respondents), managers/owners of tourism companies (3 respondents) and consultant/experts in tourism (5 respondents), all of them having their headquarters or main activity in the HU-RO CBC area. Moreover, 34 respondents (i.e. 69% from total respondents) were from Romania and 15 respondents (31%) from Hungary.

The main research questions investigated and presented in this paper are as follows:

RQ1. Experts' opinion on the achievement of the objectives and aims of CBC in tourism;

RQ2. Experts' opinion on the development of the CBC in tourism as objective on the local administration's agenda;

RQ3. Experts' assessment on the efficiency of the CBC in tourism;

RQ4a. The assessment on the level of involvement of local authorities in implementing CBC projects in tourism;

RQ4b. The assessment on the involvement of county/regional authorities in implementing CBC projects in tourism;

RQ5. Evaluation on the further sustainability of the CBC projects in tourism, after ceasing their public (European) funding.

We will present and discuss in the following part the main results of the mentioned research questions, by analysing each question and the responses provided.

3.2 Findings and discussion

Q1. In your opinion, has cross-border cooperation in tourism achieved its set objectives?

The respondents were asked to express their opinion concerning the level of achieving the objectives that were set, by using a Likert scale going from 1 - never, to 5 - it achieved all the objectives. The respondents' average opinion indicates a prudent (cautious) position, which does not allow foreseeing how the respondents (as initiators and/or beneficiaries of CBC projects) review its achievements in comparison with the initial expectations. However, there are significant differences between groups of respondents, deviating from the registered weighted average score of 2.98, which is very close to the mean option "3 - to a moderate extent". Meanwhile, the most optimistic are local/regional administration's representatives, and the most sceptics appear to be the academics, while consultants in tourism, NGOs and businesses representatives give some credit to the assertion that CBC in tourism is quite close to achieve its initial aims. By country of origin, Hungarian respondents appear to be significantly more optimistic than Romanian ones (see Table 3).

Table 3: Respondents' opinion regarding the achievement of cross-border cooperation objectives (calculated as weighted average of the responses, ranging from 1 - never/not at all to 5 - achievement of all the set objectives)

Weighted average score	Respondents, by country of origin		Respondents, by professional affiliation			
	HU	RO	Local/regional administration	Academics	Companies, consultants and experts	Associations, NGOs
2.98	3.27	2.88	3.11	2.38	2.67	2.83

Source: own calculations based on data set

This noticeable optimism of local/regional government, respectively of Hungarian respondents, could be explained by their earlier and on a larger scale involvement in European funded projects. In most cases, cross-border programs have been intended for local/regional government (both as initiators and beneficiaries). Furthermore, Hungarian entities reported a considerable advance (at least of 5-7 years) in the implementation of programs financed by EU funds, compared to Romanian entities.

Q2. In your opinion, the development of CBC in tourism stays on the local administration's agenda as: a) a formal objective; b) a reason for accessing grants/non reimbursable funds; c) an important element in the overall development plan of the locality/community; d) an unimportant or missing element?

The comparative analysis between the perspective of the surveyed respondents shows that, for the Romanian respondents, the development of CBC in tourism stays on the local administration's agenda as a reason for accessing grants/non-reimbursable funds (62% of the options) and, to a lesser extent (26%), as an important element in the overall development plan of the locality/community. Meanwhile, in Hungarian respondents' opinions, CBC's development represents rather an important element in the overall development plan of the locality/community (66%), than a reason for accessing grants/non reimbursable funds (26%).

Public (local/regional) administration' representatives consider the development of CBC in tourism as an important element in the overall development plan of the locality/community (50% of the options) and a reason for accessing grants/non-reimbursable funds (43% of the options). The other categories of the surveyed respondents (i.e. associations and NGOs' representatives, tourism consultants and academics, managers of tourism companies) consider that the development of CBC in tourism stays, in most cases, on the local administration's agenda as a

reason for accessing grants/non-reimbursable funds (indicated by 66% of the associations and NGOs' representatives, 60% of the tourism consultant, and 100% of the academics). The only notable exception comes from the tourism companies' representatives, 66% of them considering CBC in tourism rather as a formal objective in the development plans undertaken by the local and regional public administration. This obviously critical assessment is likely to come from unfulfilled expectations of the business environment regarding the objectives set by local governments in the field of tourism development. On the other hand, setting CBC as reason for accessing non-reimbursable funds does not necessarily mean that the funds were actually accessed; their invocation could be only formal. Indeed, when asked to comment and exemplify the contradictions and the unfulfilled expectations, respondents mentioned the following:

- “divergent objectives of regional and local authorities in the eight component counties” (representative of public administration, Hungary);
- “there is much political involvement and a limited interest and motivation for promoting cross-border tourist attractions at local (administrative) level” (academics, Romania);
- “local authorities, even driven by good intentions, cannot always see the whole picture of the cross-border cooperation. Mutual knowledge is often limited, emotional, without economic basis” (academics, Hungary);
- “the lack of continuity, changes in local political leaders' agenda” (academics, Romania);
- “the lack of vision of local leaders, who do not understand the importance of cooperation for the development of tourism” (tourism consultant, Romania);
- “the limited economic resources of authorities and population reduce the scale of the projects” (representative of public administration, Romania).

Q3. How do you evaluate the efficiency of cross-border cooperation in tourism?

As shown in Table 4, the efficiency of the CBC in tourism was very differently assessed by the surveyed respondents, i.e.:

- public administration's representatives attribute a high efficiency to the spa and health tourism (a significant contribution seems to bring the resorts from the border counties Bihor and Hajdu-Bihar); a moderate efficiency to the cultural tourism, and a limited efficiency to active and sport tourism;
- the academics admit a high efficiency in the case of partnerships between institutions, companies, organizations; a moderate efficiency for the events, festivals associated with certain products, ethnography, and a limited efficiency for organizational support / promotion / best practices;
- NGOs' representatives assess the highest efficiency of the CBC in tourism to the partnerships between institutions, companies, organizations (similar to academics). The cultural tourism is evaluated as displaying a moderate efficiency, and the lowest efficiency is attributed to active and sport tourism;

- tourism consultants and experts assign high efficiency to the skills development in accessing European funds, a moderate efficiency to active and sports tourism, and a limited efficiency to partnerships between institutions, companies, organization;
- the opinion of the tourism companies was difficult to assess, due to the limited number of respondents. Even so, the results show that spa and health tourism was evaluated as displaying high efficiency; cultural tourism with a moderate efficiency, and the organizational support / promotion / best practices appear to present low efficiency in cross-border cooperation in tourism.

Table 4: Assessment of the efficiency of the cross-border cooperation in tourism, broken down by nature of the surveyed respondents

	High efficiency	%*	Moderate efficiency	%*	Limited efficiency	%*
Public administration's representatives	spa and health tourism	54%	cultural tourism	61%	active and sports tourism	32%
Academics	partnerships between institutions, companies, organizations	43%	events, festivals associated with certain products, ethnography	71%	organizational support / promotion / best practice	57%
Associations, NGOs' representatives	partnerships between institutions, companies, organizations	50%	cultural tourism	83%	active and sports tourism	50%
Tourism companies' representatives	spa and health tourism	66%	cultural tourism	66%	organizational support / promotion / best practice	66%
Tourism consultants	skills development in accessing European funds	60%	active and sports tourism	80%	organizational support / promotion / best practices	40%

* Each item is calculated as a percentage of total sub-sample respondents. Items' sum could exceed 100%, due to multiple responses given to this question.

Source: own calculations based on data set

Regarding the assessment of the effectiveness of the CBC in tourism, broken down by country of origin of the respondents, it appears that both Romanian respondents (31%) and, especially, Hungarian ones (16%) consider spa and health tourism as presenting a high efficiency. Events, festivals associated with certain products, ethnographic etc. were evaluated by Hungarian respondents (16%)

having a moderate efficiency in tourism CBC, while respondents from Romania (42%) have attributed a moderate efficiency to cultural tourism. A low efficiency of CBC has been assigned to active and sport tourism (by Hungarian respondents (19%)), and to organizational support / promotion / best practices (by Romanian respondents (27%)).

Nevertheless, the spa and health tourism has the most supporters, probably as a result of similar and sometimes complementary developments on both sides of the border. However, the most opinions come from respondents located in Hajdu-Bihar (HU), Bihor (RO) and Satu Mare (RO) counties, where this type of tourism is the most important, in terms of accommodation units, number of visitors and revenues.

Moreover, many respondents consider that the development of spa and health tourism (but not only!) is rather achieved on a national basis than on a euro-regional basis:

- “It wasn’t clearly and honestly examined the real joint tourism potential of neighbouring counties, it wasn’t sufficiently considered the potential of health tourism and shared resources exploitation (geothermal water), to attract tourists from outside cooperation” (local administration’s representative, Romania);
- “there is still insufficient understanding of joint tourism potential of neighbouring counties: health tourism, geothermal water” (local administration’s representative, Romania);
- “the financing of significant projects - the recipient should wait for 6-8 months before gaining access to public funds” (tourism consultant, Hungary),
- “lack of coordination and inclusion in cross-border themed packages, in order to mitigate the lack of a critical number of tourists” (academics, Romania).

Q4a. How do you appreciate the involvement of local authorities in implementing CBC projects in tourism?

The involvement of local authorities in the implementation of CBC projects in the field of tourism is appreciated by most of the respondents as moderate, both in Romania (59%) and in Hungary (47%). The public administration, the associations and NGO’s, and the tourism companies’ representatives also evaluate the involvement of the local authorities in implementing CBC projects in the field of tourism as moderate. The only exception is represented by tourism consultants, who appreciate the involvement of the local authorities as being rather limited.

Q4b. How do you appreciate the involvement of county/regional authorities in implementing CBC projects in tourism?

Regarding the involvement of the regional authorities in implementing CBC projects in the field of tourism, it can be noticed that the position of the respondents from Romania is slightly more sceptical than in the previous case, that regarding the local authorities. Thus, ca. 44% of the Romanian respondents and 67% of the Hungarian respondents consider this involvement as moderate. In different words, the Romanian respondents give more credit to the involvement of local authorities, while the Hungarian ones prefer the regional authorities. It is interesting that 64% of the regional public authorities' representatives appreciate their own involvement as being moderate, while 67% of the NGOs' representatives and tourism consultants evaluate the regional authorities' involvement as moderate. Again, academics and tourism companies' representatives are more sceptical, considering the involvement of the regional authorities in implementing cross-border projects in the field of tourism as low (below average).

Somewhat surprisingly, we find significant differences (and not only at national level) between the assessments regarding the local vs. regional involvement in tourism. Especially in the case of Romania, local authorities get more credit than the regional ones, even from rather critical entities, such as tourism entrepreneurs and academics. We could interpret this (relatively) favourable assessment through the fact that, at least in Romania, the regional authority is not effective, due to the incomplete regional decentralization process, while local government appears to be more effective. Stronger (i.e. in terms of economic potential, population etc.) local communities and authorities can do more for tourism and infrastructure development than regional authorities, which are often perceived as an unnecessary intermediary and a bureaucratic level, artificially inserted between local and national levels. On the other hand, the Hungarian respondents consider regional authorities as presenting a more complete vision of the development of HU-RO CBC:

- “joint tourism product packages - like historical sites, gastronomy, wine, beer, kadarka, brandy, Art Nouveau, wellness, folklore, industrial monuments - were developed, thus a joint tourism supply has been evolved” (academics, Hungary);
- “our project affected only partially the local government; the aim of our project was a description of certain tourist attractions” (NGO's representative, Hungary).

Local authorities, although enthusiastic, have neither the capacity nor the resources to achieve a sustainable cross-border tourism development:

- “a lot of the tourist investments were done by local governments, but it is questionable how effective these investments will be as tourist attractions” (tourism consultant, Hungary);
- “the big problem is the transportation infrastructure (particularly in the Romanian side) and the insufficient connections between touristic attractions on both sides of the border. It is questionable whether small projects implemented by authorities or local entrepreneurs may partially address these problems” (public authority’s representative, Romania).

Regardless of these positioning, our research revealed another situation that tend to be problematic for regional development. Whether it is due to the involvement and influence of the more experienced and financial powerful local governments, whether it results from the specific design and objectives of the European multiannual programs, the euroregional developments tend to run with two speeds, leaving behind the rural communities, deepening but not alleviating the existing disparities. The assessments of respondents are suggestive:

- “for some communities (especially urban), the effects were more consistent than for most rural localities” (tourism company’s representative, Romania);
- “favouring urban areas” (NGO’s representative, Romania);
- “there were good projects and important for rural areas, but in the long run, large urban areas and already famous resorts (as Debrecen with Hajduszoboszlo in Hungary, or Oradea with Baile Felix, and Timisoara in Romania) will benefit more from cross-border development in tourism than rural communities” (local administration representative, Romania).

Q5. How do you appreciate the sustainability of the CBC project in tourism, after ceasing EU financing?

Overall, the sustainability of CBC projects in tourism after ceasing EU financing is appreciated with moderate perspectives, both in Romania (by 76% of respondents) and in Hungary (by 80% of respondents). Some actions or activities could be self-sustained at a satisfactory level, but others cannot continue without financial support. Broken down by the profile of the respondents, the majority of them (i.e. public administrations’ representatives, associations and NGOs’ representatives, tourism companies’ managers and tourism consultants) consider the future sustainability of CBC projects as presenting moderate perspective (80%). The exception is represented by academics, with 57% of them considering the sustainability of CBC projects in tourism (after ceasing EU financing) as displaying a limited perspective, and 43% of them as having with moderate perspectives. As one of the surveyed respondents has expressed, “it was especially ignored that the sustainability of joint programs or new tourist products should be ensured after the termination of the EU support” (academics, Hungary).

The experts' concern over the future sustainability of the cross-border projects (particularly in case of ceasing EU financing) refers specifically to those projects and investments that had no solid economic and social justification:

- “projects developed without economic prospects, that cannot support themselves; projects ... for the sake of projects” (tourism company's representative, Romania);
- “the maintenance of the joint programs has not been solved. It is not enough to create something, it should be operational” (academics, Hungary);
- “the reduced economic resources of authorities and population limit the scale of the projects and their future (by itself) sustainability” (public administration's representative, Romania).

4 Conclusions, limitations and furthers

Our main aim was to investigate the potential and the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation programs in tourism sector, to reveal the involvement of local and regional authorities in the implementation of cross-border tourism projects and the prospects concerning the future sustainability of the projects already undertaken. We mainly achieved this aim by carrying on a survey-based research among representatives of local/regional public administration, tourism associations and NGOs, consultants, experts and academics working in the field of tourism and cross-border cooperation, located on both sides of the Romanian-Hungarian border.

Our main conclusions are as follows:

- According to the respondents, cross-border cooperation in tourism has mostly achieved its objectives; however, the agreement with this statement is lukewarm, but this caution could be attributed to an even-minded realism: fulfilling the projects indicators does not mean, automatically, an effective development in cross-border tourism development, as expected;
- There is a clear hierarchy of the respondents' options and expectations regarding the most appropriate types of tourism to be developed in the cross-border area. However, there is little interest in those initiatives that can provide complementary development of tourism, and a consistent preference for the traditional solutions that proved to be successful in the past (e.g. spa, health, cultural). There is a moderate support for the partnerships between institutions, companies, organization, or skills development in accessing European funds, although they are necessary to develop an effective cross-border tourism;
- The involvement of public authorities in the tourism sector seems to be overall well appreciated, but with significant differences among countries and professional interest of respondents. Local authorities are appreciated for their involvement, openness to people's problems, closeness to the

community, but are blamed for exaggerate focus on small projects and lack of a euroregional holistic vision (which, on the contrary, seems to be the advantage of the regional authorities). Both are, however, criticized for promoting “political” projects, with limited sustainability, for their inability to successfully address the structural deficiencies that hinder the sustainable development of tourism (transportation infrastructure and cross-border connections);

- Respondents are actually worried about the lack of sustainability in certain projects, after ceasing the European funding. It may be realism or the awareness that the initial enthusiasm and theoretical forecasts do not pass the test of time and challenges in the real environment. The concern is justified especially in the case of artificially supported projects, based on political lobbying, and of the projects having over-estimated the potential of tourism, natural resources and the interests of consumers. Good prospects are seen for the future cross-border cooperation, particularly from local authorities. Some of these optimistic assessments are fuelled by the belief that the proposed projects will be, in the future, better selected and implemented, based on the experience and increasing mutual trust between the cross-border partners. In other cases, the optimistic vision is explained by maintaining a low transparency on actual outcomes. It could be motivated by the threat of withdrawal (or impossibility to access) the funds, and even sanctions, if the failure would be unclosed;
- We have found a real convergence among the representatives of each professional category, irrespective of their country of origin. The fear of divergent positions was largely wasted; our research results are consistent with previous researches on HU-RO CBC (e.g. Radics et al., 2011; Badulescu et al., 2014; Badulescu et al., 2015; Bujdosó & Dávid, 2015). Differences were revealed, rather, between the professional categories of respondents: more sceptical and critical appear to be the academics, the tourism consultants and tourism companies' representatives (the latter seem to be also, somewhat, disillusioned by the inadequate involvement of other stakeholders);
- Concerning in particular the local authorities' representatives, their position is not only the most optimistic but the most coherent and consequent throughout the research. It is one of the most surprising and, at the same time, encouraging conclusions of our study. This statement needs to be closer addressed and deepen by further researches on the topic;
- Investigating the responses broken down by administrative units and countries, we notice that most of the responses come from Satu-Mare County (Romania) - with 14 responses, Bihor County (Romania) - with 11 responses, and Hajdu-Bihar County (Hungary) - with 7 responses. The last two mentioned counties (i.e. Bihor and Hajdu-Bihar) are parts of Bihor – Hajdu-

Bihar Euroregion, which provides about 39% of the overall responses. The reasons for this relative concentration relate to the following:

- these two counties concentrate a large part of the tourism potential of cross-border area (especially mountains and spa), they count over 38% of the bed-places in accommodation units and concentrate around 50% of the total number of nights spent in HU-RO cross border area (see above);
- the existence of an administrative and managerial centre of the CBC, namely the Regional Office for Cross-Border Cooperation for Romanian-Hungarian Border (BRECO) in Oradea (the main city of the Bihor County);
- both counties have experienced the cross-border cooperation earlier and more intense, compared to other counties from HU-RO CBC area, and they have already implemented by now more than a half of the overall tourism projects financed under HU-RO CBC financing program.

Moreover, a determining factor appears to be the existence of the Bihor – Hajdu-Bihar Euroregion, grouping these two counties. Its small size and population, but relatively equally distributed in the two component units, their remarkable similarities and also complementarities appear to be positive drivers in fostering cross-border cooperation. Therefore, another conclusion emerged is that the correct sizing and selection of the component units of a cross-border area and the decisions' decentralization and closeness to the beneficiaries seem to exert the best impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the cross-border cooperation.

The main limitation of the study is the relatively small size of the sample of representatives of local and regional public administration, tourism companies and associations, experts working in the field of tourism and cross-border cooperation. The limitation is due mainly to the small size of the whole area addressed by cross-border cooperation programs, and the tourist potential which is concentrated mainly in several small areas. Moreover, the respondents have been somehow selected by the authors of the present study, due to the limited number of the existing persons fulfilling the criteria of previously being involved in CBC cooperation in tourism.

Further investigations are needed to address and deeper analyse some relevant issues which have not lead to specific clear conclusions. Moreover, the questionnaire used as research instrument has offered the opportunity to investigate additional issues, which will be presented in future contributions.

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