

EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS IN THE FIELD OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE LOWER DANUBE MACRO REGION

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Abstract

The present paper is the result of an effort made by the authors to explore the needs of education and training in the field of local development, according to the situation in Romanian and Bulgarian Danube bordering regions, aiming at designing joint projects to address such needs between the universities to which authors are affiliated.

Local development is here understood as a deliberately induced process of improving the welfare of local communities, which should be democratic, inclusive and sustainable, in particular with regard to creating competitive local economies, stimulating economic growth and ensuring better living conditions for the inhabitants. Local development is an important part of a governance process which involves complex interactions at various territorially defined levels: local, regional, national, cross-national, international. In the case of the regions considered in the present paper a historical opportunity is provided for them by the so called European Union Strategy for the Danube Region. In order to fully exploit this opportunity, the capacity to address local development issues should be strengthened in both countries, especially by well designed education and training programmes. This is why local development was considered a priority topic for the cooperation between the two universities.

In the same framework, taking into consideration the challenges which are specific to the Lower Danube Region, other topics of interest were considered: logistics, tourism, consumer affairs or rural development. The authors of the present paper had to avoid overlapping with the work of the other teams. In particular, there are many common points between local development and rural development, because in both countries the regions on the border of Danube are predominately rural and significantly dependent on agriculture. Therefore, here, the needs for education and training are defined in strict correlation with the required capacity for understanding the development process and its priorities, designing, planning, implementing and assessing development policies with a favourable local impact in a regional context.

The paper presents as in a mirror the Romanian and the Bulgarian points of view. The two perspectives are quite different but complementary. Briefly said, while the Romanian approach is bottom-up, with a focus on the local capacity to take initiatives that will contribute at shaping the regional development process, the Bulgarian one considers first the priorities of the region, in order to define the capacities required for a proper response at

local level. Both perspectives are valid, and it should not be any contradiction between them. This is why we consider they are complementary.

The studies rely on documentary research and secondary analysis of data in order to assess the capacity gap in addressing local development issues, and to identify education and training needs in economics and business matters related to local development. They discuss the rationale of cooperation between universities from Bulgaria and Romania in responding to such needs, and, finally they propose an inventory of joint initiatives in this respect.

The paper emphasizes the factors which explain the reasons why cooperation between universities in raising the expertise in local development matters on both sides of Lower Danube is required and desirable, such as the vicinity, the common opportunities and responsibilities related to having Danube as a common asset, the similarities in development patterns, the common challenge of European integration, use of EU support and better exploitation of the Internal Market, the need to speed up the modernisation process and to achieve some economies of scope and scale.

Among other proposals, authors propose the establishment of a university hub to coordinate networking among higher education institutions from Bulgaria, Romania and other countries of the Danube Macro-region in the field of local and regional development related research, education and training and a joint master program in local development.

Keywords: local development; education and training; Danube Region, cross-border cooperation; macro-regional strategy.

JEL classification: F15, O15, O18, P41, P46, P48, R11

Romanian Situation*

1. Background

Romania has adhered to the European Union at 1st January 2007, in the context of a controversy regarding its degree of readiness to become a Member State. Romania and Bulgaria were the least developed countries of the enlarged European Union, and their accession was regarded as a big challenge for each of the two countries and for the European Union as well. With the belief that the European integration will help their country to achieve economic and social cohesion, Romanians have seen accession as an opportunity to speed up progress and to catch-up with better developed countries of the region. Three years later, the achievements appear to be deceiving, to certain extent, and the transformational processes prove to be far more difficult and long-lasting than expected. The lack of institutional capacity to design and implement effective development strategies policies and programmes is seen as the main handicap which generates delays, a poor absorption of structural funds and a low efficiency of investments.

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A new historical opportunity opens for Romania with the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), announced early this year, and which has to be adopted in December 2010, after successive consultations with all the stakeholders. This is the second European Union macro-regional strategy, the first one being launched in 2007 and adopted in 2009 for the Baltic Sea region. The European Union macro-regional strategies aim at creating a consensual frameworks between regions belonging to several countries that share common features or challenges, established following the principle of place-based policies in functional regions, in order to collectively address opportunities and problems that are of common interest, in a way which will improve the overall functionality, competitiveness and attractiveness of the entire region (European Commission, 2009b). This opportunity refers mainly to the regions on the border of the Danube River, regions that are also participating in the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-border Cooperation operational programme.

The linkage between macro-regional strategies and local development is not entirely apparent, and the implementing of projects with a favourable effect from a macro-regional point of view is not automatically equally profitable for everybody. In a first phase the macro-regional strategy will deal with large scale projects (transport infrastructures, environment problems, energy and similar) significant for the entire region, a situation in which local communities interests may be overlooked. Maybe, some will win more, some will win less, and some will lose. The following text, from a commission note on macro-regional strategies is eloquent: „*More generally, the macro-regional strategy concept could evolve from a means of solving problems and meeting challenges in specific regions to an innovative and potentially powerful method of promoting European integration and territorial cooperation while preserving the subsidiarity, flexibility and inclusiveness essential for efficient, effective and popular interventions*” (European Commission, 2009b, p. 3-4). Under what circumstances, we would ask?

This paper is build upon the belief that the most important condition for such desirable evolution is the capacity of local leaders and actors to negotiate and to exploit the opportunities provided by the macro-regional strategy in the best interest of their communities. Communities have to build around what they have got, not around what the national economy or the global economy will deliver them. They have to preserve, put into value and exploit local differences. This means that local leaders and actors in the local economy need to have the means to understand what the local competitive advantages are. Democratization and decentralization have raised the responsibility of local communities in shaping their desired future, but did not assure, by themselves the actual capacity to understand the challenges, and to deliver a competitive locally adapted response. Communities that have this capacity, especially in terms of expertise in local development planning and implementing, will be in a more favourable position to take advantage of the macro-regional strategy. As the European Commission experts noted, „The funding could be made available on a competitive basis – the criterion being how well the proposed intervention supports and implements the strategy”. As we read it, the meaning of this statement is that communities that will be able to convince about the organic contribution of their own development to the development of the entire macro-region will get more support, while others will be lagging behind.

In the following chapters we are discussing, for Romania, the capacity gaps related to local development, we argue the need to develop expertise in local development matters and to make it available for assisting local leaders in policy development and implementing, as

well as in bargaining with national, regional or European Union Officials. We also explore the role that universities should take in preparing local development experts and in disseminating local development culture, following the experience of more advanced countries. Then, we explain the rationale of cooperation between universities from Bulgaria and Romania in developing and delivering education and training programmes focussed on local development matters, and finally we are making some concrete proposals how to tackle these issues.

2. Capacity gaps related to Local Development in Romania

Local Development should be understood as a process of correcting structural deficiencies which have led to underdevelopment of communities aiming at ensuring a certain convergence in terms of welfare with more advanced ones. Approaches to local development are based on some of the 'basic principles' promoted by development paradigms such as sustainable human development, sustainable livelihoods and local level early recovery. It takes human development as both a means and an end, aims to empower the poor and other marginalised groups, promotes accountability and ensures sustainability through local ownership and broad stakeholder participation. Local development takes a multi-sectoral approach with attention for economic, political, environmental and social factors (UNDP, 2007).

Achieving sustainable local development is a complex endeavour that cannot be tackled without appropriate capacity, defined as „the abilities of individuals, institutions and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner” (UNDP, 2006).

Evidence from past performance figures, direct observation and in depth interviews with a limited number of local leaders and experts suggest the existence of huge capacity gaps related to local development, in Romania, in general, and especially in the Romanian Lower Danube region.

First this lack of capacity is proved by the very weak performance in the absorption of funds. Based on official reports of management and monitoring agencies the absorption rate of EU funds is low. The global actual absorption rate of funds under the Convergence Objective, including advances and interim payments made by the European Commission, amounted at the end of 2009 to approximately 10.3% of the 2007-2013 EU allocation (for an amount received of approximately 1.97 billion Euro). For each structural instrument individually, the absorption rate is as follows: ERDF – 10.3%, ESF – 9% and CF – 11.1%. The lack of administrative capacity, in particular with regard to adequate human resources, is considered to be one of the main difficulties leading to such weak performance (ACIS, 2010a,b).

There is no data available about the number and qualification of people involved in local development policy design and implementation. Based on data published by the National Agency for the public service about half of public servants have tertiary education, most of which are working in the central public administration and its deconcentrated units. This speaks by itself about how scarce the expertise at the level of both urban and rural localities is. For instance, the 2009 report on the use of structural instruments highlights among the main difficulties encountered „A limited capacity and experience of the beneficiaries of the

local and central administration in preparing and implementing projects; the main deficiencies relate to:

- Lack of experienced and sufficiently trained staff, especially within local authorities in small and medium-sized localities;
- Lack of a strategic planning and of a thorough budget planning;
- Poor skills in key areas such as project management, public procurement or financial and budget management. (ACIS, 2010b, p. 70)”

The essential problem, in our opinion, is related to knowledge related to social and economic matters and the degree of understanding of the development process. From direct observation and in-depth interviews we found out that local development is frequently misinterpreted, being confounded with economic growth, or considered to be an almost exclusive responsibility of local public administrations to provide services of general interest, or raised as a justification of any isolated action carried at local level, by public administration, enterprises, NGOs etc. Even worse, it appears to be some kind of general consensus, including the assessment of national agencies considers to be better equipped to deal with such issues, to consider local development capacity synonym of any mechanical utilization of methodologies and procedures, as in the case of accessing EU funding.

In reality, not all kinds of Local Development policies/actions are effective and suitable as the situation of the south of Italy demonstrates. Sorin Ionita, from the Romanian Academic Society, is very lucid when showing the risk of badly designed and implemented development policies to lead to a so-called Mezzogiorno syndrome characteristic for regions that are unable to overpass the condition of being poor and dependent of external aid (Ioniță, 2007). Reading his article, it is clear that the southern regions of Romania appear to be especially exposed to this kind of risk.

The entire region is characterized by underdevelopment (less than 2000 EURO per capita) and severe structural handicap:

- the majority of the population is rural, low educated, old, dependent on social assistance
- subsistence agriculture is the only living condition of a large number of households
- lack of entrepreneurship culture
- market structures inexistent or bad
- basic infrastructure is missing or bad
- very poor services of general interest
- lack of local financial resources

Therefore, not only the development gap is very large, but it is also very difficult to identify an effective mix of priorities and sequence of actions in order to achieve conditions for local sustainable development

Furthermore, the gap in terms of local development expertise can be assessed by reference to the needs, depending of the number of sub-national entities that should be assisted in addressing local and regional development problems. Only for the Romanian Danube

bordering zones also considered by the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border cooperation programme the number of sub-national communities is the following:

- Three NUTS 2 regions;
- 7 judet (the first sub-national administrative unit);
- 12 large towns (Municipiu)
- 29 towns
- 470 rural administrative units (Comuna)
- A population of about 3.3 million people, more than half in rural localities

There is an urgent need to develop a large community of experts in local development to assist communities in policy design and implementing. Education structures, universities in particular, should undertake an important role in this respect, following the example in western countries. Without investing in developing capacity at local level, the underdevelopment situation of the Romanian regions bordering Danube River will not be overcome in the near future, independently of the opportunities provided by EUSDR or the availability of funds.

3. The role of universities in preparing local development experts

Investment is needed in education, lifelong learning and skills acquisition, in order to increase the ability of public authorities and the private sector to deliver basic services, and to promote sustainable growth. Learning, defined by UNESCO as any improvement in behaviour, information, knowledge, understanding, attitude, values or skills, can be achieved through education and training. Education represents all deliberate and systematic activities designed to meet learning needs, while training is defined as any formal (post-compulsory education) instruction or learning activities – usually, though not always, shorter term and less academic than educational programs- that develop knowledge, skills and attributes linked to particular forms of employment. The distinction between knowledge, skills and competencies is captured in defining a competency as the ability to use both acquired knowledge and skills under new circumstances. In our approach, we consider capacity building as a process of competency development based on knowledge and skills acquisition through learning. This interpretation, adopted to meet the specific focus of our paper, ignore a series of other factors impacting on capacity as politics, organization, institutional arrangements and funds availability. Nonetheless, one should note shortcomings related to all these other factors can be ascribed to competency failures as well.

In Romania local development capacity building is mainly attributed to the National Agency of Public Servants and eight Regional Centres of Continuing Training for the Local Public Administration, out of which four serve the Danube bordering regions. They are providing a large variety of short training programmes (30 to 60 hours each) and, as a rough estimate, about 2000 people are annually trained. The training programmes encompass such wider topical categories as: Public Management, Reform & Law, Public Communication, Human Resources, Public Resources, Projects & Financing, Personal Development, Information Technology, and Foreign Languages. Among the more than hundred specific topics one may find: Strategic planning for public entities, Administration and European Affairs, Local sustainable development and public services, Urban

sustainable development and environment protection, Intra - and inter-institutional communication of public entities, Public investment, Public procurement, Project management, Accessing EU funds, The use of computer. As one may easily see, these training programmes address very specific instrumental issues and have only limited effectiveness without prior sound professional background and holistic understanding of the stake of local development.

More comprehensive education in the field of local development is provided by universities through Local and Regional Development Master Programmes or post-graduate training courses. We could identify four master programmes on local and regional development offered by universities from Bucharest, Craiova, Iasi, and Cluj. It is not possible to assess the effectiveness of these courses based only on available curricula but several issues are obvious: first, the curricula are very different from a university to another, which means that there is no clear consciousness about the competencies and skills required by a local or regional development experts; second, there is a clear mark of the profile of the faculty offering the course on the curricula, which means that the programme was designed primarily by taking into consideration the kind of in-house resources to the detriment of the professional profile of the graduates; third, all the programmes focus on practical and instrumental knowledge (like, for instance, European Union regional Development Policies, Project management, Structural funds etc) to the detriment of creating a more fundamental and scientific background that could enable students to make more independent judgements and to promote more innovative approaches in their local or regional development related work.

Apart from these main-stream activities aiming at raising the competencies in local development, there are other initiatives that should be taken into consideration as one time training courses organised as individual projects (within the EU Human Resources Development Programme, for instance) with collaboration from more experienced western institutions, the Young Professionals Scheme which trains so called *public managers*, the establishment of the Partners Foundation for Local Development Romania member of Partners for Democratic Change International that provide assistance, training and also a number of free international manuals, guides and toolkits.

In Romania, according to our analysis, universities play a marginal and not specific role in responding to education and training needs in local development. This conclusion is supported by looking to the international experience. Without undertaking a systematic and exhaustive research, we have identified outstanding academic programs in local development in many developed countries from Europe, North America (i.e.: Waterloo University, Canada) or Australia (Sydney University). Among academic programmes in Europe the following may be listed:

- Joint European Master in Comparative Local Development, University of Trento, Italy
- Master in Local Economic Development (LSE, Great Britain)
- Master in Regional Development (Newcastle, Great Britain)
- Master in Community and Local Development (Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland)
- Master in Sustainable Local Development and Social Economy (University of Huelva, Spain)

- Master's Degree in Local Development Management and Support (inter-university programme) (Jaume I University Spain)

The best example may be the Joint European Master in Comparative Local Development, hosted by the School on Local Development of the University of Trento, Italy. The master programme is established in cooperation with Corvinus University of Budapest, University of Ljubljana and the University of Regensburg. Its orientation on more fundamental and general competencies is illustrated by the welcome statement of professor Bruno Dallago, head of the school: „In a world of interdependence and integration of the different fields of knowledge and human activity (“globalisation”), local development represents an important dimension for understanding and translating knowledge into action and performance. Studying local development also requires assuming a particular vision of the globalization process, which differs both from the standard idea of convergence of institutions and practices, and the alternative vision of distinct “national capitalisms”. In fact, the world and its dynamics are moulded by the strong interdependence and the dialogue between local characteristics and identity dimensions, as much as they are by international and national forces.” This vision is followed by the curricula content:

- Principles and problems of local development: economic aspects.
- Principles and problems of local development: legal aspects.
- Principles and problems of local development: social and political aspects.
- Principles and problems of local development: Financial aspects.
- The management of diversities in society.
- International organizations and regional governance.
- Local development and entrepreneurship policies.
- Sustainable local development.
- Project Cycle Management, Impact Assessment and Research Methodology.
- The role of language and culture in international relations, economics and business.

Taking into consideration what we have found to be the shortcomings of the Romanian education and training response to the expertise needs in the field of local and regional development, and we have learned from studying the international experience we have identified a number of subjects that should be part of an academic programme on local development. In the following list the titles are indicative and some subjects can be aggregated in a single module:

- Development economics
- Demographics
- Territorial planning
- Human development
- Social responsibility
- Leadership in local development
- Policy priority setting and budgeting
- Project cycle management
- Local Development case studies
- Financial management, procurement and commissioning
- Public-private partnerships

- Service oriented local development: services of general interest and business services business enabling environment, market information systems
- Policy evaluation
- Trans-national integration and multilevel governance
- Entrepreneurship and innovation policies for local development

4. Rationale of collaboration between Romania and Bulgaria

For Romania and for Bulgaria as well, preparing a sound university level degree in local development could take several years while any delay in supplying local communities with expert support in addressing local development issues in a better way could imply not only delays in improving the social and economic conditions of the population but also severe waste of public EU and national funds. At contrary, there are many reasons to envisage a collaborative approach.

First, from the view point of the economic and social situation the two countries have a similar pattern they have gone a similar transition, and face similar challenges in terms of modernization and European integration. They share also Danube as a common responsibility in terms of environment protection, but also as an extremely valuable asset in terms of energy, transportation, fishing, tourism, agriculture etc. The vicinity between the cross-border regions favors the circulation and the exchanges between them and their integration. More, than this, Danube has become the axis of a very important European Union macro-region context within which Romania and Bulgaria, having similar bargaining power and similar interests, should better support each other's position and develop a coordinated approach.

Second, the cooperation between Romanian and Bulgarian universities can take advantage of the differences between the two countries (or the regions involved, in particular). Such differences can be sources of complementarities and development opportunities. They can generate also a critical learning effect, contributing at avoiding stereotypes and providing a larger base of inspiring experiences.

Third, sharing the effort to prepare various modules will create mutually profitable economies of scale and will increase the flexibility in course delivery. On another hand, the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies and D. Tsenov Academy of Economics of Svishtov which have already achieved experience and trust in cooperating on various projects could become facilitators in their own countries in creating a network of universities that will cooperate in developing and disseminating knowledge related to local development. This is in particular important because the fast changing environment requires continually updated course content while the resources in terms of university teachers specialized in disciplines relevant to local development and able to prepare and deliver an outstanding course will continue to be limited in the medium run.

Last, but not least, the joint education of highly qualified experts in local development will induce an interoperability effect. Such desiderate is of outmost importance for ensuring a larger base of employment, more flexibility and promptitude in responding to the needs of local communities. In addition, sharing the expertise will create in both countries better conditions for avoiding conflicts of interests which are currently frequent because, due to

resources constraints, the same limited number of experts is involved in the design, commissioning, implementation and evaluation of a certain project.

5. Responding to education and training needs in the field of local development

The assessment of the needs for education and training in the field of local development, carried out specifically for the Danube bordering regions of Romania, although many findings may be valid for other Romanian regions as well, revealed a severe competency gap, scarce expertise resources, and a failure of the universities to fulfill their role. Moreover, assuming that the situation in Bulgaria is similar, we have found that it might be better to address the challenge to improve the academic education and training delivery in this field by joint efforts of Romanian and Bulgarian universities. By studying the international experience as well, we have identified several types of actions and target groups that can be considered:

- Types of actions
 - Joint master in local development (involving as appropriate other universities)
 - Joint post-graduate training programs
 - Awareness raising conferences (caravan)
 - Joint advocacy for developing the qualification of local development expert within the higher education qualifications framework in both countries.
- Target groups
 - Local leaders
 - Regional development agencies
 - Consultancy firms
 - Providers of services of general interest
 - Individuals that aspire to become local development experts

In order to bridge the capacity gap discussed above, and to obtain an actual, effective improvement, a critical mass intervention is required, using a variety of means and involving as many stakeholders as possible. The Academy of Economic Studies of Bucharest and D. Tsenov Academy of Economics of Svishtov could initiate and lead a larger movement, mobilising the academic communities in their countries and external support to create a unique knowledge platform in the field of local development.

Bulgarian Situation**

The problem how to be determinate the educational and training needs is put because every EU member state have to react to the EU policy and strategy for the period 2010 – 2020. In this context one of the challenges is ways for joint and more coordinated development of the Lower Danube Macro region (LDMR) as an integral part of the Danube hyper region to be found. One of the important tools could be the European Strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR). Such are entrepreneurial skills training, knowledge gathering and transferring etc. The third issue is how to prepare projects under the umbrella of the European Strategy for the Danube region.

The modern European thinking needs new approaches in the process of the joint development. It is valid especially for periods when a new decade (2010-2020) is starting. In cross-roads period the universities have to play leading role in the process of preparing future specialists for real practical actions.

An imitative of the European Parliament leads the European commission to issue in September 2009 the concept for the EU macro-regional strategies. The first was the Baltic Macro Region strategy and after that – the European Strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR). Or the holistic thinking was applied in developing natural water basins – first entirely in the frame of the EU (Baltic hyper region), and afterwards started the discussion about the basin of the Danube river, which includes and non EU member states.

In European Union documents “Europe 2020” and EUSDR are put important super accents as: 1) Single markets and 2) Macro regions’ developments the “vertical” aspect of utmost importance is the world markets’ competitiveness to be achieved, and the ‘horizontal” one is the Trans regional development and the maximal connectivity to be a fact. Nowadays the question is what to be done for tackling such problems, how regional entrepreneurs and setting up an institutional base for joint actions to be prepared. A possible answer is awareness about the Lower Danube macro region importance to be created.

Regarded from other perspective, two types of problems are facing the EU: valid for countries and regions as a whole (e.g. greater cohesion, energy effectiveness etc. and specific ones for the different regions, including the Danube hyper region and its macro regions - Upper, Middle and Lower. The member states of the EU have to participate in understanding and resolving the European problems in the beginning of the new decade 2010-2020, to be aware of the documents which state the EU strategic problems as Europe 2020 and EUSDR and to realise the common decisions taken.

Regarding the Single European market the conclusion of the European Commission is, that every day businesses and citizens faced the reality, that bottlenecks to cross-border activity remain although the fact that legally European single market exists. It is also realised that market networks are not sufficiently inter-connected and that the enforcement of the single market rules remains uneven. Often, businesses and citizens deal with 27 different legal systems for one and the same transaction. While the EU companies are confronted with the daily reality of fragmentation and diverging rules, their competitors from China, the US and Japan, gain full strength from their large home markets. Those

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considerations have to challenge all the stakeholders in the process of building-up the Europe of the 2020.

The Single European market has territorial dimensions. The national standpoint is that understanding that human resource is key capital for the development of community and more specifically for an economy based on knowledge. The idea is that investments in people are investments in a future more harmonized and more sustainable development. This priority sets the need for number of initiatives aiming to improve the quality of education in line with the labour market demand, and to create opportunities for better qualification and create conditions for development of applied research and development in view of mutual transfer of knowledge and know-how. In this context the development of human resources within Danube macro-region is based on partnership and good practices.

Because many of the European development problems have Trans border and Trans regional character the two specialized economic academies joined their efforts to find out how to prepare needed for the Danube macro Region specialists and to organize their training. The Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest (Romania) and the D Tsenov Academy of Economics in Svishtov (Bulgaria) started to work in the area of human potential developments and to find ways to offer joint training programmes. Their collaboration started in 2008 and since then is developing in diverse forms of activity. Joining their efforts, the two academies started to: 1) determine the training and education needs in the field of local and regional development in the Lower Danube Region and to 2) take the necessary actions in this regard.

Some aspects of the competences in regional entrepreneurship (Yankov, 2009) and regional development are presented by authors as D. Miron, A. Dima and S. Vasilache (2010). Other authors suggest a hybrid method for regional research (Năstase and Kajanus, 2008). Also there could be cited general ideas for sustainable development (Dinu, 2010), which are also considered among the most important strategies of empowering individuals in terms of increasing welfare and security and to acquire the necessary abilities.

The problem of training the modern student regarded as citizens of an integrating Europe and especially in profiled higher educational institutions such as the Academy of Economic Studies and the Tsenov Academy of Economics is a strategic issue. The students have not to be trained only in the “vertical” aspects as functional and in separate subjects oriented professional areas, but also in problems which concern not only regional development itself, overviewed from the European perspective 2020. Here they have to put the accents on finding up the missing till now links which are necessary for the creation of a single (Pan European) market (European Commission, 2010).

1. Methodology

The methodology is founded on the thesis that the quality human resources and specialists depends on the degree of awareness about EU development issues and training which they receive during the study in higher institutions.

1.1. Hypothesis

The European Union needs cross-functional specialists – professionals and defends systems oriented (vertical and horizontal). It is stressing on Europe 2020 and the joint supra and intra state development.

1.2. Scope and tasks

The scope of this part of the article is an overview regarding the training for creating awareness about the problems of the Lower Danube Macro Region holistic development.

2. Training for awareness about the Danube strategy preparation and implementation

So the task is the training needs we target as the object of the research the Lower Danube macro region to be determined. The region itself covers territories around the river Danube and its basin. From Bulgarian side it includes 3 planning and 9 administrative regions, 73 municipalities (from them 21 are situated on the Danube river shore. All they are eligible for European Trans border cooperation programmes and European Operative program Romania-Bulgaria, 2007 – 2013.

For the needs of this article we want to clear the terminology. We call the whole Danube basin *Danube Hyper Region*. It includes three macro regions as follows: 1. Upper (Superior) Danube river: from Km 2411 to 1790 (Kehlheim-Gonyo – 621 km); 2. Middle Danube river: from Km 1790-930 (Gonyo – Vaskapu - 860 km). 3. Lower Danube river: from Km 930 to the Danube Delta (930 km).

This integral hyper and macro regional development concept is shown as follows in figure no. 1.

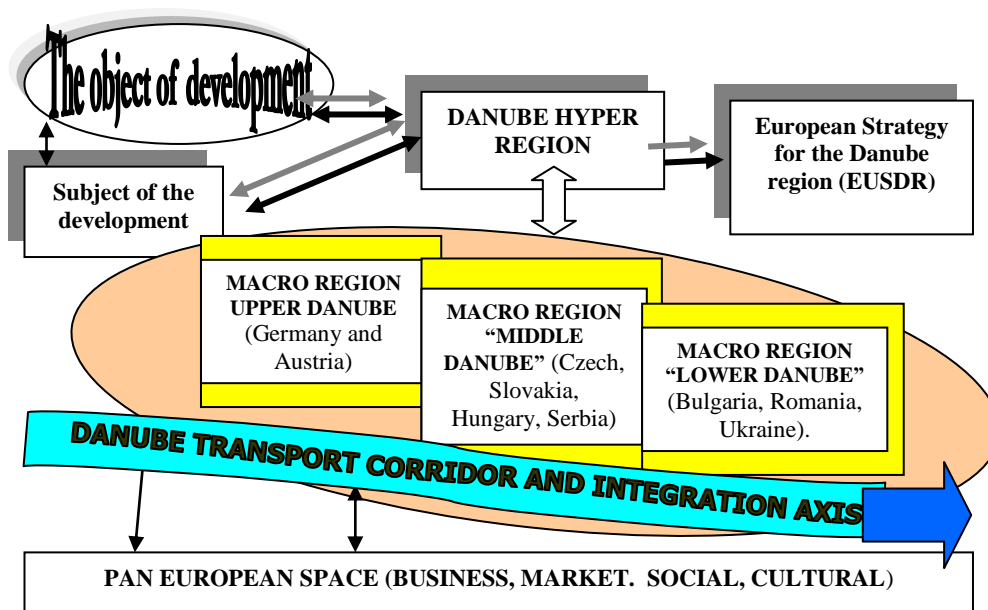


Figure no. 1: The outlines of the Danube Hyper region

Here we could find the place of the European Strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR). It could be regarded as one of the many Danube hyper regional development tool.

The new paradigm of the integration and regional development is based on the idea opposite to “*divide et impera*” principle. Its accent is the integration and the management of neighbouring territories, knowledge and skills by using their potential, specific prerequisites, facts (datum), etc. In this regard the networking approach itself is not a new tool for research and conceptualizing of regional systems development. But the problem is that it is used in a reductionist way; the networks are divided in sub networks and are approached on the basis of the principle “*divide et impera*”. Nowadays different government institutions and NGOs create their own networks, which operate in different directions and the networks are not synchronising their actions. They also are not involved in large and important projects.

There are different types and levels of regional development which need modern approaches and tools as: network approach (holistic thinking and approach; goal orientation; rational projects with friendly nature impacts; chain development principle etc. The integral thinking itself means to start from global and then to act locally.

The macro-region approach means that there is a coordinated and integrated framework for all projects in areas which include territories from a number of countries or regions. The regions themselves are associated with one or more common features or challenges” (European Commission, 2009)

The development in the LDMR has to include:

- In vertical aspect: single market rules; more balanced energy mix, which to follow the trajectory: *FROM* „Constantly increasing production and consumption of energy” *TOWARD* „The increasing the energy intensity in all sectors of the society” *TILL Carbon and nuclear wastes neutral economy*, which have to decrease and even to stop the emissions of harmful substances which damage the components of nature (Yankov, 2006); the conservation and the sustainable use of such a natural datum as rivers, landscapes and many others.

- In horizontal aspect: increasing the connectivity through improving the existing and settling new regional connections; the increasing the cohesion between the different regions.

“The Europe of the regions” is not only an abstract notion or a slogan. The concept the Pan European market entrepreneurial process is a step to the process of Trans border integration not for the region (regional development) itself, but including Trans border regional development. The sustainable development in this context put the accent on the comprehensive integration within and outside trans-border regions of Bulgaria and Romania. They must also to make presentations of models for regional integration of territorial entities from Bulgarian perspective (Yankov, 2009).

The holistic approach goes through different levels of the regional development, starting from the EU Hyper regions towards macro regions and then to NUTS¹ I, NUTS II, NUTS III (European planning regions, national administrative regions) etc.

¹ NUTS - Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics.

Lower Danube macro region could be regarded as a subsystem of the Danube hyper region. The range of the LDMR as an object of horizontal and vertical development could be presented in figure no. 2

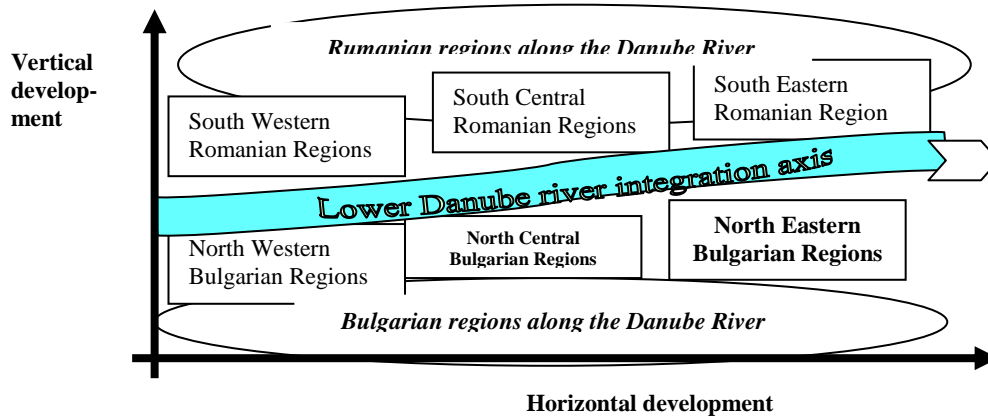
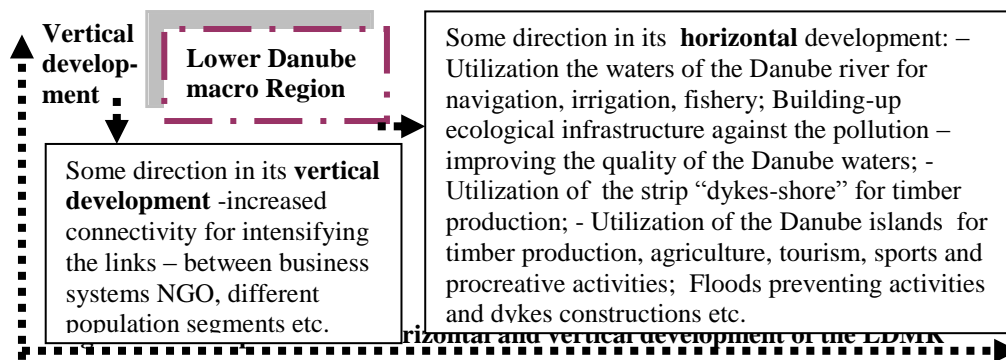


Figure no. 2: The outlines of the Lower Danube Macro Region

The thematic of the regional integrated development has two dimensions – vertical and horizontal. They are systematized in the following way, presented in figure no. 3.



Horizontal development

The basic idea is that the coordinated, joint, comprehensive and mutual development of closest territories will bring synergetic effects. One of the tools in this regard is the Danube strategy. There are efforts and capitals to be invested in TBR markets in an interconnected complex. It will take advantages from the market systems proximity, from their reciprocal complementation in the production of specific row materials, products and energy.

With the strategic thinking many problems, which up until now are being solved separately, would be approached and resolved as a whole. The entrepreneurs networks created will prospect jointly possibilities for their multi vector development. In this regard the multi vector development of the LDMR has the following outlines figure no. 4.

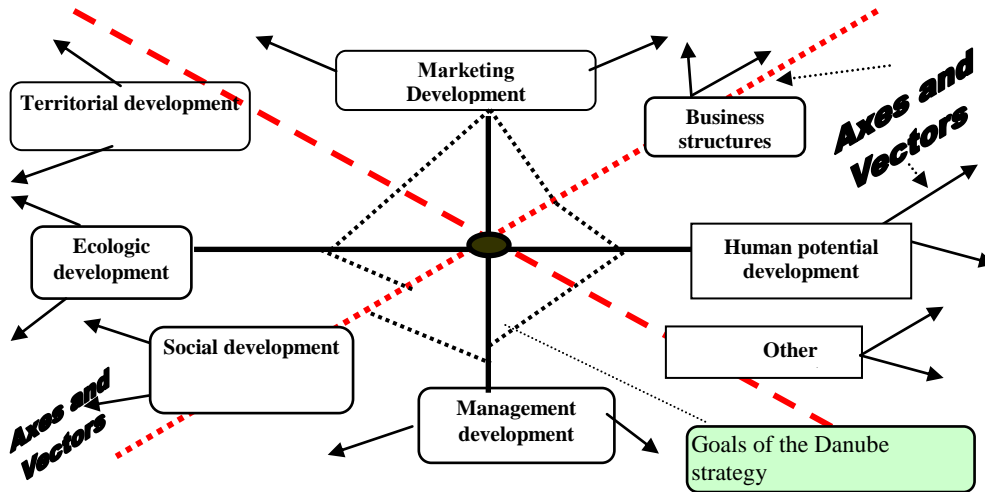


Figure no. 4: Multi vector development of the LDMR

In that context the general idea about the methodological approach regarding the problems of the Lower Danube from European perspective is shown in table no. 1.

Table no. 1: The big picture for creation awareness regarding the main questions connected with the Lower Danube Macro Region development

Levels	Which are the problems of the Lower Danube development regarding the European prospective?	Which institutions have to resolve those problems?
(European) Transnational National Regions along the Danube river Local communities	Which are the problems of the Lower Danube development regarding the European prospective Who have to be educated for creating awareness How they have to be approached for to be studied by bachelor and Master students? Holistic Problems of strategic nature Projects development etc.	

3. Training for awareness about the Danube strategy preparation and implementation

The object of the European strategy is the Danube space. It includes the river itself, the ecosystems inside and along the Danube River, the islands; the systems of the localities on the river shore (port, non port) and their hinterlands the adjacent territories etc.

The Danube strategy could be regarded as one of the important tools for the LDMR development. It has to apply the holistic logical chain principle itself is very important and it means that the preparing and implementing of different strategies. From the Danube river point of view one have to start from its sources and step-by-step to reach its Delta. It could be illustrated with the following chains, which follows the normal logics of development:

for example the building of ecological infrastructure to start *from* Upper (then) Medium (then) Low (then) Black Sea; or *from* the tributaries to the main course of the river etc. Only proceeding in that way will bring synergetic effects and will affect positively the Black Sea basin.

In other aspect the chain principle imposes first the global and then local thinking: starting from Supranational levels - then National and sub-regional levels (Yankov, 2007) The coverage of the EU Danube strategy and its relation with the Danube hyper region vision is shown in figure no. 5.

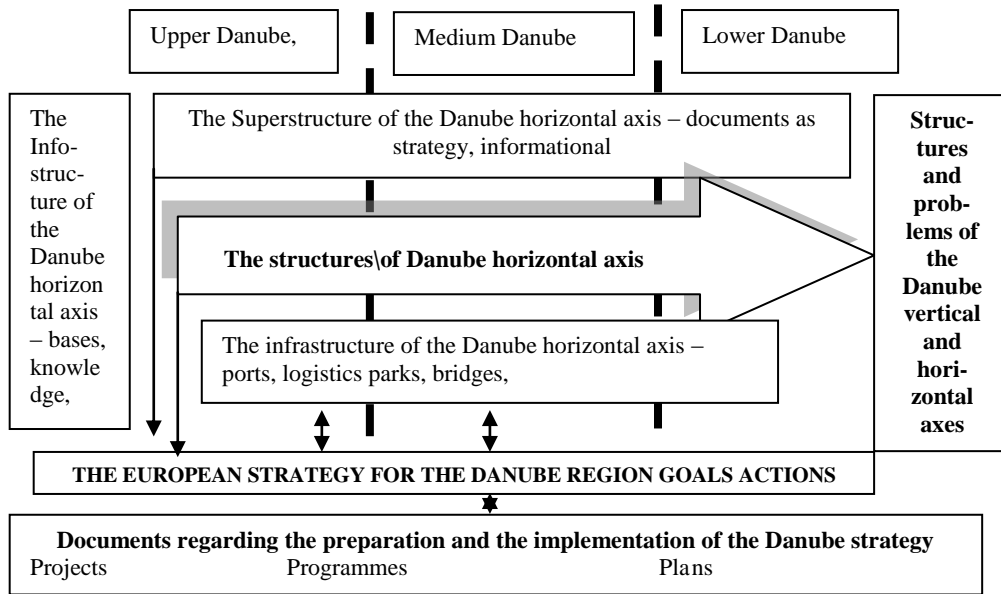


Figure no. 5: The coverage of the EU Danube strategy

The analysis of the relations between the different Trans border stakeholders engaged in the process of resolving the problems of the LD MR development could be a platform for the future projecting². Table no. 2 is presenting one possible frame for such kind of activity.

The European Strategy for the Danube region intentions is to be not just an ordinary strategy. Its goals and the philosophy aim to create holistic thinking about the Danube River and macro regional development. The horizontal super goals are related to the improving connectivity in the Danube macro regions and with others regions. The vertical ones aim to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of the Danube macro region.

Table no. 2: Model for Trans-border relationship analysis in the process LD MR development

² The process of the LD MR development could be facilitated and more active by the participation of institutions as for example Danube Countries working group, the European Regions Assembly, the International Association for Danube Research, the European Regions Institute, etc.

Possible structure of the stakeholders	Frequency of the relations (connections)	Types of involvements in different projects	Other imitative	Individuals involved
Administrative structures and institutions				
Business initiatives				
Nongovernmental organizations' initiatives				
Commuting with educational purposes and work				
Projects based on Trans border interactions				
University relations and projects initiatives				

Danube strategy as a new tool for joint macro regional development, it is a umbrella which has to cover different sub-strategies and moves. It will be a driving engine for preparing visions and alternative strategies for the entrepreneurial process and is also will give a real start for joint business activities in neighbouring territories market exchanges and transactions.

Danube strategy aims are to contribute for the establishment of the so called “Danube identity” among different communities - precondition for more beneficial participation in the European integration processes. The strategy is expected to become a new model for regional development and respectively for cooperation and integration. Other ambitious goals as "Smart Danube" "good Danube housekeeping" are symbiosis of economic development and environment protection. They might be achieved by different tools. In its turn the "Smart Danube" goal generates the need for "smart cities" and consecutively for "smart urban planning”. Through the Danube strategy the Trans border regional integration could be well-directed process. It has to include balanced initiatives both from “up-down” and “down up”. The Danube strategy initiative (project) will overcome the different aspect approaches, visions and projects, done for them alone.

Danube strategy is a regional development tool for the period 2011 – 2020 and as such it provokes many stakeholders not to be only engaged in it, but to take joint and coordinated activities. While involved in the Danube strategy preparation and implementation all the stakeholders have to organise a more and more goal-oriented processes. Another positive impact on Bulgaria would be the fact, that it provokes the country to approve a Law for the Danube coast exploitation and systematisation.

The priority areas of the strategy are based on the three “pillars” proposed by the European Commission, namely: *connectivity* (which needs an analysis of the reached degree of connectivity), *environment* and „*unlocking the potential*” of the region’s human resources. The development of those ideas needs in the process of training those pillars to be made more concrete. A possible tool in this regard is the next matrix. (Table no. 3)

Table no. 3: General overview matrix for systematizing actions in correspondence with the pillars of the Danube strategy

Strategic pillars problems resolving	Sub regions of the LDMR	Problems and themes	Projects coverage	Other activities
Connectivity				
environment				
„unlocking the potential”				
<i>Mix of the above pillars</i>				

4. Training the regional oriented entrepreneurs

The approach which regards the entrepreneurs as self made and starting from green field or “just from a scratch”, has to be replaced by a vision how the efforts to be invested in *training regional entrepreneurs* and for discovering, developing not only individuals but as more specialized and multi functional teams. As it was stated above, the Danube strategy could be regarded as a tool for promoting entrepreneurship in European Union’s Trans border regions. The main traditional areas of the entrepreneurial activities and initiatives are the business, the markets and the products. One of the emerging areas is the “horizontal” orientation (regional, territorial) entrepreneurship, which is taking place in and between different autonomous territorial systems. The “horizontal” oriented entrepreneur’s projects will allow the ability of the involved in the projects specialists to work together in the European project space to increase. Such types of entrepreneurs have to be guided and motivated.

The preparing of regional and especially Trans-border entrepreneurs implies new types of academic initiatives. Or in the post modern era a specific types of regional entrepreneurship emerge, namely *collective entrepreneurial initiatives*.

The development of direct contacts, the institutionalisation of the cooperation between structures in Bulgaria and Romania, will increase the local actors’ competence, the reciprocal knowledge of the problems, which the regions confront. It will help some directions of cross border cooperation based on the necessities and the priorities identified by both sides to be determined.

The areas of the territorial entrepreneurship are vast and they include their basic subsystems - business; social; spiritual, ecological administrative cultural etc.

One of the strategic *goals* of the European Union vertical and horizontal development is: integration of Trans-border regions. One of the main ways for achieving the goal is the

development of multi dimensional regional entrepreneurship initiatives development. With such a strategic thinking, many problems, which up till now have been solved separately and in not an effective way, would be approached and resolved as a whole. That put the question in which way and how the universities in the neighbouring territories could be involved?

5. Determining the range of training specialists for regional development process

From the Danube strategy perspective there are needed more concrete competences for regional entrepreneurship and for sustainable regional development. The competences are also considered among the most important strategies of empowering individuals in terms of increasing welfare and security and to acquire the necessary skills.

The academic aim is the students to be trained not only technically in project development, but also how to approach the problems, connected with their *content*. Another problem is the universities to be involved in the process of training creativity, how to “produce” creative ideas and to apply integral thinking providing training products with real content. This is the main reason for finding out how the human resources and especially the future specialists have to be trained in more and more creative ways.

The training has as target groups individuals together with the networks in which they take part. Such networks are: of specialists; of institutions; of entrepreneurs; stakeholders; civil society organizations; of individuals, who will act as integrators and manage the integration processes on different regional levels; business systems; marketing etc.

The main questions of the training activities could be:

How to create awareness regarding the problems of the LD MR and the Danube strategy? And how the trainees to be engaged in marketing activities - popularize it and to provoke, hopefully, foreign investors’ interest in co-financing joint projects, etc. The marketing has to make sure that the Lower Danube Macro Region is attractive for its citizens, businesses and investors. Not the least, these measures will provide for the establishment of the so called “Danube identity”.

What matters the specialists have be trained in, what bachelor and master degree programmes and specific subjects they have to include, where the subjects to be located in the academic curricula; what kind of Trans border entrepreneurial initiatives – for joint usage of renewable and alternative energy resources; study of the markets to be offered etc.

What to be the goals related to the preparation of different regional entrepreneurial types and their profiling; How general awareness about the regions in which they are living and will works or develop, or implement projects; what practical training have to be organized.

How should be done the training of regional entrepreneurs in order to correspond to the regions’ specific features and characteristics.

In the Lower Danube macro region, universities engaged in the Strategy problematic the dyad “Training – Research” itself, have to be better balanced and to pursue the realization of the scenario A, as it is shown in figure no. 6.

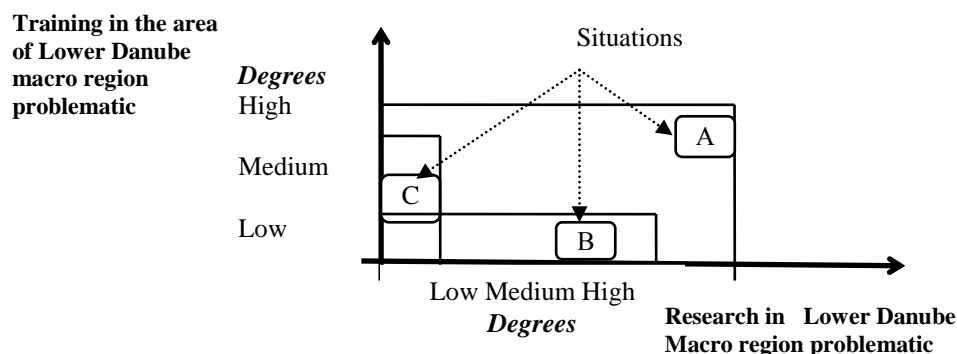


Figure no. 6: Training and Research scenarios

The higher educational institutions in the LDMR territory have to orient their activities towards the Danube River problematic. The institutions itself have to be stimulated by the fact that they are acting in a proximity of the river.

The Universities of the LDMR has to play a major role and to be one of the principal stakeholders of its holistic development. Their collaboration in Lower Danube Macro regions is facing the Lower Danube Macro regional development has to have such issues as:

- generating ideas, concepts for the development of alternative projects (for example using renewable sources of energy);
- offering special courses for creating awareness; building-up and management of Trans border think tanks (strategic projects teams and network);
- Encouraging and motivating original entrepreneurship’s initiatives etc.

The academies have to be involved also in ‘producing’ joint visions about the development of the LDMR and its sub-regions. The leading idea has to be: “Developing of the Danube hyper region as an integrated concept and as an entity”. Or the academies have also to produce a package of activities regarding the training and to answer to the questions, as some of them are systematized in table no. 4.

The Danube strategy is facilitating the development of the adjacent territories and regions by stimulating the thinking by project development and by building-up meridian axes and Trans border meridian corridors (Yankov, 2007). The implementation of the meridian axes and corridor oriented entrepreneurial projects will stimulate the Bulgarian and Romanian specialists and human resources from the border regions to develop business of underlined Trans-border character, to establish joint partnerships and efficient entrepreneurial networks. The implementation of the project developed (if approved) will result in the opening of the regional markets of the both countries which are certain knots of European single market network.

Table no. 4: Integral approach to the training accents

Action concerning the higher education in the area of the LDMR development and Danube strategy	About (what ideas have to be generated)	Using concrete tools (they have to be chosen properly)	Concrete actions concerning the coverage of the Danube strategy pillars
Creating awareness			
Resolving problems through learning by doing			
Entrepreneurial projects elaboration training			
Others			

The entrepreneurial projects if are properly conceptualized, initialized, developed and proposed for financing from different European and National funding programmes, will enable the border regions to benefit from their proximity and advantages of the Danube river waterfront. Thus the resources of either region will be more easily available to the counter parts will be able to avoid the unnecessary transportation costs, finances and other resources.

The training in the project creativity, in discovering problems of the LDMR development and solutions for their resolving is nowadays an issue of utmost importance. Other thing is the ideas to be properly put in documents and projects, to get skilled to manage their realisation.

Conclusions

The question which universities have to participate directly in the LDMR development could be answered in that way: those which have as a mission component the problematic of the LDMR development; which are working in the proximity territory or are situated in localities on the river itself. They have to transfer ideas, concepts, and constructs from the science to practice; and from practical necessity (after research) to the universities for proposing solutions.

The joined efforts are needed for real territorial systems development. In this regard it is possible a **CONCEPT FOR CREATING AN INTER-ACADEMIC HUB** and respectively a **NETWORK FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH IN THE AREA OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOWER DANUBE MACRO REGION** to be structured. Its objectives could refer to joint training of specialists for cross-border cooperation in the Lower Danube Region. The subjects of the activities will be the development of Master degree programme for joint training of specialists in the macro region. In this regard some of the themes could be connected with the training in **ECONOMICS and MARKETS OF THE LOWER DANUBE MACRO REGION**.

Another necessity is a group (forum) to be created and afterwards supported which to discuss the problems of the LDMR development. And its agenda could include also exchange of views for joint development of the Lower Danube macro region. The forum would play also a mediating role among the higher education institutions and launch

initiatives and models for bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation in the region of Lower Danube.

Final remarks

The Academy of Economic Studies of Bucharest and D. Tsenov Academy of Economics of Svishtov undertook an assessment of the needs of education and training in the Danube bordering regions of Romania and Bulgaria, as part of a more comprehensive exercise aiming at identifying the most suitable areas of cooperation between the two universities.

The Romanian contribution stressed that the capacity gap of Romanian sub-national communities with respect to local development is putting these communities at risk of jeopardising the opportunities that the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region provides. This capacity gap is partly explained by the failure of Romanian Universities to provide high quality education and training in local development. The Bulgarian contribution discusses more in detail the issues related to the functionality of the European macro-regional context and the interaction between the supra-national and sub-national levels, putting accent on the need to provide students with an understanding of European and macro-regional policies. Finally, both contributions, which have taken complementary approaches, arrive at the same result: there is much to do at university level in both countries in order to meet the needs for knowledge and skills in local and regional development in their countries, with crucial implication for both overcoming structural deficiencies at sub-national levels and boosting European integration cohesion and competitiveness.

As regards the education and training content, both contributions dissociates from the current training focussing on instrumental skills (how to write a project proposal, how to access EU funds etc.), in favour of a more fundamental and holistic understanding of local development (Romanian) contribution, creative thinking and entrepreneurial attitudes (Bulgarian contribution).

Finally, authors agree that cross-border cooperation between universities in delivering education and training in local development is necessary and profitable; moreover they all support the initiation of a university network (or university hub) facilitating the cooperation between a larger number of universities in developing knowledge (research), knowledge exchange and dissemination.

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