

FORMS OF CROSS-BORDER TOURIST CO-OPERATION IN THE BIHOR–HAJDÚ-BIHAR EUROREGION.

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Introduction

In this article I've proposed to present and to analyze tourist project realized with the help of the PHARE CBC program and the Cross-border Co-operation program between Hungary-Romania 2007-2013 in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion, named from now on HURO. This program continues the cross-border co-operation programs already implemented in the region in the past (Interreg IIIA in Hungary and Phare CBC in Romania), being implemented in the framework of a common institutional structure, by using common funds and in the same time developing results and experiences that were gained previously.

These projects received a relatively small amount of financing (generally between 50.000 and 500.000 Euro), comparing to the projects implemented through Regional Operational Programs, through which more considerable funds are accessed. Although these projects are welcomed and in many cases the results were very promising, however the outputs were not always the ones expected or planned. Within the framework of this article we present shortly and in a synthesized way each project that was started in the domain of tourism, highlighting the benefits and the shortcomings of them.

Methodology of work

The used methodology for realizing this article is based first of all on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the cross-border tourist projects developed in the past 6 years in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion, analyzing the specific database through the comparative analysis and inventory method. We obtained information's about the objectives, realization and financial resources for the implementation of the project from the official website of the Cross-border Co-operation program between Hungary-Romania 2007-2013 (www.huro-cbc.eu), from the websites of the projects and from online articles released by local and/or national press.

Cross-border tourist projects in the Bihor-Hajdú Bihar Euroregion within the framework of the PHARE CBC program

The cross-border cooperation on the Romanian-Hungarian border, received pre-accession PHARE CBC funds even before 1998, when the border between Romania and Hungary became eligible for this program. In this way, in the period between 1996-2003 – according to the website of the regional office for cross-border co-operation of the Romanian and Hungarian border Oradea -, (www.breacoradea.ro) for cross-border projects the amount of 28 million Euro were granted for the Romanian side and 34 million Euro for the Hungarian side. According to the website www.huro-cbc.eu, in the period between 2007-2013 a total amount of 248 million Euro are available (four times more than in the period of pre-accession) for stimulation of cross-border cooperation. This amount is made up of EU contribution through the European Regional Development Fund and the contribution of the two member states.

The PHARE CBC 2004-2006 program from Romania was implemented together with a secondary program called INTERREG IIIA from Hungary and has one component for each of the three years. The program was implemented through the scheme of grants, financing being

granted after the selection of project proposals received as an answer to the public announcement of the open auction.

In this way, in this period, four cross-border tourist projects were implemented. The biggest project from the financing point of view was entitled “*Romanian-Hungarian Corridor for preserving biodiversity*” (PHARE CBC RO 2003/005 702-01). The project had the purpose of creating a “green corridor” for preservation of biodiversity, which includes the protected areas on both sides of the border. The beneficiary of the project was Direcția Silvică Oradea, and the main partner was the Criș-Mureș National Park Administration from Hungary. The implementation period of the project started from December 2003 and lasted until November 2007.

On one hand, equipment for monitoring biodiversity were purchased through this project, but the most important thing was the realization of the infrastructure regarding the management of the protected areas, namely the construction of the administrative headquarters of the Apuseni Natural Park from Sudrugu and three visitor’s center from which one is located in Bihor County and namely Padiș Plain (according to the description of the project on the website of Apuseni Natural Park - www.parcapuseni.ro).

This project was by far the greatest from financing point of view, but also the results were considerable (construction of 4 properties equipped and furnished, purchasing of some equipments, etc.) Through this project the ground for Apuseni Natural Park was established.

Table 1. Cross-border tourist projects implemented between the period of 2007-2012 in Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion

Nr.	Title of the project	Type of program	Total value of the project (EURO)	Finalization date
1.	Romanian-Hungarian Corridor for preserving biodiversity	PHARE CBC	2.600.000	11. 2007
2.	Unity and diversity in the tourism of Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion	PHARE CBC	74.200	12.2007
3.	Traditional craftsmanship’s – opportunity for developing a durable Bihor – Hajdu Bihar Euroregion. Cultural routes in Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar Counties	PHARE CBC	45.299	08. 2009
4.	Development and promotion integrated by common thematic tourist packages in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion	PHARE CBC	102.341	15.11. 2009
5.	Development and promotion of rural tourism and ecotourism in the North-East plain and in the Apuseni Mountains	HU-RO	141.071	25. 11. 2010
6.	„Adventure, rest, fun” – promotion of tourist offers in Hajdú-Bihar and Bihor Counties	HU-RO	510.795	30. 04. 2011
7.	Innovative realization of some common tourist packages in order to develop tourism in Hajdú-Bihar and Bihor Counties	HU-RO	96.510	31. 05. 2011
8.	Common development and integrated promotion of thematic rural tourism in Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Counties.	HU-RO	174.866	30.06. 2012.
9.	Opportunities for capitalization of the cultural patrimony through cross-border co-operation in order to develop tourism and business environment	HU-RO	505.920	06.05. 2012.
10.	Business incubator for cross-border tourist development	HU-RO	552.633	31. 12. 2012.
	TOTAL		4.803.635	

In the year of 2007, the Chambers of Commerce and Industry from Bihor County as the beneficiary, having partnership with the Development Agency from Hajdú-Bihar County and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Hajdú-Bihar, they implemented the project entitled “*Unity and diversity in the tourism of Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion*”, (RO2004/016-940.01.01-68-2.2, in the framework of Phare CBC program Romania and Hungary, Phare CBC 2004/ Interreg IIIA, financed by the European Union through the Ministry of European Integration as the Contracting Authority).

The general objective of the project foreseen the relationship intensification of regional cross-border co-operation between Romania and Hungary, among the two border counties and among the communities and economic actors in this area; superior capitalization of the tourist potential on a local and regional level, promotion of business co-operation; creation of a diversified tourism based on local resources that can satisfy the needs of more tourists and can generate a favorable environment for establishing a new group of cross-border businesses;

This project was the first that formed as purpose the integrated promotion of Bihor-Hajdú Bihar Euroregion as a European tourist destination based on realizing 6 tourist packages and a tourist brand. Subsequently another three projects were realized that had similar objectives and purposes.

The result consisted in the realization of 1500 brochures, which were initially planned to appear in 6 languages, but at the end only two languages were realized: in Romanian and Hungarian. On the other hand, however, besides the brochures, 1000 multimedia CD’s were realized containing information’s about Euroregion tourist destination and two tourist websites that already appeared in six languages. Through this project 6 tourist packages were proposed with different circuits and destinations.

This was the first project of this type, which proved to be a good initiative, because specialists recognized the fact that these two counties can be complementary destinations and not competitors. We identified however also some shortcomings about the translation of the materials. Even though those two websites (www.turismbihor.info and www.tourismbihor.info) are active even today, they were not updated for about 4 years.

The project entitled “*Traditional craftsmanship’s – opportunity for developing a durable Bihor – Hajdu Bihar Euroregion*” was implemented between the period of August 2008 and August 2009 and it was financed by the Ministry of European Integration through the Romania – Hungary Phare CBC 2006 Program (Phare CBC RO 2006/018-446.01.01.)

The project was applied by the “Anytime Ready Association”(Asociația Gata Oricând) in partnership with the Center for Protected Areas and Durable Development – Bihor (CAPDD Bihor), Tourist Association of Kis-Bihar (Kis-Bihari Idegenforgalmi és Turisztikai Egyesület); County Department for Culture, Cults and National Cultural Patrimony of Bihor County. The project proposed to create premises for cross-border initiatives for socio-economic development of the Bihor – Hajdu-Bihar Euroregion, based on using the cultural, immaterial patrimony of the two counties, through promotion and capitalization of traditional craftsmanship’s that can be found here.

According to the information on the website of the Center for Protected Areas and Durable Development (www.capdd-bihor.org), the main *activities and results* of the project were the followings:

- Realization of a database of all popular craftsmen in the Bihor – Hajdu-Bihar Euroregion.
- Organization of a type of event called “*School of craftsmanship*” and one called “*Camp for popular creation*”
- Opening of a promotion center craftsmanship in Oradea

- Organization of a seminar on the subject of capitalization and preservation of traditional craftsmanship in the Bihor-Hajdu-Bihar Euroregion where popular craftsmen participated from the two counties and representatives of local APL's
- Realization of a presentation brochure about the popular craftsmen in the two counties
- Realization of a common brand to promote traditional products
- Realization of 2 thematic routes and including traditional craftsmanship workshops as tourist attractions.

The long term results of this project were pretty low, however the truth is that it was a project with a budget that did not reach 50.000 Euro.

The fourth cross-border tourist project, realized from PHARE CBC funds was entitled "*Development and promotion integrated by common thematic tourist packages in the Bihor-Hajdu-Bihar Euroregion*" (RO 2006/018-446.01.01.01.15, Financed by Phare CBC 2006/INTERREG IIIA Program), realized by the Faculty of Economic Sciences from the University of Oradea in partnership with the Bihor County Council, Auto-government of Hajdú-Bihar County, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bihor County, General Association of Economists from Romania – Bihor branch and Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion Foundation (as associate). The ongoing period for this project was between 15.08.2008 and 15.11.2009.

This project – similar with the one realized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bihor County – had the general objective to support initiatives of co-operation in the domain of tourism with the purpose of growing the competitiveness of actors in the domain of tourism, respectively the growing the competitiveness of actors in the domain of tourism in the domain of developing and promoting thematic tourist packages within the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion.

Specific objectives of the projects were the facilitation of the reciprocal knowledge and favoring the Hungarian-Romanian exchange of experiences in order to created an integrated network of development and tourist promotion in the Euroregion, supplying instructions in order to improve the tourist activity and the development of common, thematic tourist packages, giving assistance and consultancy for the interested actor in tourism from the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar, support of the common promotion of thematic tourist packages (according to the website of the faculty - www.steconomieuoradea.ro).

Within the framework of this project 6 tourist packages were proposed (balneary tourism, landscape tourism, recreational, traditional and habits tourism, cultural tourism and business tourism), each of them having more routes and destinations. The project was more complex then the one implemented by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bihor County because besides the created packages a catalogue was prepared of all the actors participating in tourism in the two counties, offering in the same time the possibility of cross-border cooperation among them.

The first tourist project realized within the framework of Cross-border Co-operation Program Hungary and Romania 2007-2013 (HURO/0801/160) was entitled: „*Development and promotion of rural tourism and ecotourism in the North-East plain and in the Apuseni Mountains*” and implemented by The Association of Environment Friendly Tourism from Debrecen (Debreceni Természetbarát Turisztikai Egyesület) in partnership with InfoTour Association from Carei and the Center for Areas and Durable Development from Bihor County.

The main purpose of the project was to analyze the sources of development of tourism in the plain area of the two participating countries (three counties) and the Apuseni Mountains area. The project emphasized some approaches that are necessary to ensure the development of the tourism in the area. In this way studies were realized, which analyzed the tourist potential of the area and the way in which this is capitalized. In the final period of the project, more work was put in the promotion of the tourist products towards the tourist: two movies/short films were realized, one about the values of nature in the region and one about the possibilities of rural tourism and ecotourism. The followings were also realized: another 10 short movies about the tourist

attractions, a webpage (www.thematic-routes.eu) where more information can be found about the opening of the tourist attractions, database of local tourism services, films, studies, useful information's. Also 3000 multimedia DVS's were realized and in addition tri-lingual informational panels were placed on the created tourist routes (according to the website www.thematic-routes.eu).

Within the framework of some consultancy of the interested factors, 10 thematic tourist routes were identified: route of guesthouses, route of craftsmanship's, route of vine, route of landscape values, route of health, route of water, route of famous people, route of museums and traditional houses, route of traditional products and route of caves and karst formations.

It is the first project of this type, which includes 3 counties, respectively 10 routes. It contains some very original ideas, even though a small dose of subjectivity is denoted. Unfortunately the project did not benefit from a generous financing so this way it could not have been advertised properly.

The cross-border project entitled: *"Adventure, rest, fun - promotion of tourist offers in Hajdú-Bihar and Bihor Counties"* reunited as partners the Hajdú-Bihar County Council, Megyegazda Nonprofit Kft. (Ltd.), together with the Oradea City Hall and Bihor County Council.

The purpose of the project was to develop tourism in Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar County, not just in local and national plan, but in international plan as well through a common offer. To reach this purpose, the tourist areas of the two counties were taken into inventory, and after organizing them, tourist packages were released with main attractions from this region. In parallel, to promote tourism on the level of the two counties, the project partners have launched an advertising campaign that contained 7 tourist packages within the framework of the project, on themes like cultural patrimony and monuments, popular art, national parks, gastronomy, rural tourism and business tourism, calendar for county holidays in 2011 or therapeutic tourism and wellness. For each theme an informative brochure was printed in 4 languages, the purpose of the tourist packages were to increase the number of tourists registered in the housing units from the cross-border region and to increase the incomes resulting from tourism. In the framework of the project 45.000 informative booklets were printed. To complete the tourist information, the partners have realized a website to promote the offers of the two counties (www.bihar-bihor.eu), which is available in 7 languages.

This project answers the best to the requests of the actual advertising, being the most complex, diversified and by far the most advertised tourist project among all of the projects analyzed in this study. Of course, this fact was backed up by a budget over half of million Euros.

This contains elements, which covers all types of tourism that can be practiced in this area. Regarding the viability of these packages, it is still will be seen which one of them will consecrate.

Another cross-border tourist project was implemented by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Hajdú-Bihar County in partnership with Association for Business Promotion in Romania and the Federation of Employers of Bihor County. This project ran under the name of: *"Innovative realization of some common tourist packages in order to develop tourism in Hajdú-Bihar and Bihor Counties"*

The general purpose of the project was to consolidate economic competition in the region with the development of the tourism, and also promoting objectives, destinations and tourist manifestations from the two counties as well as the realization of a more active propaganda.

Another purpose is to encourage co-operation among companies and organization with tourist profiles on both sides of the border. Local actors in the tourism sector must recognize the fact that the only way they can stay competitive is if they realize strategically thought developments together with other actors (companies, organizations) in this way overcoming on competition.

Within the framework 6 big packages were created, each having more "sensational" tourist packages. Almost all of the packages contain a destination on both sides of the border or involves

the fact that tourists who arrived from outside the area to a balneary resort can take a trip of a day to the neighbor county, which is based on the complementarity of the tourist objectives.

Most of the packages contain a program for a day, but in some cases also circuits are proposed, which can be realized in more days.

This was the fourth type of project that realized tourist packages in the Euroregion. In this time, however, the implementation of an innovative element was tried, especially in the names of the packages full of fantasy, which sometime are not only fantasist but even a little futuristic. With all these the project managed to bring some new elements and ideas to the tourist packages as well as the other projects offered the opportunity to create a business relationship among those actors who are implicated in tourist activities on both sides of the border.

The Department of Geography and Territorial Arrangement within the Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport of Oradea University, is implementing during the year 2011 and 2012, as the Leader, a project entitled: *“Common development and integrated promotion of thematic rural tourism in Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Counties.”* (HURO /0901/017/2.1.3). The project has a total length of 18 months and the Hungarian partner is the Department of Social Geography, Development and Regional Planning of the University from Debrecen.

The general purpose of the project is the sustainable development of the cross-border tourism in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion, through developing new, thematic product that are specific for the rural tourism, to promote these products and their development with the help of tourism in the border side rural economy of the area. The project addresses to all interested parties in developing thematic tourist products – investors, owners of pensions, hotels, motels, restaurants, farms, persons from rural environment who wish to begin a business in the domain of tourism, tourism agencies in whose offer appears the thematic tourist products, tour operators, non-governmental organizations, etc.

Because this project is not yet finished it is hard to predict its success or failure, but considering the fact that the project will be developed by a staff formed by professionals (university professors) it is almost certain that the result will be no other than satisfactory.

Another ongoing cross-border tourist project is entitled: *“Opportunities for capitalization of the cultural patrimony through cross-border co-operation in order to develop tourism and business environment”* (HURO/0901/192/2.1.3.) This project was realized by the City Hall of Salonta together with the City Hall of Debrecen, respectively the Arany János Cultural Association from Salonta and it was implemented between the period of 06.12.2010 and 06.05.2012. Even though Salonta is not in the area of study, I included this analysis in this project because it is connected to the cross-border tourism from the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion.

The general objective of the project is to develop tourism with the purpose of enforcing the socio-economic cohesion within the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion.

Specific objectives of the project are: durable development of existing cultural-historical values, prospecting common tourist development opportunities among Salonta and Debrecen through common cultural-tourist activities, respectively extension and consolidation of cross-border relations through the realization of a tourist partnership.

Within the framework of the project the following activities were realized: project management, communication, advertising materials were printed and edited, common participation at tourist fairs, study-tour to Brussels, respectively tourist development strategy was developed for the two cities (Salonta and Debrecen) for the period of 2011-2016. This project is also not finished yet, but because of the high volume of financing (total budget over 500.000 Euro) it is expected to give spectacular results in the same measure.

The project called *“Business incubator for cross-border tourist development”* was submitted within the framework of Priority axe no. 2 - „Enforcement of social and economical cohesion in the border region” by the city hall of Vadu Crișului Community, in partnership with the city hall of Hajdúszoboszló city, respectively the Hotel Owners Association from Hajdúszoboszló. The

general objective of this priority axe is to intensify economic competition in the area through development in the business environment and improving the quality of human resources.

The service providers from Hajdúszoboszló offer also today quality tourist services, but they wish to be more prepared for welcoming the guests from Romania and also they wish to diversify their offers of programs and mountain trips, while Vadu Crisului has a generous offer from this point of view. Within the framework of the project in Vadu Crisului a business incubator will be established, which will be built on the site of the old city hall, and in Hajdúszoboszló city tourist information center will be built, at the main entrance of the spa. At the finalization of the program, in both localities a tourism agency will be opened that will promote balneary tourism and mountain tourism together, making both locations more attractive for tourists. The business incubator will offer the headquarters for 11 companies with the condition that they will create jobs in the community of in the region.

Conclusions

Even though through these projects in the last 6 years more than 5 million Euros were accessed for tourism development for the Euroregion, this did not lead to a substantial improvement of the tourist flow. Normally, measurable results of a project are direct proportional with the volume of financing. This way we cannot expect that a project of 50.000-100.000 Euros to bring major change in the tourist circulation of the region. For notable results, massive investments are required first of all in the general infrastructure and the one specific for tourism, especially in Bihor County, because without adequate access paths or diversified and quality housing units it is very hard to generate more requests than the existing ones. For this, more projects would be necessary that are financed within the framework of Regional Operational Program through which major investments can be made that would have major impact on this domain.

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