

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS IN ROMANIA - REPUBLIC OF SERBIA IPA CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME

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This research paper is based on the analysis of the sustainability aspects in cross-border cooperation programmes. The importance of this research topic consists in presenting if the implementation of the activities of the projects submitted under cross-border cooperation programmes is based on the sustainability aspects. In this matter, the article will present theoretical aspects of sustainable development, territorial cohesion and cross-border development and focuses on practical questions related to sustainability aspects in the case of the Romania – Republic of Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme. One of the main challenges of the cross-border area is also environmental challenges. Sustainable development represents the fundamental objective of the European Union and refers to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. Countries cannot develop without existing cooperation between them, therefore EU policy is based on economic, social and territorial cohesion. Methodologically, the research is based on identifying of appropriate theoretical concepts corresponding to the chosen theme, collecting and processing data. The paper concludes with answers to key questions related to the integration of sustainable development aspects in cross-border cooperation programmes and projects. The results of the research have implications that could contribute to the current problem of absorption rate of EU funds, offering information about IPA cross-border cooperation programmes and increasing the capacity of potential applicants to elaborate and implement projects for obtaining and using financial EU funds. The added value of the paper results from the fact that EU financing is a topical issue of great interest to European and national level. To the best of our knowledge, this topic has not yet been researched within the national literature. The author contributed by performing methodology of qualitative research, a study case regarding the Romania-Republic of Serbia IPA CBC Programme, which can be very useful for a better understanding of the European Union financial allocations through cross-border cooperation programmes.

Keywords: sustainable development, cross-border cooperation, IPA, territorial cohesion, environmental impact

JEL Classification: F 15, H 77, O 38, R 58

Introduction

Borders are important for Romania's development because of its geographical position and the length of its internal and external borders in the new architecture of the EU. The Romania-Republic of Serbia border is 546,4 km long, partially land (256,8 km) with the River Danube forming a natural frontier for approximately 289.6 km. The eligible border regions within the Romania-Republic of Serbia IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme (Map 1) cover an area of 39,351 Km², of which 22,149 Km² is in Romania and 17,202 Km² is in Republic of Serbia. Thus 56% of the eligible border area is in Romania and 44% is in Republic of Serbia. The priorities agreed by EU Member States, incorporated in all policies of the European Communities are equal opportunities, environmental protection, energy efficiency, information society known as horizontal themes. They refer to sustainable development, environmental protection and

improvement, promoting equal opportunity and non-discrimination, promotion of information society and IT solutions and increasing energy efficiency. These themes must be respected by applicants for developing and implementing their projects.



Map1. Romania-Republic of Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme. Self processing

European territorial cooperation, as well as cross-border cooperation, is important, both economically and politically. The importance of cross-border cooperation is demonstrated through the inclusion of the CBC issue in the National Development Plan 2007-2013. One of the priorities in the achievement of the overall objective of the National Development Plan is to reduce the development disparities between Romania and EU Member States average. This goal was predicted to be accomplished by implementing projects that meet the needs and opportunities of each region and area.

The Romania-Republic of Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme is the basis for this research and sustainability analysis. The Programme is financed by the EU under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and co-financed by the partner states in the programme, Romania and Republic of Serbia. The objectives of the programme are to increase the overall competitiveness of the economy and to improve the quality of life for the communities in order to achieve a sustainable socio-economic development in the border area. The horizontal themes are found in each programme implemented by EU Member States or cross-border cooperation programmes between candidates and potential candidate's countries and must be respected by applicants for developing and implementing their projects submitted under these programmes. Therefore, the environment represents an important issue and not only in cross-border cooperation programmes. At project level, the environmental issue appears in the phase of project' evaluation, the potential applicants must provide information on how and if the activities that they propose to carry out the project have or not impact on the environment. They also must specify whether the impact is positive or negative.

The objective of the paper is to analyse sustainability aspects in cross-border cooperation programmes. The paper presents theoretical aspects of sustainable development, territorial cohesion and cross-border development. The paper focuses on practical questions related to sustainability aspects in the case of Romania-Republic of Serbia IPA CBC Programme.

Initial results after the first call for projects proposals provide the first information about the implementation of the Programme.

Aspects of Sustainable development, Territorial Cohesion and Cross-border development

Sustainable development is a fundamental objective of the European Union since 1997 and it was defined in The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development as

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland 1987: 54). Sustainable development is the achievement of a higher quality of life for present and future generations.

Harlem Brundtland discussed in the famous report presented in 1987 about the fact that no country can develop in isolation from others and emphasised that the pursuit of sustainable development requires a new orientation in international relations.

The most important EU policy is the Cohesion Policy which represents the main measure to ensure a balanced and sustainable growth in Europe by promoting harmonious development and reducing the regional disparities. Conceptually, European Cohesion policy is based on three objectives: convergence, regional competitiveness and employment and territorial cooperation among the European countries. These are the main factors of the regional economic development. These objectives, between 2007 and 2013, aims to support cross-border cooperation through joint and regional actions, in order to increase the overall competitiveness of the regional economy and to improve the standard of living for the populated areas, to support transnational cooperation through actions leading to regional development as well as interregional cooperation and exchange of experience.

Promoting European territorial cooperation is also one of the Romania's priorities provided in the National Development Plan 2007-2013. This priority must be achieved through joint actions in cross-border cooperation field. Cohesion policy means economic, social and territorial cohesion and sustainable development refers to economic, social and environmental development.

Europe 2020 Strategy is based on three priorities: smart growth (economy based on knowledge and innovation), sustainable growth (economy more efficient, greener and more competitive) and inclusive growth (economic, social and territorial cohesion). At national level, Member States will need to implement joint programming and increase cross-border cooperation.

We can conclude that these concepts are intersecting with each other and all lead to socio-economic development reducing the disparities between different countries and regions.

Cross-border Cooperation Programmes between Romania and Republic of Serbia

In 2003 was first initiated the cooperation between Romania and Serbia & Montenegro through the External Border Initiative Programme for Romania. The programme was meant to maintain and develop the traditional economic and cultural relationships between Romania and these countries. This was the basis for the introduction of the new instrument (IPA). The purpose of the programme was to increase the level of cross-border cooperation, this is why a special attention was given to the "people-to-people" actions type. For the 2004-2006 through the Neighbourhood Programme, the financial allocation for the Romania – Serbia & Montenegro was 16 million euro (Phare) out of which 1,8 million euro for the people-to-people actions and 4,20 million euro (CARDS) of which 1.2 million euro was allocated to the support of people-to-people actions. The programme aimed to create joint frameworks for promoting neighbourhood cooperation in the following areas: business support cooperation, environmental protection, local public services cooperation, small scale infrastructure improvements, and local tourism development.

The development of joint people-to-people actions has represented an important first step for many institutions in the border area, because it has raised the interest in joint activities and in undertaking planning and implementation of activities in collaboration with partners from the other side of the border. This stimulated the cross-border partnership, the cross-border networking and built relationships that are the basis for more sustainable cross-border initiatives in the future.

Romania-Republic of Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme

The Romania – Republic of Serbia IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme resulted due to the cooperation between the Romanian and Serbian national, regional and local authorities, supported by the European Commission Delegation to Romania, the European Agency for Reconstruction in Belgrade, the Serbian Ministry of Finance, and the Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism. Given the fact that horizontal themes must reflect in each programme financed by EU funds, CBC programmes have also added horizontal themes including sustainable development and environmental protection which must be respected during the implementation period. In the description of the Romania-Republic of Serbia IPA CBC Programme it is stated as specific objectives increasing the overall competitiveness of the economy in the border area and improvement of the quality of life for the communities of the eligible area. Starting from the specific objectives of the Programme, there are four priority axes as a basis for intervention in order to tackle common challenges facing both regions from Romania, as well as from Republic of Serbia (Diagram 1).

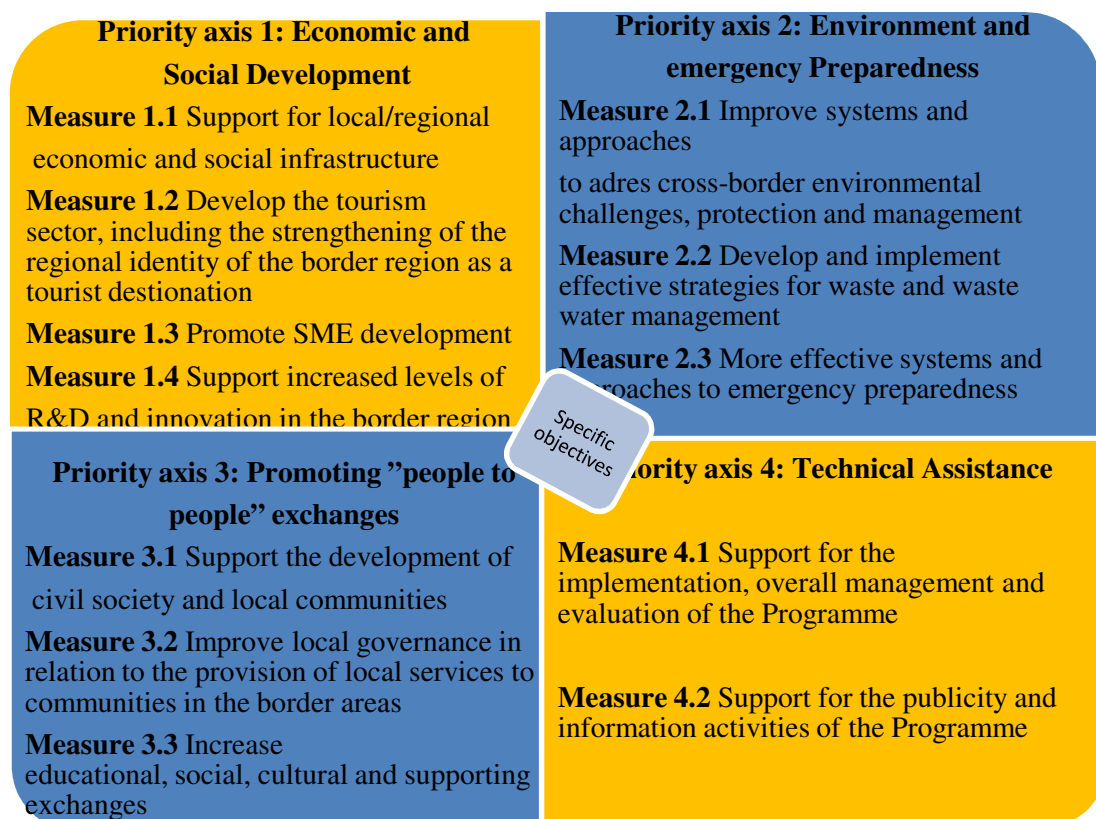


Diagram1. Priority axes Romania-Republic of Serbia IPA CBC Programme. Self processing

From the sustainability analysis, the axes and measures of the Programme represent an integral sustainable development approach. On project level, in elaboration phase, the potential applicant must focus on one measure for preparing the project proposal. It is a requirement to respect the horizontal themes by each project applicant when deciding the activities of the project as well as in the implementation phase of the project submitted and approved. At the end of the implementation period the beneficiaries have to complete a questionnaire in which they must stipulate if the project had environmental impact. Regarding the biodiversity, it must be specified if the project had activities with effect on the Nature 2000 sites and if they did, then they have to mention if the effect was positive or negative and the area which might be affected. With regard

at the environmental emergency and air, the beneficiaries have to specify if the project addresses environmental emergencies or if the project contains activities aimed with effect on the air quality and if the effect was positive or negative. The impact on environment is measured also through the activities that affect cultural heritage, historical heritage and activities having a positive impact on landscape, natural and national parks, protected natural areas and thermal springs. In this case the beneficiaries have to specify whether the projects had positive or negative effect. It must be stipulated also if the projects includes activities that have resulted in a shift from road to water transport, activities aimed at developing river transport infrastructure, activities aimed at rehabilitation the river banks or at reducing potential flood areas and other flood prevention activities. The sustainable development and environmental protection is preconditioned by the programme, so if these aspects are respected during the implementation period, then the cross-border cooperation programmes will be sustainable as well.

The Romania-Republic of Serbia IPA CBC Programme is being implemented through calls for proposals. The projects submitted under the first call for proposal ends in 2012. The number of signed projects was 46 and the total value of all selected and contracted projects is 19 million euro. On 25 of March 2011 was launched the second call for proposals to be financed and the deadline for the submission of applications was 27 of June 2011 and the total funds available for this call were 15,3 million Euros.

After the evaluation period, a number of 45 projects were approved. The projects are based on the partnerships formed by eligible institution from Romania and Republic of Serbia. In general, the project activities have to reflect the objectives, the priorities and the horizontal themes in the application form. In the first call for proposals which is still in implementation phase, from 46 projects approved 6 projects are under priority axis 2 Environment and Emergency Preparedness and in the second call for proposals, from 45 projects approved 5 projects are environmental projects.

Conclusion

Since the projects under the first call for proposals are still in the implementation phase and the projects under the second call for proposals are in contracting phase, ex-post conclusions on the success and the real implementation of activities based on the sustainability aspects of the projects or programme cannot be completely presented yet. However, considering the fact that some of the projects under the first call for proposals completed during this period, some answers to key questions related to the integration of the sustainable development aspects in IPA cross-border cooperation programmes might be presented:

What is the structural impact of the projects?

Based on the programme indicators, one of these indicators is to increase the cooperation between public authorities, municipalities and the target for 2015 is 197 projects between public authorities in joint development, joint implementation and joint financing. For 2015 is estimated a number of 1200 participants benefiting from the joint public cross-border events organized within the projects. The Romania-Republic of Serbia IPA CBC Programme brings together organizations from various regions from the eligible area of the programme, active in various sectors. Cross-border cooperation between authorities from different countries for joint implementing the projects submitted implies changes in some of the components of the organizational structure of the institutions such as administrative procedures, transparency and partnership principles. The requirement to find partners abroad and work together is one of the greatest achievements of EU findings. In many occasions the partnerships do last longer than the period of the projects and this is a proof of structural impact and sustainable development.

The activities of the projects have environmental impact?

Of the 46 projects under the first call for proposals, 3 projects are focused on environmental emergencies (whether is alarm systems or intervention, or monitoring and combating the negative environmental effects), 6 projects are focused on improving air and water (monitoring and combating plants with negative effects on air quality, combating pollution of rivers in the eligible area, 10 projects addresses the cultural heritage (either promotes or rehabilitate archaeological sites or cultural objectives), 2 projects positively affect the landscape (cleaning and setting up sites without interfering with the protected areas), 1 project improves the transport infrastructure, 6 projects promote tourism attractions and 2 projects addresses on flood prevention. Currently there are no data on greenhouse emission, the projects that may have impact on them are still in implementation.

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