

## CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IMPACT ON REGIONAL TOURISM. THE CASE OF BIHOR COUNTY

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**Abstract:** *The present paper aims to investigate the cross-border cooperation impact on regional tourism based on the Bihor County case study. The first part of the paper analyses the literature regarding cross-border cooperation impact on regional tourism. In the second part, the paper provides a synthetic analysis of the Bihor County tourism in the context of North-West Region of Romania. Based on national territorial statistics, regional and local development strategies for 2014-2020, Bihor County Department of Statistics, Bihor Trade Office and Bihor Council data, other available dataset for tourism sector, the analysis shows that Bihor County has the highest tourism potential at regional level and the most diversified, covering large areas of the county. Also, Bihor County tourism is above the regional average at almost all tourism indicators. The third part of the paper documents about cross-border cooperation impact on Bihor county tourism. The location of Bihor County on the border with Hungary and the opportunity to benefit of funding from EU through Cross-border Cooperation Programmes are competitive advantages for Bihor County at regional level. Based on Oradea Regional Office for Borders Cooperation (BRECO) data, the paper presents the positive effects of cross-border cooperation on Bihor County tourism due to the 10 tourism projects implemented under the PHARE CBC Programme 2004-2006 and HU-RO CBC Programme 2007-2013 in Bihor-Hajdu-Bihar Euroregion and their impact on regional tourism.*

**Keywords:** *regional tourism; regional development; cross-border cooperation; North West Region of Romania; Bihor County.*

**JEL classification:** O18.

### Introduction

Euro-regional development is an important component of the regional development process of the European Union (EU), supported by the Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes. The diversity of areas of cooperation (tourism, transport, environment, SMEs, etc.) presented in the Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes provide Euro-regions the chance to implement development projects aimed at common objectives. Romania's involvement in cross-border cooperation is highlighted by the existence of 12 Euro-regions established in our country. In border regions, which represent 20% of European territory, cross-border tourism projects have a real impact on the growth of local economies as Committee of the Regions shows (CR, 2016:2). Development of tourism projects through PHARE CBC and HU-RO Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes at Euro-regional level reflects the importance given to tourism, which is considered the engine for the development of border/cross-border regions.

Cross-border cooperation usually starts with individual initiatives, even if the objective is for the long-term. The framework and the current forms of cross-border cooperation (harmonious cooperation between the communities and authorities located on each side of the national boundaries) is based on the idea that if two or more border regions merge together, they will be able to solve issues they are faced with, with greater ease than if approaching such issues individually. Even if border regions are deeply rooted locally, the development of cross-border regions is a lengthy and unstable process as it is subject to national wills. Thus, cross-border regions constitute the main catalysts in terms of European integration. The European edifice needs such cross-border regions so as to demonstrate the authenticity and reliability of a united Europe.

### **1. Literature review – Cross-border cooperation impact on regional tourism**

Tourism is and continues to be an important area of the economic development policy in many regions of the world (Sharples and Telfer 2002:35 cited by Borma, 2014:34). World Tourism Organization (WTO) claimed in Manila Declaration that: *“global tourism can contribute to establishing a new global economic order that will help eliminate the growing economic gap between developed and developing countries and ensure economic acceleration and constant social development, as well as progress, especially in the developing countries”* (WTO, 1980:1 cited by Borma, 2014:34).

Countries worldwide turn to tourism as a strategy for development, therefore being in a fierce competition for revenues from international tourism, which are projected at a total of USD 2 trillion, up to 2020 (WTO, 1998a) and international tourist arrivals are estimated at 1.6 billion (OMT, 2011:11).

According to UNWTO (2014, 2015 and 2016), Europe is the most visited region in the world. In 2014, international tourist arrivals in Europe were up 15 million (+3%), to reach a total of 582 million (UNWTO 2015:7). Tourism receipts grew by 4% in real terms, reaching 509 billion US\$ (383 billion euro) (UNWTO 2015:7). These are „robust results” for „the world’s most visited region”, which accounts for 51% of all international arrivals and 41% of receipts and comprises many of the world’s largest and most mature destinations (UNWTO, 2015:7). In 2015, Travel & Tourism sector generated US \$7.2 trillion (9.8% of global GDP) and supported 284 million jobs, equivalent to 1 in 11 jobs in the global economy (WTTC, 2016:3). Travel & Tourism continued to show its resilience in 2016, contributing direct to GDP growth of 3.1% and supporting 6 million net additional jobs in the sector, generated 7.6 trillion US\$ (10.2% of global GDP) and 292 million jobs in 2016, equivalent to 1 in 10 jobs in the global economy and *„the tourism sector will continue to grow its economic contribution, providing the rationale for the further protection of nature, habitats, and biodiversity”* (WTTC, 2017:3).

Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) is a key element of the EU regional development policy. According to European Commission (EC), **European Cross-border cooperation** aims to tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purpose of the overall harmonious development of the Union (EC, 2017a).

Tourism is a principal factor giving rise to meetings and interactions between populations, and this aspect takes on another dimension in a cross-border context:

it is first of all a “social and cultural link” across the border between two populations (CR, 2016:2). Thus, tourism is a catalyst in the development of border regions, contributing to the development of diverse areas such as (AEBR, 2000:272 cited by Borma, 2014:119): “*regional economic development, development of the regional labour market, development of infrastructure and facilities, investment and business placement*”.

Tourism will continue to play a prominent role in planned ERDF investment, as well as related investments into the conservation, protection, promotion and development of natural and cultural heritage (see graph), with about € 8 billion of planned ERDF allocation. Tourism has not been included as a thematic objective in the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) regulations as it constitutes a means or a sector rather than an objective (EC, 2017b).

The European Territorial Cooperation Programmes support numerous cross-border tourism projects in Europe, with the following main objectives: the improvement of the quality of tourism at the regional and local level, the development of more sustainable models of tourism, and the establishment of stronger cross-border links between economic and cultural actors (CR, 2016:3)

## **2. Bihor County Tourism in the Regional Context**

The North West region has a high potential for diversified tourism - spa, cultural, mountain, rural, religious, sports and leisure, business etc., determined by natural and anthropic tourism resources of great value, varied landscape, attractive and unpolluted rich thermal water and mineral resources, valuable cultural heritage (picturesque towns, wealth of historical monuments, wooden churches, Roman forts, castles, manors, castles with stylistic authenticity and unique character), the large number of accredited places with tourism potential (163) and ethnic diversity (NW RDA, 2014). The main weakness of the region is the accessibility and low mobility, which directly impact the access to the unique and valuable touristic objectives (NW RDA, 2014).

Even if the importance of developing an integrated regional tourism is acknowledged (Regional Development Plan 2007-2013, Regional Development Plan 2014-2010, many projects financed from structural funds etc.), the number and diversity of information tools to promote the regional tourism are obviously insufficient and there are not yet diversified integrated tourist packages. Although there were increases in gross investments in tourism, they have focused mostly on accommodation infrastructure and, eventually, gastronomy and food components, but far less the tourist services and activities that tourists can carry on the natural and cultural potential offered by the different areas the region.

According to the Regional Development Plan 2014-2020 (NW RDA, 2014), there are many similarities between tourism potential and its value as a whole in the North-West Region (counties: Bihor, Bistrita-Nasaud, Cluj, Maramures, Satu Mare, Salaj) and Bihor county:

- The existence of diversified tourism potential - spa, cultural, mountain, rural, religious, sports and leisure, business tourism, etc., determined by the combination of valuable natural tourism resources and cultural heritage;
- The existence of the same major weakness related to reduced availability of sightseeing, especially due to poor road infrastructure;

- The existence of the same problems to value the potential of tourism and tourism service quality as those reported nationally in the SWOT analysis;
- Similar trends regarding the evolution of structure in tourist reception with functions of accommodation, development of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in hotels in the past five years: a significant increase of the number of rural guesthouses along with drastic decreases when motels, tourist chalets, villas, camps, school camps; an insignificant increase of tourist arrivals generally, drastic drops of tourist arrivals in accommodation structures related to ecotourism or adventure tourism;
- Low attractiveness for foreign tourists, the North-West region ranks fourth nationally;
- Low use of tourist accommodation capacity - under 40% in all counties in the region.

Despite these similarities, the analysis of tourism indicators according with national territorial statistics (RNIS, 2015), Bihor situation is above the regional average. Compared to the other counties in the North-West region, foreigners preferred almost exclusively counties like Cluj, Bihor and Maramures, and the volume of gross investments in hotels and restaurants, although declining in 2010, locates Bihor County as the 1st at regional level, while the North - West region ranks 3rd after Bucharest-Ilfov and South-East (NW RDA, 2014).

Bihor County has, in our opinion, the highest tourism potential and also the most diversified, covering large areas of the county. Summarized below, based on Bihor County Development Strategy 2014-2020, several arguments in support of this assertion:

- Innovative combination of natural heritage and an important cultural heritage, also geographical and ethnographic diversity;
- Unique combination between mountain and water as elements that define natural heritage:
  - Mountain: Beauty, karst wealth and high biodiversity of the Apuseni Mountains in the county of Bihor (Bihor-Vlădeasa Forest Mountains, Forest-Moma, Ses - Plopiș) :
    - Protected Areas: From the standpoint of the number of protected areas of national interest Bihor County is best represented at the regional level with 64 such protected areas, about half of the entire park Apuseni is in Bihor County.
    - Caves: the county with the largest number of caves in the country, over 8% of the approximately 20,000 known cavities in the country, among them being found also four superlatives Romanian cave: the deepest cave - V5 Vărășoia System – Padiș, the longest cave – Wind Cave - Șuncuiuș, the largest underground waterfall – Cămpeneasca cave – Vașcău, deepest submerged cave – Izbucul Izbândiș plus Bear Cave largest cave complex and landscaped country that recorded the highest number of tourists nationwide. A special feature in Bihor Mountains is the presence of forested karst, which are the premises of the existence of ice caves: Scărișoara Glacier, Bortig

- pothole, Live Fire, ice pit from Vârtop Plateau, Barsa Glacier etc.
- Biodiversity: peculiarities of other geographical factors, climate, hydrographic network, vegetation and fauna. In addition to limestone areas, plateaus and cliffs as well as numerous species of plants, is a special attraction for tourists.
    - Water: Spa resources exploited Felix Spa and May 1 and more, rich water resources, numerous lakes, mineral and thermo mineral springs, surface waterfalls (BC, 2014);
  - The existence of 4 resorts, including 2 of national interest: Baile Felix and Stana de Vale and 2 of local interest: 1 Mai and Tinca (RNAT, 2015);
  - The existence of 2 ski slopes approved: Hidisel (Hidiselul de Jos), Piatra Grăitoare (Vârtop) (RGDCAT, 2015) and a resort of national interest for winter sports (Stana de Vale, 3 functional ski slopes, although not approved, two cross country skiing slopes)
  - Large number of tourist routes approved (MRDT, 2014) and under the approval;
  - Very high potential for extreme sports (climbing, escalade, mountain rivers water sports, etc.).
  - Rich built heritage: 431 built heritage monuments, of which 170 are archaeological sites and monuments, 221 monuments and architectural ensembles and 40 are memorials and monuments, fine art, Fortress of Oradea, Museum of Țării Crișurilor (BC, 2014);
  - Ethnic and religious diversity (Bihor county are registered monasteries and churches representative of many religions, including 3 synagogues (BC, 2014);
  - The diversity of cultural traditions and cultural events (BC, 2014);
  - County tradition in tourism and hospitality industry, a large number of classified businesses active in this sector and specialization in vocational tourism education system, vocational and academic, training for adults (BTR, 2015; BCDS, 2015);
  - Structure of county economy oriented towards services with high added value which requires skilled and specialized labor (BC, 2014);
  - Bihor county residents are distinguished by their hospitality and tolerant and cooperative mentality(BC, 2014);
  - Increasing foreign investors interest in Bihor County (BC, 2014);
  - Increasing investment in transport infrastructure to increase accessibility to the main areas of tourist interest: upgrading of the access road to the Padiș (BC, 2014);
  - Increasing investment in tourism infrastructure and tourism services (BCDS, 2015);
  - Bihor County location on the border with Hungary and Bihor county eligibility for Pre-accession program PHARE CBC and CBC Programme Hungary-Romania - tourism being a major area of intervention covered by a total of 10 projects (BRECO), location of the Regional Office for Cross Border Cooperation (BRECO) Oradea - Compete at regional level benefits;

- Greater capacity of absorption of European funds in at regional level tourism (ROP) of Bihor county compared to the other counties in the region - reflected in attracting four projects (one for cultural heritage: Oradea Fortress revitalization and 3 for tourism infrastructure of all 14 existing across the region), capacity due to Oradea City Hall (no. 2 in the country in the absorption of EU funds) and business tourism in Bihor County (2 from 7 existing projects in tourism across the region for tourism infrastructure) (NW RDA, 2014).

Statistical data on tourism activity in Bihor (BCDS, 2015; RNIS, 2015) shows a rising trend for most of the indicators, 2007-2013.

Regarding the tourism infrastructure, number of tourist accommodation in Bihor County is 128 in total, an increase of 14% in 2011 compared to 2010, with the highest growth categories *villas and bungalows and guesthouses areas*.

**Table 1:** Tourist receptions with tourists' accommodation functions, in Bihor County

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Total</b>	85	83	100	110	128
<b>Hotels</b>	29	30	32	39	43
<b>Hotels Apartments</b>	-	-	-	1	2
<b>Motels</b>	4	6	7	5	4
<b>Hostels</b>	1	1	1	2	3
<b>Tourist inns</b>	1	1	1	-	-
<b>Chalets</b>	5	5	6	7	4
<b>Camping and cottage type units</b>	8	7	7	6	4
<b>Villas and bungalows</b>	20	12	12	12	21
<b>Camps for students and preschool children</b>	6	6	6	3	3
<b>Urban guesthouses</b>	6	6	9	4	7
<b>Rural guesthouses</b>	5	9	19	31	37

Source: BCDS, 2013

The territorial accommodation infrastructure is not reduced numerically, but is relatively concentrated as a distribution area, distinguishing two infrastructure concentration in two areas: 1. Oradea and Sanmartin (Baile Felix – 1 Mai) area; 2. Apuseni Mountains. There are many uncovered accommodation infrastructure areas although there is demand from tourist's northern area of the county, where, although there is potential for tourism, it offers only three cities: Marghita, Valea lui Mihai and Sacuieni.

**Table 2:** Indices of net use of tourist accommodation capacity

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
47.0	44.5	44.1	37.7	38.4	38.1	36.7

Source: BCDS, 2015; RNIS, 2015

A very relevant aspect is also that the number of tourists, who stay at least one night in the location of the county they are visiting, is much larger than the number of tourist arrivals. From the accommodation point of view the category most tourist

reception structures are classified at a good quality level, of 3 and 4 stars hotel in Oradea and Baile Felix. Availability of accommodation is a problem, but especially in rural areas of the county, where, if the accommodation infrastructure is found, it is improperly equipped. Also in rural areas an important issue is the lack of tourist services such guidance, signalética etc. Moreover, in Bihor county there is an acute lack of local tour guides. The current method to identify a local guide is to ask the locals. "Official" guides are that can be found in the field and are mostly those serving a specific objective, tourist cave, museum etc., but they don't have the necessary training.

Use of tourist accommodation capacity instead is low - 36.7% in 2013, lower than in 2007 (47%) (BCDS, 2015; RNIS, 2015). From the accommodation point of view the category most tourist reception structures are classified at a good quality level, 5 stars category (1 hotel in Oradea) 3 and 4 stars hotel in Oradea and Baile Felix (BCDS, 2015). Availability of accommodation is a problem however, in rural areas of the county a bit better covered but insufficient, in the mountains (BTR, 2015; BCDS, 2015).

The analysis of statistical data on tourism activity in Bihor (RNIS, 2015; BCDS, 2015; NW RDA, 2014) indicates the following trends for 2007-2013:

- Number of tourist reception with functions of tourists' accommodation in Bihor County increased by 50% in 2007-2011, overall the highest growth recorded for rural guesthouses (7 times, from 5 in 2007 to 37 in 2011); tourism capacity increased as the number of seats at 10.071 in 2013 but with drastic reductions for motels, tourist cabins, villas, camps, school camps but decreased as the number of places-days (the operation) at 2.596.300 in 2013 (RNIS, 2015 ; BCDS, 2015);
- The number of tourist arrivals in the establishments of tourists' reception with functions of tourist accommodation in Bihor County increased slightly (0.44%) in 2011 compared to 2007, but significantly from 2010 (17.63%) while the lowest was recorded. In 2013, the number of tourist arrivals increased at 252.100 compared with 194.100 in 2010. The number of tourist arrivals in accommodation structures related to tourism or adventure tourism: tourist chalets, villas, camps, school camps, however, is almost insignificant (numbers in the thousands of tourists per year) (RNIS, 2015 ; BCDS, 2015);
- The number of foreign tourists in Bihor is low - 38 939 in 2011, but an increase of 30.65% over 2010. In regional context, foreign tourists prefer almost exclusively Cluj, Bihor and Maramureş counties (NW RDA, 2014);
- The number of nights spent by tourists in the establishments of tourists' reception with functions of tourist accommodation in Bihor County was 952.200 in 2013 with a slight increase compared to 2010, when register 885.400 but a big drop from 2007(RNIS, 2015; BCDS, 2015);
- Net use index of tourist accommodation capacity in operation in Bihor county is low – 36,7% in 2013, again with a slight increase compared to 2010, but a big drop from 2007, when register 47%. The situation of Bihor County for this indicator is above the regional average, where net use index of tourist accommodation capacity in operation dropped dramatically in one quarter (RNIS, 2015; BCDS, 2015);

- The volume of gross investments in hotels and restaurants, although down from 2010, ranks Bihor County on the first place on regional level (North- West region ranks 3 after Bucharest-Ilfov and South-East) (NW RDA, 2014).

### 3. Cross-border Cooperation Impact on Bihor County Tourism

The location of Bihor County on the border with Hungary and the opportunity to benefit of funding from EU through Cross-border Cooperation Programmes, as well as the location in Oradea of the Regional Office for Borders Cooperation (BRECO) are competitive advantages for Bihor County at regional level. Positive effects on tourism are visible through:

- *Partnerships and funds for tourism development through tourism projects, financed by PHARE Cross-border Cooperation Romania–Hungary Programme 2004 – 2006 and Hungary-Romania Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007 – 2013.* In Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion, established in 2002, were implemented a number of 4 tourism projects under the PHARE CBC Programme between 2004-2006 and a number of 6 tourism projects through HU-RO CBC Programme between 2007 – 2013 as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Completed CBC projects in tourism in Bihor – Hajdu-Bihar Euroregion (2004 - 2013)

Code	Project title	Beneficiary name/ Leader partner	Project value (Euro)	PHARE / European Fund for Regional Development co-funding (Euro)
Touristic projects implemented under PHARE CBC Romania–Hungary program, in 2004-2006, in Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion				
RO 2004/016-940.01.01.01.1 1	Unity and diversity in Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion tourism	Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bihor County	57,525.00	50,025.00
2006/018-446.01.01.01.1 4	Integrated center for business development by promoting regional tourism and culture	Alesd Local Council, Bihor County	335,650.00	300,058.75
2006/018-446.01.01.01.1 5	Development and promotion of integrated packages with common theme in the Euro region Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar	University of Oradea, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Bihor County	102,341.00	85,841.60
2006/018-446.01.01.01.2 0	Complementarity and similarity as a means of sustainable	Center for Protected Areas and	110,410.00	97,410.00



Code	Project title	Beneficiary name/ Leader partner	Project value (Euro)	PHARE / European Fund for Regional Development co-funding (Euro)
	development in Euro region Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar	Sustainable Development, Bihor County		
Touristic projects implemented/completed, in 2007-2013 under HU-RO CBC program, in Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion				
HURO/0801/144	Making innovative joint packages for tourism development in Hajdú-Bihar and Bihor counties	Chamber of Commerce Hajdú-Bihar County	96,510.27	80,623.55
HURO/0801/155	Adventure, recreation, entertainment: tourism promotion in Hajdú-Bihar and Bihor counties	Local Self-Government of Hajdú-Bihar County	510,795.00	422,947.57
HURO/0801/160	Development and promotion of ecological tourism opportunities in the North-East Plain and the Apuseni Mountains	Friends of Nature Tourism Association, Debrecen, Hajdú- Bihar County	163,150.00	134,169.95
HURO/0802/131_AF	Business incubator for cross-border tourism development	Vadu Crişului Municipality, Bihor County	552 633,86	466,766,86
HURO/0901/017/2.1.3	Join development and promotion of integrated rural tourism thematic in Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion	University of Oradea, Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport, Bihor County	174,866.00	148,636.10
HURO/0901/192/2.1.3	Opportunities of improvement of the cultural heritage through cross-border cooperation with the means of development in tourism and business environment	Salonta Municipality, Bihor County	505,920.00	430,032.00

Source: work of authors based on information provided by BRECO, 2014

- *Results of cross-border cooperation implemented projects in tourism and their spill-over effects on Bihor County tourism development as shown in Table 4 and Table 5.*

**Table 4:** Results of the PHARE CBC projects in tourism (2004 - 2006) in Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euro-region

<b>Project title</b>	<b>Results</b>
<i>Unity and diversity in Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion tourism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating a brochure that describes six common packages in six foreign languages (Romanian, Hungarian, English, German, French, Italian), the modernization of one building (already existing) with an area of about 736 square meters, in order to create commercial spaces for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) which have tourism activities,</li> <li>• creating multimedia CD with information on tourist destination of Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar (1000 copies in the 6 languages mentioned above) and the creation of a travel portal.</li> </ul>
<i>Integrated center for business development by promoting regional tourism and culture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the modernization of one building (already existing) with an area of about 736 square meters, in order to create commercial spaces for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) which have tourism activities,</li> <li>• creating 4 new jobs in the business incubator.</li> </ul>
<i>Development and promotion of integrated packages with common theme in the Euro region Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establishment of the Tourism Promotion Center in <i>Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar</i> euro region,</li> <li>• the creation of a website in order to present a model for the development and promotion of tourism packages ,</li> <li>• the training of 40 travel services providers in Bihor county (who were involved in the project), by means of specialists (teachers, cavers , etc.) in tourism,</li> <li>• the creation of a catalogue of bidders in tourism from Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar euro region, in which it was described the offers of accommodation, catering and leisure available within the 6 circuits from the common theme developed in the project,</li> <li>• a published a Tour Guide of the bidder in tourism;</li> <li>• the creation of a database that includes the bidders in tourism that were participants in the project;</li> <li>• the organization of a tour fair in proximity of Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar euro region.</li> </ul>
<i>Complementarity and similarity as a means of sustainable development in Euro region Bihor –Hajdú-Bihar</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• completed by conducting a feasibility study for the creation of a human resources training in the Apuseni Natural Park and that provides alternatives chances of employment and contributes to combating social exclusion;</li> <li>• creating a database of images with valuable national elements of the two parks (over 10,000 digital images);</li> <li>• the printing of two publications (a photo album about the Apuseni Natural Park and a booklet - in Romanian - describing Hortobágy National Park ) in order to support tourism development through complementary increase of attractiveness in tourism destination like Hortobágy National Park - Cefa - Apuseni Natural Park;</li> </ul>

Project title	Results
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>organizing an annual fair of the ones involved in small and medium businesses, producers and artisans from the protected natural areas in the Euro region, with the role of facilitating the development of links between people, businesses and institutions in the region.</li> </ul>

Source: work of authors based on information provided by BRECO, 2014

**Table 5:** Results of HU-RO CBC projects in tourism (2007 - 2013) in Bihar – Hajdú-Bihar Euro-region

Projects	Results
<i>Making innovative joint packages for tourism development in Hajdú-Bihar and Bihar counties</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>creating a website <a href="http://www.bihariturizmus.eu">www.bihariturizmus.eu</a></li> <li>the creation of thematic touristic packages following the identification of tourism resources of the Euroregion</li> </ul>
<i>Adventure, recreation, entertainment: tourism promotion in Hajdú-Bihar and Bihar counties</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7 package offers for tourist,</li> <li>180.000 leaflets, 84.000 brochures, 1000 image books,</li> <li>1 web portal (<a href="http://www.bihar-bihar.eu">www.bihar-bihar.eu</a>)</li> </ul>
<i>Development and promotion of ecological tourism opportunities in the North – East Plain and the Apuseni Mountains</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>feature film on the natural values of the region analyzed and 10 short films presenting thematic routes defined by the project;</li> <li>a web site (<a href="http://www.thematic-routes.eu">http://www.thematic-routes.eu</a>) that includes information about attractions in the region North - East Plain and the Apuseni Mountains, databases , videos , surveys , contacts etc.;</li> <li>the definition of 10 thematic tourist routes based on tourist attractions, accommodation and restaurants, and entertainment programs available in the existing euro region, named as follows: <i>The route of inns, The craft trail, The wine trail, The trail of significant landscapes, The route of health, The water trail, The trail of famous personalities, The route of the museums and traditional houses, The local traditional products route, The route of caves and karst formations.</i></li> </ul>
<i>Business incubator for cross-border tourism development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishing a business incubator in Vadu Crişului for travel agencies</li> <li>establishing a tourist information center located at the main entrance of Hajduszoboszló swimming pool</li> <li>mutual promotion of tourist attraction from the Euro-region (Hungary spa tourism and Romania mountain tourism).</li> </ul>
<i>Join development and promotion of integrated rural tourism thematic in Bihar – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>creating a project site;</li> <li>creating a map of Bihar – Hajdú-Bihar Euro region and some thematic tourist maps;</li> <li>the development of travel albums and brochures, etc.</li> </ul>
<i>Opportunities of improvement of the cultural heritage through cross-border cooperation with the means of</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>development of promotional materials of cultural tourism in Salonta and Debrecen: short films about the two cities, commercials, newspaper articles, etc. short films about the</li> </ul>

Projects	Results
<i>development in tourism and business environment</i>	<p>two cities Salonta and Debrecen), commercials, newspaper articles, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating a website about the two cities: <a href="http://www.nhd.ro/salonta/index_hu.html">http://www.nhd.ro/salonta/index_hu.html</a>.</li> </ul>

Source: work of authors based on information provided by BRECO, 2014

- **Emphasizing competitiveness in tourism sector**, particularly in the spa tourism, but also to all other forms of tourism, except for mountain tourism, that is not threatened due to specific touristic attractions for Hajdú-Bihar County: thermal resorts, national parks and natural reserves. In Hajdú-Bihar County the most famous resorts are Debrecen and Hajdusoboszlo. Besides these resorts, there are small town like Puspokladany, Balmazújváros and Berettyóújfalú that also have spa facilities. Hortobágy National Park (included in the UNESCO World Heritage since 1999), located in Hajdu-Bihar County is a real gem of the region, being the first national park of Hungary. Also, we must add anthropogenic sights: architectural and historical monuments (County Hall and The Prefecture in Debrecen, Nine Bridge holes from Hortobágy, memorial houses of personalities Ady, Arany, Petofi, etc., religious centers and holy places, Debrecen is considered the most important religious center of Reformed Church from Eastern Europe, World Summit of the Reformation, Pope's visit linked to Debrecen, etc.), folk customs and traditions, ethnographic centers (pottery, carvings, embroidery, etc.), gastronomy, event organization (National and International Dance Festival for Children, Bela Bartok International Choir Festival and Military Band Festival, etc.), conferences, leisure activities and sporting events (cycling, riding, fishing are very popular) etc.

### Conclusions

At the regional level, Bihor County presents the greatest potential for tourism development and tourism specialization meets the recommendations of the North-West Regional Development Plan 2014-2020 of the areas of smart specialization. At Euro-regional level - Bihor County tourism benefited by partnerships and networks of cross-border cooperation in tourism, strategies to develop cross-border tourism, thematic tourism packages etc. created by cross-border cooperation projects implemented, allows the transfer of know-how, exchange of experiences, sharing of certain services related etc. within resulted cross border cooperation networks. At the same time, Bihor County tourism competitiveness increased as a competitor response to Hajdú-Bihar County tourism competitiveness, particularly in the spa tourism. In our opinion, the experience of cross-border cooperation projects and their results created in Bihor County a very important portfolio for tourism development, a critical mass of relevant players in tourism and touristic infrastructure, databases, promotional materials, strategic documents etc. The superiority of these projects is based on the importance given to relational and network-type factors, essential for nowadays tourism development. Through promoting in an integrated manner the main touristic areas of the Bihor County and through fostering partnerships between operators in the tourism sector with local public administration and tourism sector

institutions for collaboration, cross-border cooperation projects providing competitive advantages at regional level.

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