THE ROLE OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION OF NATIONALITIES ALONG THE MURA (MURAMENTI NEMZETISÉGI TERÜLETFEJLESZTÉSI TÁRSULÁS) IN THE CROATIAN-HUNGARIAN CROSS BORDER COOPERATION WITH A SPECIAL ATTENTION ON TOURISM

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Abstract:

Despite the intensification of cross-border relations, it has been experienced that Euroregions were not able to achieve effective cooperation so far. The main reasons can be detected due to multi-heterogeneity, plural recruitment of interests and disinterest due to the lack of resources. To solve this problem, Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, thus the organization of EGTC have been created (MARTÍNEZ, A. A. 2014). The analysed local government association made continuous efforts in the last 25 years to develop the Croatian and Hungarian areas. This cooperation was based on trust as well resulting in the creation of the Mura Region EGTC which we believe will result in a quality change in terms of economy and tourism development as well. This is possible because the EGTC functions as a quasi-enterprise, being a legal entity as well and so it is able to tender not only the national sources but directly from Brussels. It is also a unique situation at this organisation that while in the Carpathian Basin the cross border relations are mainly based on Hungarian-Hungarian relations, in this case the Croatian-Croatian partnership is dominating. In addition, size and existing daily inter-ethnic relations contribute to the high level of success (BALI, L. – FITOS, G. 2012). The Mura Region EGTC was registered by the Croatian and Hungarian partners in June 2015 to strengthen the social-economical cohesion with the improvement of accessibility on the micro level and the evolving of eco-touristic developments for less environmental impacts. The Mura Region provides unique natural environment and a rather complex potential for tourism (CSAPÓ, J. 2014).

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Unfortunately the quantity and quality of the infrastructure demands further investments to satisfy different needs of the tourists. Creating a good relationship for cooperation and permanent search for financial resources are essential tasks for local governments. This study aims to demonstrate the formation, programming activity and future potential of the Mura Region EGTC pointing out recommendations of further development directions by presenting past and relevant present projects and analysing their multiplier effects. The research is completed with detailed legal analysis and interviews with municipal leaders.

Keywords: River Mura, EGTC, Croatian-Croatian relations, sustainable tourism development

Introduction, the role and importance of the EGTCs

Since border areas have always been sensible regions through history – and this is especially valid for the Central-European countries – now we have a chance to create cooperation instead of emphasizing and deepening the already existing negative effects of the border land areas (AUBERT A. – CSAPÓ J. 2015, AUBERT A. ET AL 2015, HARDI, T. 2002, 2004; DE SOUSA, L. 2012; BUFON, M. – MARKELJ, V. 2010; HALÁS, M. 2007; SOKOL, M. 2001). As preliminary documents for this research we have to mention the documentary accepted in 2006 by the Committee of the Regions in which strategic directions were proposed for regional co-operations and for the adaptation of institutional tasks in EGTC’s operational framework. Many changes took place in the past six years; almost all of the EU-countries have incorporated EGTC regulations into their legal systems, thus the earlier established organisations have more successful projects.

Hungary was one of the first countries that has adopted EGTC regulations. In countries such as Germany and Austria where strong provincial system operate, adaptation processes were held up by disruptions. Today these countries also solved the regulatory compliance of the EGTC. After the establishing of the first EGTC, Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, the circle of EGTCs has expanded. Co-operations are being established for expansion, employment, education, culture, heritage, tourism, environment, healthcare, public transport and administration. Until the summer of 2012, 28 cross-border organisations were registered and 16 member states joined the programme. Most of the EGTCs were funded in France, Hungary, Spain and Slovakia. The secondly established Ister-Granum EGTC is a good example for the initiative readiness in Hungary (HARTL, M. 2010).

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Hungarian and 38 Slovakian settlements around Esztergom are located in the border region of Hungary and Slovakia. The main task of this EGTC is to realize cross-border co-financed programmes and projects and representation. The current line-up is characterized by indefinite and long-term agreements. The co-operative organisations are mostly local governments, governments, committees, advisory bodies etc. A further characteristic is that there is hardly any EU-funding for an adequate and professional functioning.56

However, we can see new opportunities appearing in the period between 2014-2020. The Committee of the Regions will continue to promote territorial cohesion in accordance with the objectives of cross-border, transnational and interregional co-operations. EGTC is an instrument for 2020 which is given concrete expression of multilevel governance and foresees a greater role of local democracies. The supervision of EGTC regulation makes clear the conditions and creates legal certainty. The importance of this process lies in the accelerated establishing of new EGTCs (BALI, L. – FITOS, G. 2012).

Methodology

During the research we used both primary and secondary sources for our investigations. The majority of the secondary data base was provided by the KSH (Central Statistical Office of Hungary) and the official databases of the researched tenders.

Primary information was gathered during field trips and also interviews and in-depth interviews were undertaken with the local stakeholders (mayors of the settlements and leaders of tourism organisations) of the economy and the tourism industry. During the investigations we analysed the international network and its intensity based on the thorough analysis of the tendering activity. The structure of the presented development plan follows the regular sequence of such tourism development plans.

Theoretical background, literature review

In the 21st century the tourism global market creates an organic and interdependent system in which the supply and demand side experiences significant changes both in time and space and also from the perspectives of the

quantitative and qualitative aspects or components (LEW, A. A. – HALL, C. M. – WILLIAMS, A. M. 2014). As newer and newer regions and tourism products will be involved in the international and domestic tourism trends only such a tourism destination or tourism actor can survive which or who can provide an ever growing standard of quality (COOPER, C. – HALL, C.M. 2008, AUBERT, A. – MARTON, G. 2013, GONDA, T. – RAFFAY, Z. 2015).

According to recent changes in tourism trends it is obvious that visitors are more strongly involved in cultural activities than earlier, although we have to highlight that the role of the 3S (or 4S as sun, sand, sea and sex) in mass tourism will still be (very) dominant (CLAVER-CORTÉS, E. – JOSÉ F. MOLINA- AZORI’N, J.F. – PEREIRA-MOLINER, J. 2007). On the other hand as the new generations of visitors appear on the tourism market, now we can talk about a new 3S group or generation of tourists now mainly motivated by sport, spectacle and satisfaction. Also we have to stress that one of the most important motivations for a tourism visit is getting (more and more, and as diverse as possible) experiences (CLAVERIA, O. – MONTE, E. – TORRA, S. 2015, MARIANI, M. M. – BUHALIS, D. – LONGHI, C. – VITOULADITI, O. 2014, GONDA, T. – MINORICS, T. 2014).

The punctual spatial impoundment of the analysed region is significantly influenced by the political aspects of the border which was constantly changing through history. The strength of the attraction through the state border also depends on this factor in terms of cross border cooperation building. Apparently we can see a strengthening of the relations in the last 15 years which can confirm the planning of common projects and tenders in the present and in the future also (ŠIMIĆ, A. 2005, HANSEN, N. 1983, NEMES NAGY, J. 1998, NOVOTA, S.-VLAŠIČ, I.-VELINOVA, R.-GERATILEV, K.-BORISSOVA, O. 2009). Since the strength of the mentioned attractions between the borders is changing, from the point of view of the Hungarian-Croatian cooperation we have to distinguish between two kinds of relations: along the border and cross border. Due to the incomplete texture the attraction of the border can only hardly be detected by statistical methods so we cannot speak in this respect about classic cross border relations. However, the macro and mezo regional centres of the neighbouring areas have a certain amount of connections. In this respect the cooperation is not a bottom-up initiative, the cross border connections create a greater, more comprehensive system and they constitute real cross border relations. (MARTINEZ, O. J. 1994, MÁGAŠ, D. 2013, GRUPE, C. – KUSIC, S. 2005).

Taking into consideration the cross border situation in Hungary, we can assume that in many cases only weak contact zones were developing, while with the more central parts of the country more significant connections were created. This is in relation with the so called ‘effective state area’ an ongoing situation in
The role of the Regional Development Association of Nationalities... the Drava River bordering area at the southwestern parts of Hungary, since the change of the regime. Besides these rather negative processes we could experience a kind of positive development procedure in the last two decades as well. The relation between Hungary and Croatia is politically stable and the development of the interactions are also strengthened by the comparative social-economic possibilities. However, the highest degree of cooperation is still not achieved, we can only see initial phases of the expected development (HARDI, T. 2009). It is also worth mentioning that the altering economic circumstances can also actuate the activity of the certain cross border areas and their centres and in certain economic areas (such as tourism) a kind of specialisation can also set off (NIEBHUR, A. - STILLER, S. 2004, RECHNITZER, J. 1999, MARTINEZ, O. J. 1994).

An introduction to the Mura Region EGTC

The Mura Region EGTC is located in Western Transdanubia, in the southeastern part of Zala County along the Hungarian-Slovenian-Croatian triple-border.

Figure 1: The location of the Mura Region EGTC (joined settlements highlighted with red)

Source: Edited by the authors 2014
By the examination of the establishment of the Mura Region EGTC we actually observe the reintegration opportunities of some parts of the historical Zala County. With the EU member state Slovenia and with the joining of Croatia, the interstate, regional and local governmental relations constantly smartened up. This process is supported by the increasing available EU-funds promoting cross-border relations. Of course the economic development of the Mura territory depends on successful co-operation of local governments, local NGOs and regional social-economic organisations on a great extent.

Since the change of the regime, several local governmental associations have been established, operating despite the economic downturn, following the political change and the current economic crisis. The project leader is the Muramenti Nemzetiségi Területfejlesztési Társulás (Regional Development Association of Nationalities Along the Mura) which is an active participant of regional development processes for 19 years. The organisation and its partners, Donja Dubrava, Goričan, Donji Vidovec already implemented several successful projects in the past 15 years, however they only reached significant results on minority, cultural, sport and educational interactions with the lack of effective economic effects (BALI, L. – HEGEDÜSNÉ BARANYAI, N. – GÓR, A. – FITOS, G. 2015).

The former tendering activity of the region as a scale of interaction and cohesion in tourism and regional development

Important conclusions of interactions can be drawn from the assessment of the tendering activity of the IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) projects which could justify the raison d’etre of the establishment of the organisation (Mura EGTC) in addition of historical aspects. It was the only credible source which had a detailed database about the interactions. Here we have to say that the Croatian-Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry which has offices in both countries and existed for more than 2 years did not even have appropriate data regarding the bilateral mutual investments (GULYÁS, L. – BALI, L. 2013).

From the results of the first calls for projects a particular situation emerges: the most successful projects were from the field of education-training and ‘interpersonal’ relations (Table 1). A wide range of settlements realized educational projects like Murakeresztúr and Csáktornya (Čakovec). In half of these cases the co-operation was based on existing and operating partnerships between settlements and ‘interpersonal’ relations where small towns along River Mura (and Drava) like Čakovec, Križevci, Letenye which were the most successful. In the topic of ‘Cross-border business partner searching’ on priority ‘Co-operating economy’ only one project was realized which de facto aimed to deepen economic co-
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operation. The beneficiary was the Enterprise Development Foundation of Zala County (Zalaegerszeg) (BALI L. – HEGEDŰSNÉ BARANYAI, N. – GÓR, A. – FITOS, G. 2015). The results of the second calls’ winner projects outlined a former tendency as well where local governments replaced their lack of resources from funds addressed for cross-border co-operation (Table 1). On priority 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 the following projects were realized: ‘Development of the sewage plant of Letenye and canalization of south-western part of Prelog’, and ‘Technical documentary of canalization in Bázakerettye, Donja Dubrava, Donji Vidovec and Kotoriba’. In both projects the strengthening effect of social-economical cohesion along the borderline are questionable, especially in Bázakerettye. On the second priority there are no such tendencies. Previous experiences showed that the density of cross-border interactions depended on spatial structural, transport and ethnic issues. Co-operation which can exclusively be interpreted as a cross-border co-operation has been barely present, e.g. Letenye (HUHR/1001/2.2.2/0012), Tőtszerdahely (HUHR/1001/1.1.2./0004). In each of these projects the ethnic aspect had a strong influence also since the existing micro-regional relations have revived with the support of EU funds (BALI, L. – FITOS, G. 2013).

The third call of projects show a totally different condition (Table 1). Most of the projects were realized in the main topic ‘Sustainable tourism in the river area of Mura-Drava-Danube’ within the topic of active and ecotourism. In addition, projects about coherent touristic image and active tourism had priority in front of the decision makers. In the first and second turns only one project was realized, while in the third turn altogether 26. In the topic ‘Co-operation in economy’ was a significant, about 50% reduction in the amount of projects submitted. An even greater setback of winner projects can be seen in the topic ‘Inter-community human resource development’: in the first turn 11, in the second turn 31, while in the third turn only three projects were realized (GULYÁS, L.-BALI, L. 2013).
Before analysing some specific programmes, it is worth having a look at the aims and purposes of the CBCs, so simply, a word cloud helps us identify the keywords. According to these programmes, the following words were put in priority: development, cultural values, competitiveness, nature, border, cooperation and sustainability (Figure 2.).

Referring to the table above, we can notice that sustainable environment and tourism have been the top priority for both the first and second turn. The number of winner projects for the sustainable environment and tourism is 40 in the first turn, 60 in the second turn and 39 in the third turn.

Referring to the table above, we can notice that co-operating economy and inter-community human resource development have been the second priority for both the first and second turn. The number of winner projects for the co-operating economy and inter-community human resource development is 40 in the first turn, 60 in the second turn and 39 in the third turn.

Source: Gulyás, L. – Bali, L. 2013

Table 1: Priorities/Intervention areas/Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority 1: Sustainable environment and tourism</th>
<th>Number of winner projects by turns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sustainable and attractive environment</td>
<td>1st 2nd 3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Landscape development on the area Mura-Drava-Danube</td>
<td>2 3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2. Environmental planning tasks and small scale communal actions for the improvement of natural areas: habitat restoration</td>
<td>4 6 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Sustainable tourism on the river area Mura-Drava-Danube</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2.1. Elaboration of regional touristic product plan</td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.2. Active- and ecotouristic infrastructure development: visitor centres, forest schools, water sports, bicycle paths, hiking trails, rental services</td>
<td>0 0 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.3. Development of cultural heritage and thematic routes</td>
<td>0 0 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.4. Popularization of the river area as an unified touristic product</td>
<td>0 0 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.5. Private investment incitement</td>
<td>0 0 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority 2: Co-operating economy and inter-community human resource development</th>
<th>Number of winner projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Co-operating economy</td>
<td>40 60 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Searching for cross-border business partners</td>
<td>3 6 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2. Promotion of cross-border labour mobility</td>
<td>2 3 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3. Joint R&amp;D&amp;I</td>
<td>8 6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.4. Joint local planning, strategies, programmes</td>
<td>2 5 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Inter-community human resource development</td>
<td>7 12 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1. Cross-border educational, training and exchange programmes</td>
<td>7 16 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2. People-to-people relations</td>
<td>4 3 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3. Bilingual facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own editing with www.wordle.net
If we have a look at the word cloud for the project titles of the Hungary-Croatia cross-border co-operation programmes (2007-2013) we can clearly identify the keywords and hence the most important calls and priorities for tourism development. According to this, the word “development” is the most important, but we can also clearly identify the geographical space these projects were allocated: “Drava”, “Danube”. The most important activities that were planned to be developed are mainly connected to active tourism (“bicycle”, “routes”, “cycling”) and ecotourism (“routes”, “river”, “preserve”, “park”). In the next step we needed to have an authentication from the scientific/academic background in order to prove or disapprove the tourism product or topic choice of the project writers. Based on earlier researches on the tourism products of the area (CSAPÓ, J. 2014; AUBERT, A. – CSAPÓ, J. – PIRKHOFFER, E. – PUCZKÓ, L. – SZABÓ, G. 2010.; AUBERT, A. – CSAPÓ, J. – MARTON, G. – SZABÓ, G. 2012), these projects were correctly emphasizing the major advantages (leading tourism products) and also the backwardness or problems of the region, so we find the problematic fields of “infrastructure”, “marketing” and “stimulation” for example (Figure 3.).

**Figure 3. The word cloud for the project titles of the Hungary-Croatia cross-border co-operation programmes (2007-2013)**

Source: own editing with www.wordle.net

**Case study: The Tourism Development Plan of the Regional Development Association of Nationalities Along the Mura**

This chapter is introducing a local tourism development plan created by one of the authors of this article (CSAPÓ, J. 2014) intending to take into consideration these new trends in tourism being adapted to the domestic and regional characteristics.
It stands here as a practical example of the tendering and tourism development approaches focusing on the Mura region.

**Figure 4: The spatial allocation of the settlements of the Regional Development Association of Nationalities Along the Mura**


**The structure of the development plan**

The major point of focus and so the structure of the development plan are the following:

- Analysis of the international and domestic tourism trends;
- The thorough social-economic analysis of the settlements of the Regional Development Association of Nationalities Along the Mura (the situation analysis of the basics of the tourism sector);
- The tourism supply analysis of the settlements of the Regional Development Association of Nationalities Along the Mura;
- The tourism demand analysis of the settlements of the Regional Development Association of Nationalities Along the Mura;
- The tourism SWOT analysis of the researched area;
- Developing-outbreak possibilities, the strengthening potential of the tourism industry of the region.
Results

The pillars of the tourism development plan

The major decisive factors for the competitiveness of the destinations are marketing, product development (based on quality rather than quantity), diverse supply and the special segments. In order for a region to become a tourism destination, the following criteria have to be fulfilled:

- The presence of a well-identifiable and dominant tourism attraction;
- Should have tourism products based on the dominant tourism attraction;
- It should possess a regional knowledge of identity;
- It should possess a regional tourism organisation and management system;
- Financial sources should be detached to product development and marketing (Aubert A. 2007a; b)

It is also very important to add that the border regions represent a separate category in regional tourism policy having a unique role in the creation of the integrated Europe and cross border co-operations. So in this respect also the tourism development of the Regional Development Association of Nationalities Along the Mura cross border allocation should play a highlighted role.

Further trends and tendencies influencing the creation of the tourism development plan were:

- the increase of the absolute number and share of the individual travellers
- the increase of the absolute number and share of the travels characterised by shorter stays;
- the increase of the interest towards special tourism products;
- the more frequent use of the internet;
- the further development of the budget airlines;
- the strengthening of the late reservations;
- increased price sensibility.

In order to create the tourism development plan of the Association we intended to strongly take into consideration the regional (tourism region) aims and objectives of tourism development in order to find and create concordance with each other. The strategic objectives of the Western Transdanubian Tourism Region were the following:

1. The strengthening of the competitiveness and market share of the region;
2. The creation of the possibilities for sustainable development;
3. The strengthening of the tourism attraction with product development and attraction organisation, image creation in order to develop separate tourism landscapes;
4. Human resources development, the creation of entrepreneurship advisory boards, strengthening the co-operations;
5. Improving accessibility. (A Nyugat-Dunántúl Turisztikai Régió turizmusfejlesztési stratégiája 2007-2013)

The Tourism Development Strategy of the Western-Transdanubian Tourism Region (2007-2013) contains information about the area of the Mura region also. In the strategy the text refers to River Mura and its connected tourism products. It also proves that from the point of view of the general development of the region the covered area proves to be a periphery. Nevertheless the strategy highlights that the role and importance of cross border allocation plays a very important part in the region's development aspects. The mentioned leading tourism products of the region are:
- active tourism (waterside and cycling)
- wine tourism and gastronomy
- ecotourism
- rural tourism

The need for conscious development

In this chapter we clarified the main possible drivers for the development of tourism in the settlements of the regional development association. Our main conclusion was however, that they can only be carried out sufficiently and efficiently in the case of efficient cooperation and partnership. Therefore without spatial cooperation, the dislocation of the resources and disadvantageous allocation of the financial sources will be implemented so there will be no chance to be able to carry out the needed investments effectively. One of the most important topics in this sense is the case of the construction of a new bridge on the Mura for which a great lobby activity and a strong approach is needed. Nevertheless, with the strengthening of the public road transport and connections, a long term dynamic development could be generated which could also mean a stronger flow on capital and tourism movements, promoted also by Croatia’s joining of the EU.

The creation of a sustainable but competitive tourism in the region

One of the most important aspects of tourism planning in recent years is strongly connected to sustainability, but on the other hand also to competition and competitiveness. A major question is how these seemingly opposite aspects can be accommodated with each other. In an area carrying out sustainable tourism, the management and all the other players of tourism, mainly on the supply side, have
to take into consideration that they can only create a continuous developing, long
term functioning and operation when they fulfil the needs and aspects of financial
liquidity and profit orientation. So in this respect a common connection point
between sustainability and competitiveness is the competitive (service and tourism)
product deriving from sustainable activity being tested on the market based on
its price, quality, market research, marketing and promotion activities and by the
follow up service possibilities.

The process of tourism development

In this chapter we highlighted the process of tourism development stages and the
role of the management. Of course the management will coordinate the tasks
formulated through the planning period. This management can be a tourism
organisation or a municipality or, such as in our case, a regional development
organisation or association. It is further very important that their decisions should
be authoritative to the internal actors (population, local governments, local
enterprises) since they are the ones who represent the program to the external
actors (financial institutions, external firms, state administrative institutions etc.).
During the implementation period, emphasis should be placed on the physical
environment in order to minimise the negative effects that can emerge during
the creation of the tourism destination. One of the most important attractions
of the Mura region is the “untouched” environment providing a strong basis
for the strengthening of water tourism, hunting tourism, angling and walking
tourism, but if an adequate infrastructural background would be created (cycling
routes) cycling tourism could appear as well. This natural environmental basis
should only be changed with moderately limited actions in order to implement
the former plans and studies projected. Accordingly, the major viewpoint of the
tourism development plan is long term thinking and planning:
1. The first step is the creation of a plan for complex tourism integrated into the local
   economy.
2. The marketing activity should accentuate the long term, environment protecting
   approach. This should be defined in an image and a mission for the internal and
   external actors alike.
3. The strengthening of an economy based on local products.
4. Such a destination should be created besides the already existing ones which match
   with the above mentioned viewpoint system and regional development ideas.
The concrete development ideas based on the local potential

In the next step we elaborated the concrete development ideas based on tourism products established on local potentials and marketing activity. We can determine the following statements:

1. It is inevitable to increase the image and the notoriety (mainly inland but in the international scene also) of the area with the analysed tools;

2. It is inevitable to involve the local population into tourism development;

3. It is inevitable to strengthen the approach of the local population to tourism;

4. It is inevitable to much more utilise the cultural-economical potential of the local Croatian population also in tourism;

5. It also should be a priority to utilise the EU’s CBC programmes as much as it is possible;

6. It is necessary to strengthen the tourism infra and suprastructure and the cross-border transport relations;

   a. Lack of adequate tourism accommodations;
   b. Introduction of qualifying or labelling systems in tourism.
   c. The increase of cross border points.

7. In order to develop and strengthen tourism a regional organisation system should be created;

8. The tourism of the region should basically be built around active and ecotourism.

The major types of determined tourism products

Based on the local resources and characteristics, the development plan also pointed out the most important tourism products of the researched area which are the following:

1. Ecotourism
2. Cultural tourism
3. Hunting tourism
4. Angling and water tourism
5. Rural tourism
6. Wine tourism
7. Cycling tourism
Possible directions of tourism development

The development plan determined the most important possible directions of tourism development:
1. The need for conscious development;
2. The creation of sustainable but competitive tourism;
3. The creation of a complex tourism industry integrated in the local economy;
4. The marketing activity should emphasize the long term approach;
5. The strengthening of the local economy based on local products;
6. Such a destination should be developed which is adequate to the approach of the above mentioned aspects and to the aspects of regional development.

Summary

The Mura Region EGTC is a border region of Hungary with unique social relations where not the Hungarian-Hungarian but the Croatian-Croatian relations are dominating. In Central-Europe, after the change of the regime, the development of border areas has been going through a revival, in spite of the lack of former experience. Taking advantage of new EU organizational structure and with the help of EU funds, the opportunity for long-term operating of such organisations have increased. This had been proven by the local political elite with a willingness for co-operation. We believe that tourism is only an additional development method in the area offering a good opportunity for the social-economical participants to recognize this economic development chance in a greater extent. The Mura region has an outstanding and unique environment and potential for tourism, providing a premises of its successful development. However, the non-adequate infrastructure (both concerning quality and quantity) necessitates significant investments in order to fulfil the differentiated needs of the tourists. For this cooperation, partnership and an increasing tendering activity is needed from the side of the local governments and the entrepreneurs as well. It is obvious that the limited frames do not allow the realisation of the needed investments, sometimes not even the realisation of the own share of the tendering process. It is also a disappointing sequel further on that the different planning programmes were stuck and remained on the level of planning. These include different development possibilities among which the development of tourism could be promoted as well. Such investments could be a new cycling route or the establishment of a new bridge on the Mura. Besides infrastructure development, the implementation of such investments is also strongly needed in order to promote the development of accommodation. All in all, besides the preservation of the natural values and attractions, we
propose the creation of sustainable tourism development plans for the region as a possibility for both domestic and international visitors. One of its first steps should be the creation of a unique, distinguishable image reflecting the historical, minority and cultural traditions. The economic part should be based on this together with the local products of the local bio and village producers. A selling place or a market should be created for these products in the centre of the region. The shop with local products could serve the accommodation units as well. Parallel with this, an adequate accommodation structure should be created in order to make visitors stay for longer periods of time. In this case, the framed processes could strengthen each other with the domestic and external demand relatively independent from seasonality. We also accentuate that tourism is not the only chance for development in the region, but it is among the possibilities of a multi-dimensional economy together with agriculture, industry and services other than tourism. Even if tourism cannot be the primary priority of economic development, but it could serve as a tool for economic complexity in the Mura region too. Through this article we aimed to describe the past and present realities and a little bit the future of a cross border region of Hungary and Croatia, where the peripheral and bordering spatial allocation could have both negative and positive impacts. However, we believe that given its potential and the more and more punctual planning processes, with a proper realisation of the proposed ideas, the region could make a further and very important step towards its social and economic development.

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Online sources

