

A FEW CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL OF THE TRANSBORDER TOURISM. CASE STUDY: BIHOR - HAJDÚ-BIHAR COUNTY

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Abstract

Euro regionalization concept, namely Euroregion is no more an innovative topic, but a common one. This is the case of Bihor - Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion, we are dealing with in this paper. The objectives for establishing this cross-border structure are multiple, but the present paper will deal only with recreational tourism implemented by the two neighbouring counties on the western border of Romania and eastern border of Hungary, Bihor County and Hajdú-Bihar County, forming a united structure since 2002.

Key words: *Euroregion, recreational tourism, cross border touristic potential, territory.*

JEL Classification: L8

INTRODUCTION

Research undertaken in this paper is a theoretical and scientific analysis of some aspects related to recreational tourism as a result of cross-border relationships of Bihor County (RO) and Hajdú-Bihar County (HU). The arrangement of this paper has considered three levels of observation: institutional, potential and the natural environment, socio-economic potential of the two counties.

CONCEPTUAL BASE AND BENEFITS

The occurrence specific and the development of Euroregions is that of inter-relationship, mutual aid and development at all levels. Many of these Euroregions, due to the large area they have and the big difference of language and culture or socio-economic benefits, have failed (the most outstanding example for this paper, preceding the establishment of the Euroregion we are dealing with, this is Carpathian Euroregion) (Süli-Zakar, Czimre, 2001). Extra-polating, neither in every day life is not sufficient that two pieces of land joined or close to each other to develop in an advantageous manner, because their owners, as neighbours, do not exercise the same management and the same techniques and development procedures, even if the neighbourly relationships are very good. Starting from this naive example from everyday life, we naturally wonder how a mutual development could be beneficial for societies which live on territories with close administrative limits, but of different ranks (Tóth, 2004). In other words, even for Euroregions is not enough to have close territories so that the development of the two or more adjoining areas is performed in the same way or at the

same time. This is the reason why we believe that small euroregions were more successful (Süli-Zakar, Horga). From the latter category we mention Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion, formed in October 2002, by Bihor County Council and Hajdú-Bihar Self-government, to the Agreement for its foundation adhering both Oradea Municipality and Debrecen Self-government.

To better understand what we will explain below, we consider it useful to state that good cross border cooperation must meet the following criteria, namely:

- common language and culture,
- same historical legacy,
- common border area,
- common geographical location,
- minimal economic balance.

What support this understanding are the several definitions underlying the Euroregional phenomenon. So, first we will discuss about what a **state territory** is. This is the part of the globe enclosed by state borders, including soil, subsoil, water and air column above the soil and waters over which it exercises sovereignty. In general, a state territory - the listings of characteristics of a territory in this paper are reported only to states in discussion, Romania and Hungary - can be seen in several ways, namely:

- from a geographical point of view, we refer to a unitary or divided territory. In our case, both Romania and Hungary are unitary states;
- from a political point of view the territory of a State may have a unitary or federal structure. In our case, both Romania and Hungary have a unitary structure;
- from a national point of view, states can be national or multinational. In our case, even if on the territory of both countries live ethnic minorities too, both Romania and Hungary are national states.

According to the Constitution of the two countries, it is inalienable, that is non-transferable to another by any means and its borders are determined by organic law.

From an administrative point of view, the territories of the two neighbouring countries are organized into counties, cities and communes. The latter, according to the local administration law from Hungary, are called “localities having rural character.”

The second term we briefly consider is the **state border** (Miclea, 2000). It also occurs as a border or boundary with the same meaning, only their language origin is different, as is their daily use. For example, we say that the term “border” (in Hungarian: *határ*) is used especially to designate the dividing line between the counties, communes or cadastral territories, “boundary” (in Bulgarian: *granica* and German: *die Grentze*) especially represents the line that separates individual properties and finally “frontier” (from French: *la frontière*), used mainly for the line dividing countries (Miclea, 2000).

But we will not insist on this description, considering that is already known.

Regarding the actual border, along the border sectors for Bihor - Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion, on the Romania-Hungary sector there are a large number of points and customs offices which control traffic to and from Romania, with very small territorial dimensions (Table 1).

Table 1. Customs offices and centres at the level of Regional department from Oradea
(according to Ilieş, 2003)

No.	Territorial structure		Position in territory	
	Regional department	Customs office/ Customs centre (b.v./ p.v.)	interior	border
1.	ORADEA, Bihor county	Oradea (b.v.)	X	-
		Borş (b.v.)	-	X
		Episcopia Bihor (b.v.)	-	X
		Salonta CFR (b.v.)	-	X
		Salonta rutier (b.v.)	-	X
2.	ORADEA, Satu Mare county	Valea lui Mihai (b.v.)	-	X
		Satu Mare (b.v.)	X	-
		Halmeu (b.v.)	-	X
3.	ORADEA, Maramureş county	Petea (b.v.)	-	X
		Baia Mare (b.v.)	X	-
		Sighet (b.v.)	X	-
		Câmpulung la Tisa (p.v.)	X	-

At the same border area - Romanian-Hungarian - the administrative unit Bihor - Hajdú-Bihar, there are 4 border crossing points with Hungary, the international crossing point regime (Fig. 1) and one occasional crossing regime (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 – Border crossing points in Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion (according to Popovicu, 2007)

As shown, the phenomenon of cooperation in the Euro-regions is to create direct links between regions and communities on either side of the state border (Zainea, 2006), by reason of the powers of local authorities. We mentioned these border crossing points to observe the many possibilities in terms of traffic from Romania to Hungary and vice versa, local citizens having many possibilities at their hand in this territorial-administrative structure to cross the border for various activities, including tourism (Szatmári, 2006).

Last but not least it is necessary to explain the sense and the meaning of the word **Euroregion**. Thus, Euroregions can be defined as *areas/border regions of economic interference, but not only, in which are capitalized the human and material resources by initiating and carrying out agricultural, industrial, transport, communication, touristic, commercial activities and programs, etc. by two or more states.* (Neguţ, 1998).

Summarizing, we can say that the benefits (Radocz and al., 2005) of such forms of cooperation are undisputed, citing for example only the most illustrative:

- Boost trade and economic relations between the members,
- Promoting cultural, artistic and scientific contacts between people and human communities,
- Cooperation in the environmental field,
- Ensuring fast and effective system of communication and transportation,

- Development of cross-border relations in various fields:
 - encouraging the economic and trade relations between the members,
 - promoting cultural, artistic, scientific contacts between people and human communities,
 - cooperation in the environmental field,
 - ensuring fast and effective system of communication and transportation,
 - development of cross-border relations in various fields.

THE MAIN STRENGTHS POINTS OF THE EUROREGION UNDER STUDY

The large territorial extension of Carpathian Euroregion to which practically belong the two territorial administrations - Oradea and Debrecen - the morphology of the natural environment with two divergent slopes and the inclusion in this area of a population that exceeds the total population of some associated states is an argument which is the basis for the formation in this area, of some new trans border Euroregions, smaller in size – the case of Bihor - Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion - with an enhanced functionality, obtained by bilateral association of some territorial administrative structures belonging to nearby states. Thus, our Euroregional model:

- has a privileged position on the Romanian side by partial inclusion of a border sector;
 - is a structure of state subordination type, with an average value both in terms of area and number of inhabitants;
 - regarding its form it is close to that of a system with high degree of functionality, being ensured a balanced distribution in the territory of settlements and their location compared to the residence centres (Debrecen and Oradea);
 - it is a well outlined cross border cooperation structure in the hydro graphic basin of Crişuri rivers, respectively Tisa river, with a morphology characterized by a stepped arrangement of the main relief units and a powerful emphasis of complementarity;
 - it takes advantage of a system of means of communication favourable for complementarity as a basis for economic development;
 - it has a dominant Romanian-Hungarian basis with a good balance of the two ethnicities;
 - it has a high level of economic development for the Eastern part of Europe;
 - it includes a single border state sector.
- and the main **objectives** of the administrative-territorial organization are:
- to maintain and develop good neighbourly relations;
 - to identify potential areas of cross-border cooperation;

- to organize and coordinate those activities that promote collaboration of the members (Racherla and Hu, 2010) in the social, economic, cultural, educational, health protection, environment and tourism protection;
- to implement specific programs in areas of mutual interest;
- to promote collaboration between residents and specialist working in diverse fields of activity of common interest;
- to promote Euroregion cooperation with other international organizations;
- to support Euroregion members by giving them useful information and working together with them for joint development projects aimed at obtaining financial funds from the European Union (Zainea, 2006).

These all lead to the idea cross-border cooperation premises – common history, complementary natural scenery environment, human component numerically (Fig. 2), and ethnically (Fig. 3) balanced, natural resources and valuable human edifices (Teperics, 2006), complementary and similar socio-economic potential – have reached the maximum degree of capitalization of interrelation between the two countries.

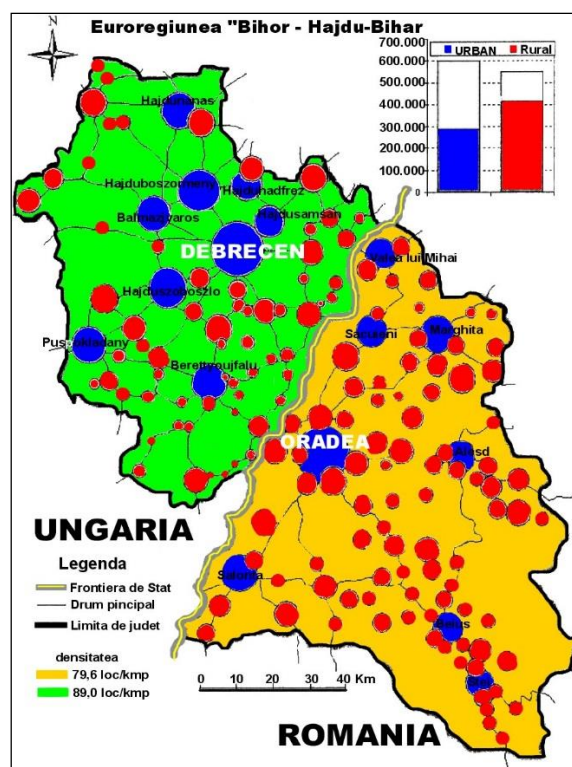


Figure 2. Demographic potential in Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion, 2004 (according to Ilieş, 2004)

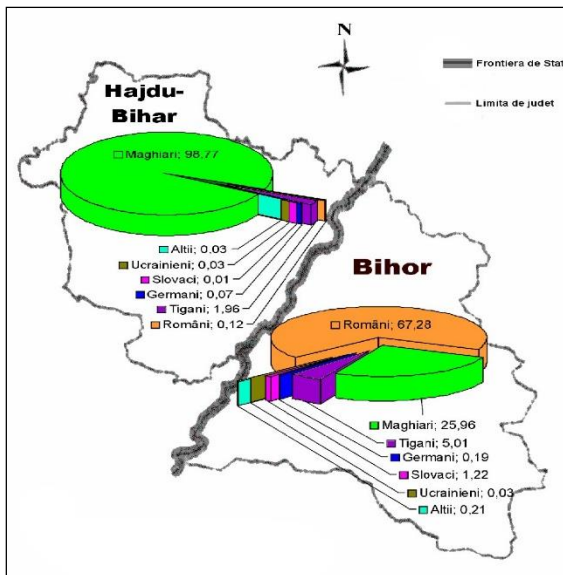


Figure 3. Ethnic structure of (%) Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion (source: Romanian Institute of Statistics and Központi Statisztikai Hivatal)

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS OF THE EUROREGION STUDIED

Locally, tourist attractions in Bihor - Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion are promoted worldwide by several authorized institutions, among which we mention Oradea Town Hall and Debrecen Self Government, the universities of the two cities, NGOs, including the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bihor, through the “Unity in Diversity in Euroregion tourism”, financed by PHARE. The latter publishes an annual brochure that promotes mostly through the Internet, but also through actual physical distribution.

First of all it is necessary to explain the term “leisure”. Thus, by recreational or **leisure** activities we can understand those activities which take place in the interval between certain times of the day, when the tourist is not resting, is not doing spa treatment or other such activities.

Over time and during the evolution of mankind leisure industry has grown and diversified, depending on the needs of the modern tourist. Thus, the evolution of science, technology and the human need (Tömöri, 2006) for comfort thus led and will lead to the birth in the future of specific forms of entertainment, all practically being adapted to almost all types of tourism, from the mountain to balneary, seaside, urban, cultural tourism.

Tourism organizers regard entertainment as a factor of competitiveness between resorts and tourism facilities and of increasing their attractiveness by having different offers. Thus, the presence of entertainment and variety of its forms arouse the interest of tourists for a given area and ensures in most cases, their return. When we refer to entertainment significance it should not be forgotten, nor overlooked

its contribution to extending the tourist season and, moreover, to improve the seasonal activity. The existence of numerous and various leisure possibilities, offered by the means and forms of entertainment, reduces the offer’s dependence on the natural environment, reducing its influence on the demand and allowing expressions of interest for certain destinations for longer periods.

Thus, the following forms of recreational tourism are known:

* Riding tourism, equitation is part of this category.

At the Euroregion level we are dealing with in this article, this type of tourism is practiced mainly by amateurs and enthusiasts of riding. Although the area is extremely rich in locations where this activity and form of recreation is performed, the Euroregion still remains one of Europe’s undiscovered destinations for this type of entertainment. The reason why this happens for sure are the high costs charged at European level in such locations, both for specific equipment any riding enthusiast needs to have as well as training and taking care of horses. And another reason, perhaps equally valid, is the lack of investors, equestrian tourism locations belong entirely to the owners, in their turn being passionate about horses.

However, enthusiasts of equestrian tourism can take advantage of several thematic packages in the area mentioned before, such as the 6 days package - maybe the most convenient - which implies: first day riding in Hortobágy National Park, then the second day, riding in the Hungarian plains and visits to various natural and cultural attractions, the third day is transfer to Vadu Crișului and obviously riding on karst plateau of Pădurea Craiului Mountains, the fourth day is organised a route that crosses deciduous forests from Meziad - Stâna de Vale, in the fifth day, is organised a route on the ridge from Stâna de Vale to Padiș, tourists being able to enjoy from above Beiuș Depression and the central part of Bihor Mountains), the last day offers riding on Padiș karst plateau (Apuseni Natural Park), with the possibility to visit the most interesting sites of the karst area.

* Adventure or extreme tourism, from this category belong speleology, climbing, mountain biking, paragliding;

* Tourism for winter sports, and here we include skiing and ski touring;

* Water sports tourism, with specific activities surfing, diving, kayaking, canoeing, rafting.

For these last three types of leisure tourism there is a particular package in the Euroregion, which is called “Team-building outdoor”. Team building takes two to three days and the cost for a package that includes rafting and speleology, is € 100 per day for one person. This route package generally offers 2-3 points of interest in the beautiful areas. For long distances, the ATV or jeeps are used, and at night they sleep in a tent or at the sheepfold. In one of the days they cross a stream in that area with a raft that the tourists have to

build and catering is provided from what is being caught with the handcrafted fishing rods that day.

As mentioned above, due to the varied landscape of the area there can be distinguished distinct *tourist areas* with a specific character, in the two counties separately (Table 2).

Table 2. Tourist attractions in the two counties of the Euroregion

Bihor county	Hajdu-Bihar county
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The first area is the Oradea, * The two famous spas: Baile Felix and Baile 1 Mai (resort renowned for having inside the resort a thermal lake with water lilies), * The south-east part of the county, where lies the most interesting massif of the county: Bihor Mountains (Western Carpathians core), * Padiş Plateau (geological reservation), * Beiuş Country (ethnographic entity perfectly individualized, that still keeps the image of some villages specialized in certain crafts (Pitchford, 1995). Potters villages can be visited, the art of processing wood is represented by the famous chest of drawers from Budureasa or the popular textiles, characteristic for Pietroasa and Valea de Jos), * Vad - Borod Depression, Plopişului Mountains and Craiului Forest (includes natural karst phenomena: Vântului Cave, Vadu Crişului Cave, „Peştera Bătrânului”), * Western Plain (complex of lakes from Cefa, balneary-climatic resort Tinca, Salonta town, the second largest city of Bihor County, with Ciunt Tower in the city center), * Ierului Plain (in Otomani and Sălcea localities they make trellis and reed braiding , and in Diosig, Sălcea and Săcueni one can admire old wine cellars), * Stâna de Vale resort, * Numerous caves: Peştera Urşilor/Cave Bear at Chişcău, Meziad cave, Farcu cave, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A first tourist area is Debrecen (important cultural center but also for treatment and bath with wellness centers renowned worldwide) (Szatmári, 2006), * Hajdúszoboszló locality (with important spas and wellness centers, especially popular among older people for the water rich in iodine, bromine, sodium, chloride, hydro-carbonates), * Nádudvar locality (known for the therapeutic thermal baths), * National Park Hortobágyi (Hortobágy offers the most romantic adventure and a rich offer of riding programs for those who love horses and horse riding. Hortobágy Horse Stud was founded 300 years ago by the city of Debrecen. Today is one of the symbols of the plain. Due to rich and unique traditions in horse breeding, it occupies a special place among national and European historical horse studs. Its reputation has been established by the equestrian art of the horse keepers from Hortobágy and by Nonius breed, today being a location renowned worldwide for horse breeding, organizing events and tourism), * Nyírség forests (here they practice wild boar and deer hunting), * Guti Forest (between Nyíradony and Nyírácsád, where you can meet the fallow deer) * Great Hungarian Plain (Alföld) (ideal for cycling enthusiasts because the land without bumps may be an important reason to organize a family trip) * Birds reservation from Tiszafüred (part of the Tisza grassland with several water branches, islands, silt, meadows and forests).

CONCLUSION

Overall, Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion has been little studied in terms of tourism, but in the two constituent counties taken separately there are a number of geographical studies both general and studies aimed at analysing elements of the surrounding environment.

This is because, we must admit that the landscape of this area is very diverse, given that the relief steps found here from low plains to high mountain peaks are in a well-defined succession. Thus, the mountains occupy the south-eastern part of the Euroregion and they represent a mountainous mass depression lobed by peripheral bays. Hilly units form a continuous transition zone between Apuseni Mountains and Crişuri Plain, with a maximum extension on the part towards the mountains of Barcău, Vad and Beiuş depression. Depressionary corridors look like bays in where the row of the western hills enters and along rivers, at the level of plains and low terraces enters the Banato-Crişană Plain. They are aligned as follows: Barcău Depression, Crişul Repede Corridor, Crişul Negru Corridor. Plains occupying the western of the Euroregion are represented by Tisa Middle Plain, Hajdúság Plain, Nirului Plain, Crişuri Plain.

From a climatic point of view, the Euroregion territory is characterized by a moderate continental climate due to the influence domain of the western circulation, carrying oceanic air masses. Average yearly temperature within the Euroregion increases from north to south and from east to west, according to the relief particularities, from regions with higher altitudes to lower altitudes depending on latitude. Distribution and atmospheric rainfall regime are closely linked to air humidity values and the degree of cloudiness, which vary according to the vertical relief natural setting.

Wind speed in Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar shows an increase from west to east once with the altitude increase.

The density of the hydro graphic network in the western part of the Euroregion, ie Hajdú-Bihar County is lower compared to the eastern part. The most important rivers are: Tisa, Barcău, Hortobágy, Kösely, Kondoros, Ierul, Crişul Repede, Peţa, Crişul Negru. Lacustrine areas of the Euroregion are found at different altitudes, from about 75-90 m up to 1800 m altitude. They are both naturally occurring and anthropogenic. Groundwater also has a wide variety in our area. In this respect we can distinguish groundwater and deep waters, from which come the thermal waters present in both counties studied.

Natural setting of the environment depending on the progress of the relief itself requires a very obvious natural setting in the distribution of vegetation and faunal elements.

We consider that boosting of economy in both counties in the near future cannot be addressed without considering the role that development of tourism has. But so that tourism can play a major role in local

economic development, it is important that the two counties base their strategy for development opportunities given by their own positioning in space, to harmonize the local policies with regional and transborder policies. Due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure, poor accessibility in the county of a

diverse range of services offered to meet the demand and the reduced capacity for payment of local demand, Bihor County, although one of the largest touristic potential at the national level creates a development gap in the Euroregion.

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