Promotion of Cultural Tourism through Cooperation in the Cross-Border Area

Rădulescu Corina Michaela
Pop Izabela Luiza
Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania
corinam.radulescu@gmail.com
pop.izabela.luiza@gmail.com

Abstract

The uniqueness and richness of culture and heritage in the cross-border area: Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine (HU-SK-RO-UA) creates the opportunity for developing cultural tourism through innovative tourism and integrated tourism products, with the result of promoting tourism, generally in Europe and especially in Trans-Carpatic Region. For this purpose, new projects initiated can achieve better cooperation and coordination between the relevant stakeholders in the tourism sector, as well as to develop and implement joint tourism strategies. The paper presents a project proposal on promoting the culture and heritage in HU-SK-RO-UA area, through tourism function. The main activities designed in the project lead to joint cross-border tourism management in order to increase the attractiveness of cultural sites and joint cross-border touristic offer, by strengthening joint new touristic products and organizing joint cultural events.

Key words: cultural heritage, touristic destinations, tourism, sustainable development, project
J.E.L. classification: Q01, Z32, O22

1. Background of the project

The unaltered preservation of cultural heritage in Europe in general, and in our region in particular, is a challenge and, at the same time a key condition for ensuring the sustainability of the heritage. It has an important role to play in ensuring social cohesion between different regions, ethnic groups, cultures .The cultural heritage is of particular importance for economic growth, by generating value chains in various sectors, with major implications for creating and strengthening jobs (European Commission, 2014).

The spiritual value of cultural heritage is reflected on all people who improve their everyday life. For creative industries, for art and artists, cultural heritage is a model, a source of information and knowledge.

Through culture and history, the attractiveness of a region can grow; this is manifested by the interest of those looking for a job in the cultural sector, tourists who are visiting the region, or those who choose to live in these regions. In this context, tourism and cultural management have become important subjects for organizations, cultural management institutions, local authorities and those who administer the cultural and historical heritage of the regions (Pedersen 2002). Cultural and historical sites can rapidly expand the tourism industry with all the beneficial implications for regional development. The major importance of the stakeholders in the planning and management of tourism activities is made by selecting and promoting tourist destinations, that can quickly generate economic growth and local development, with multiplier effects on many industries (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005), (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999).

In a study conducted by the European Commission (European Commission, 2013), multiplier effects in many economic sectors are demonstrated by the contribution of the cultural sector to GDP in the EU, through tourism enterprises and jobs. Also, the number of tourists in the EU

indicates that cultural heritage is a key factor in choosing a travel destination. Thus, 2013, 52% of EU citizens visited at least one historic monument or site and 37% a museum or gallery in those countries, while 19% visited a monument or historical site in another EU country.

Authors as Richards & Wilson (2006) or Anholt, (2007) argue that culture can provide the brand of a new city or region while attracting talent. In addition, technology adds economic value in the cultural and heritage sector (Cunningham, 2002), i.e., digitised cultural artefacts can be used to enhance the visitor experience, develop educational content; smart mobile phone apps may serve to broader information, documentaries, tourism applications as touristic routes and games. Cultural and Heritage promotion through tourism can be tool of regional development driven towards sustainability (Lordkipanidze, et. al., 2005).

2. Identification of the problems and needs for cultural tourism in cross project's development

The cross-border area of Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine has an important common asset represented by cultural heritage. In the cross-border area there are 7 UNESCO world heritage cultural sites, 2 UNESCO world heritage natural sites, a high number of museums (214) and almost 17 thousand protected buildings and monuments (ENI, 2016). Also, the area is rich in local, national and even international cultural events that tourism could build on; therefore, the area has many opportunities to attract tourists from all over the world. Thus, despite the rich heritage of the region and the fact that tourism may represent an important pillar of economic development, in this area the cultural and natural resources are not even in our days well promoted and valued, which is why tourism in this region is not sufficiently developed in order to make a major contribution to economic development. Also, there are not enough tourist products to contribute to the creation of competitive integrated packages offered to the beneficiaries and neither managerial tool to develop a common cross-border strategy, in line with the EU's policies.

The most important obstacles of region's development through cultural tourism are:
1. Information about historical and cultural heritage of Trans-Carpatic region is fragmented and presented in different languages and websites; because of that, potential tourists find quite difficult to plan their holidays in this area;
2. Online information in English or in the languages of the neighbouring countries (Ukrainian, Slovak, Hungarian and Romanian) is not always available;
3. Some local museums and other cultural institutions do not own a website and their presence online is limited due to the lack of employees;
4. Even cultural organisations which do have enough employees do not succeed to implement a viable marketing international strategy because the lack of training, abilities and knowledge their employees possess;
5. Cooperation among tourist organisations in the cross-border area is not typical;
6. Travel agencies do not offer packages including cultural or natural attractions located inside and outside of the countries forming the cross-border area, even if some historical events, identities and values cannot be fully understood by visiting only some of these attractions;
7. Many inhabitants of the four regions do not know the common history, heritage and culture they share with their neighbours, which is why social interconnection and interaction between them is limited and the sense of social cohesion is not developed enough among them;
8. The full potential value of the tourism is not being realized by local communities and the sites themselves;
9. Unplanned or mismanaged tourism and low level of integrated destination management and marketing are having a negative effect on the touristic attractiveness of the region and on local economies;

In conclusion the weaknesses that represent barriers in the development of regional cultural tourism and in a competitive common tourist offer. Some of these are: inadequate cultural marketing, insufficiently trained staff, poorly integrated tourist destinations, reduced visibility and promotion through Internet technologies.

3. The relevance of the project. Promotion of culture and heritage of cross-border area through TRANS-CULT-TOUR Project

In a long history of events, the cultural heritage of the project's region indicates an increased cultural, ethnic, natural diversity, which gives it an invaluable value but also uniqueness. The tourist niche comprises that portion of the market, perceived by tourists as the only one. Therefore, the potential for tourism development in this area is high. Unfortunately, many cross-border problems hinder the development of the cultural tourism sector.

According to the SWOT analysis carried out in the ENI (ENI 2016) programming document, shows that the main problems of the HUSKROUA area are poor infrastructure, lack of common tourist offer, poor housing quality, low cultural heritage marketing, lack of trained staff and continuous training programs, low touristic offer organized in the form products and routes that are visible on the market and lack of integrated destination management.

Based on the common and similar natural, cultural and historical values, the cross-border countries: Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine (HU-SK-RO-UA), there has been initiated a project to increase the attractiveness, visibility and the market of tourism sector. The purpose of the project is to increase the number of tourists in the area, by providing complex packages focusing on destinations tourism for rapid promotion of cultural and natural heritage and a major driver for sustainable development. The overall objective of the project is to promote cultural heritage in Trans-Carpatic Region as common European value, through enhancing networking, cooperation, forming unique interactions in cultural activities, innovations for cross-border tourism offer to attract more visitors and increase value added for local economies.

Within this specific objective of the project called TRANS-CULT-TOUR, it will aim to provide:
=better collaborations in and accros the neighboring countries between cultural, educational and tourist organizations through improved cultural and tourist infrustructure (platform, networking, performing cultural and research centres) and embedding cultural objects of common Europaen heritage into tourism activities through highly interactive demonstration actions at the cultural centres created, and thus forming the unique cross-border tourism offers;
=more innovation in exposing the cultural assets through digitalisation and smart applications of tourism routes for better tourist attraction in and accross the neighboring countries;
=new knowledge,innovation on cultural heritage into educational curriculum, training programs and dissemination materials and thus improving the public awareness of them, connections to tourist activities in and accros the neighboring countries.

4. The strategy of the project

The project's activities are divided into Activities Groups (AG), through their implementation; the expected results are presented in table 1.

Table no. 1 Results and Activity Groups of TRAN-CULT-TOUR

Result = R1 /correspondent activity group =AG1
Cultural heritage and different attractions of Trans-Carpathian region will be presented in one single digital platform available in five languages (English, Ukrainian. Hungarian, Slovakian and Romanian);
Result = R2 /correspondent activity group =AG1
A marketing strategy for establishing thematic routes will be developed as a result of research, studies and statistics carried on Cultural Heritage and Destination Tourism;
Result = R3 /correspondent activity group =AG3
Value of cultural heritage tourism services will be enhanced by innovative products, namely by "Creative museum program" and Smart Application "Trans-Carpatic Heritage Trails";
Result = R4 /correspondent activity group =AG1
Cooperation among tourist organisations in the cross-border area will become more dynamic by creating a networking of cultural and tourism stakeholders for elaboration of route-based tourism products;

Result = R4 /correspondent activity group =AG2

Travel agencies will be able to offer joint tourism routes and products developed within the project;

Result = R5 /correspondent activity group =AG4-5

The common history, heritage and culture of the area will be promoted through the scientific events and public events organised within the project, but also through the development of two cultural heritage and research centres.

Source: Authors' contribution

The links between the Activities Groups and the logical flow of implementation of the project is presented in figure 1.

Cultural heritage of a region may represent an important fuel of development if it is well used and promoted. In this context, the project seeks to perform certain activities through which the specific culture and history of Trans-Carpatic region to be better understood, valued and promoted with the final purpose of sustaining the development of cultural tourism in the area. More precisely, the project TRANS-CULT-TOUR will start with a study and a research on cultural and historical heritage of HU-SK-RO-UA cross-border area. The results of this first step will represent the foundation of developing a digital common platform in order to ensure the dissemination and exchange of information between the four partners, but also between local inhabitants of the four regions. Also, by creating a network of cultural and tourism stakeholders we will be able to develop new common route-based tourism products. The active use of these products will be encouraged through organizing public events and lectures, through the creation of cultural heritage and research centres, but also through some new, modern and innovative technological solutions such as: (1) cultural objects digitization and (2) mobile application for smartphones which will make easier for tourists to find and select specific routes and touristic attractions in Trans- Carpatic area.

Figure no. 1. Conceptual scheme of the project
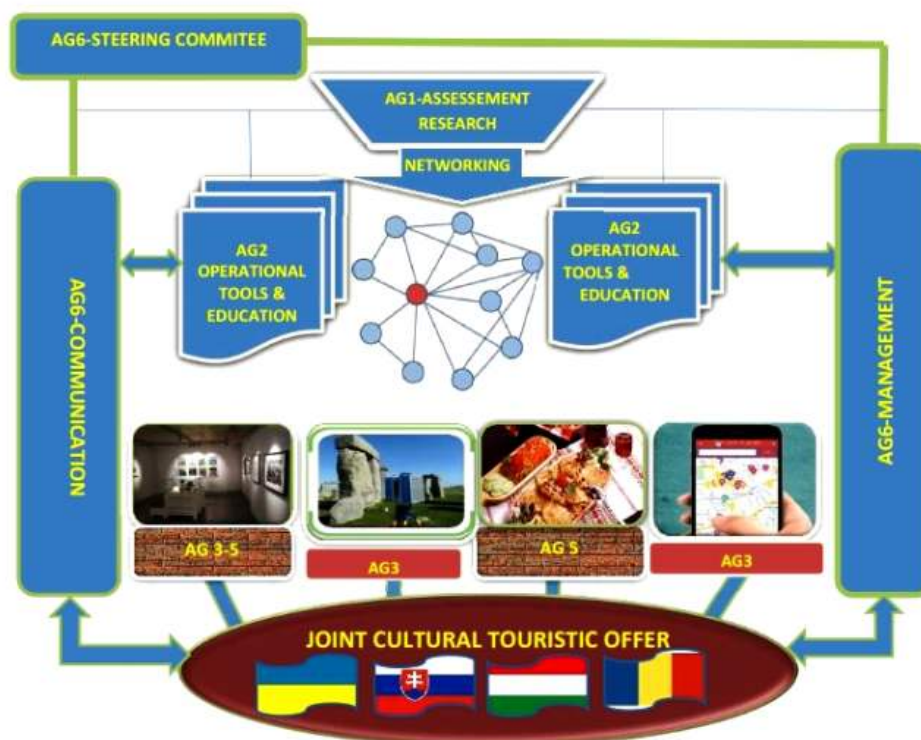
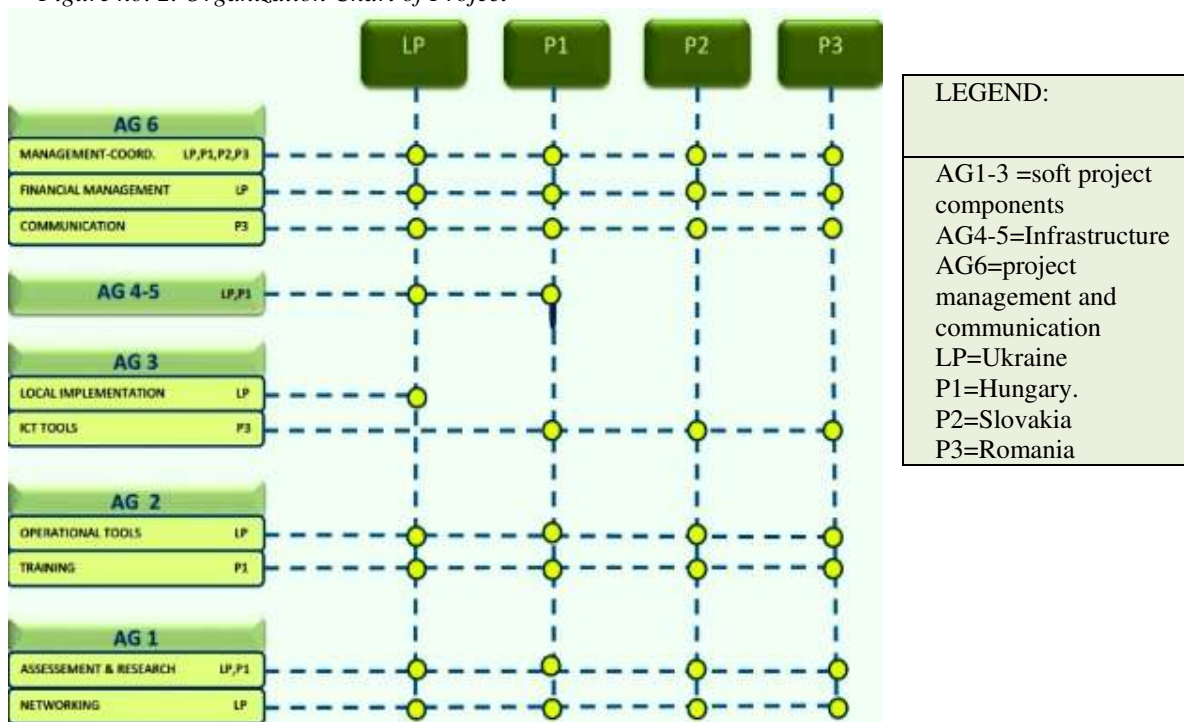*Source*: Authors' contribution

5. Cooperation approach in achieving the project's objectives and results

The cooperation criteria will be properly and commonly developed in relevance to the main cooperation criteria, namely: joint project development, joint project implementation, joint staffing, and joint financing, which is designed in the Organizational structure of the project presented in Figure 2.

- Joint project development: according to the cooperation criteria the project development is a common effort of all partners.
- Joint project implementation: The nature of the project is integrated. Partner's activity aimed to the achievement of the common objective namely: increasing the attractiveness of Trans-Carpatic region among tourists by integrating the objects / information of Common Cultural Heritage in tourist routes.
- Joint staffing: The human resources of the projects are aimed at the realization of the project objectives.

All the activities are adjusted by each partner followed by common project implementation and joint project management. All the partners are implementing the planned activities at local level and international level. The coordination team is taking the role of the lead partner of the project, but all partners are equal in the action. Each partner had similar actions before the current project and they are experienced in implementing such actions. On the other hand, common financing is one of the most important aspects, regarding the joint project implementation. Each partner has its budget for project implementation that developed at the level of project development according to action plan.

Figure no. 2. Organization Chart of Project

Source: Authors' contribution

6. Conclusions

The common cultural and heritage properties from Trans-Carptic region which will preserve both the spiritual values and the economic- social development level in the area represent a challenge for authorities, policy-makers, companies, institutions. The opportunity of the development of programs, projects or activities regarding these issues are obvious.

Cooperation and dialogue amongst stakeholders from the public and private sectors, cultural institutions and tourism industries is the leverage of better tourism management. The joint project demonstrates the role and the importance of stakeholders to assist the decision-making processes of planning and managing the tourism activities that enhances the destination purpose.

The project demonstrates that knowledge, education, rapid dissemination of information through modern technology strengthen and reinforce the position of culture and history in an economic frame; The direct effect of Developing and marketing cultural heritage sites as touristic destination assures high quality in tourism and is basis of a competitive industry. This approach creates within the project a strong joint basis for the development of cross-border cooperation, in the direction of promoting local culture and heritage, with the purpose of sustaining the development of cultural tourism in the area. Since cultural and natural heritage of the HU-SK-RO-UA area transcends the actual physical borders of the four countries (for instance, Hollosy Simon is considered an important Hungarian painter, but he was also the founder of Baia Mare artistic colony in Romania and he spent more summers in Tiachiv, Ukraine where he died in the end), the performance of such challenge is possible only within the close cross-border cooperation between all countries.

Thus, cross-border cooperation is provided within implementation stages of the action: technical-preparatory, educational-organizational, main and informational stages. The project focuses on complex solution of problems of cross-border cooperation by means of the introduction of synchronized approach in obedience to the agreed plan of action and combination of efforts of basic target groups for the successful development of established partnerships and implementation of initiatives.

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