THE DEVELOPMENT OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE STRATEGY OF THE DATOURWAY PROGRAMME

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Abstract

Cross-border cooperation in terms of tourism development is always an up-to-date topic in Hungary especially in the bordering regions since the change of the regime and especially after the joining of the EU. Thus in this paper we would like to present results carried out by our research group within the context of the international project entitled Datourway programme, so our paper intends to investigate the recent development trends and challenges of cross-border cooperation from a regional perspective, which was launched in six countries where River Danube is situated.

Keywords

“DATOURWAY programme, River Danube, river tourism, cross-border cooperation, tourism development“

INTRODUCTION

The project itself we took part as fellow researchers as planning specialist presents an “example of transnational cooperation committed to the development of tourism along and on the middle and south-eastern section of the Danube River, while paying particular attention to the protection and enhancement of the natural and cultural resources linked to this area of the great European waterway.” (Transnational Strategy for the Sustainable Territorial Development of the Danube Area with special regard to Tourism, 2011). Our research group from the University of Pécs, Faculty of Sciences, Institute of Geography has been involved in this cross-border research programme from the beginning
of 2010 until August, 2011 with the supervising leading institute of the Regional the Development Scientific Association (Területfejlesztési Tudományos Egyesület) and the VÁTI Hungarian Non-profit Limited Liability Company for Regional Development. During the research work and the planning process we carried out, took part and organised workshops, a pilot project (led by our research group), research group meetings, conferences and field trips collecting primary and secondary data on the tourism industry of the research area. In this respect our paper demonstrates the major methodology and results (elaboration of a common development strategy with special regard to tourism, the identification of the main conflict areas of the different types of tourism and the main tourism supply destinations) of the planning process and its highlighted researches.

1. THE TOURISM RELATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN DANUBE REGION STRATEGY (EDRS)

In the strategic action plan\(^1\) of the EDRS/EUSDR there are two highlighted action directions connected together with tourism development:

- One of them is value-based, strengthening the attractions, which intend to strengthen the cultural-historical characteristics connected to the Danube and the culture of the Danube.
- The other determines the Danube as a new European tourism target area determining a spatial tourism product, “brand”.

The first interfering direction wishes to create the basics for the networking tourism developments and the product development; while the second wishes to achieve its targets by forming the Danube destination as a player of the tourism market based on the brand development and uniform appearance derived from the internal cohesion of the area. According to the primary plans of the strategy\(^2\) the Danube region could become a European and international brand with the aligned development of culture and tourism. Concerning the national tasks of the concerned countries in the EDRS the intention to develop the Danube to a common tourism brand plays a highlighted role (DIERINGER J. – LAUKÓ P. – SCHNEIDER G., 2010). Slovakia considers relevant to create a new European tourism target area in the Danube basin. In order to achieve this, the country supports the networking creation of the destination management systems and the joint regional marketing visualising the Danube target area. Germany as a basis for tourism development handles the strengthening of the regional identity as a highlighted topic. From the group of countries out of the EU, Serbia considers the enhancement of the Danube’s tourism attraction as most important task of the strategy. Hungary\(^3\) – in accordance with the other members – also gives prominence to the creation of the uniform tourism façade. In the development of the Danube destination all the member countries would build on the unique cultural endowments determining sustainability as the methodological basis.

\(^1\)http://www.hidrologia.hu/mht/letoltes/eu_duna_regio_akcioterv-magyar%20osszefoglalalo_1.pdf


\(^3\)http://www.vati.hu/files/sharedUploads/docs/teruletefjesztes/DUNA_kiadvany_2010.pdf
2. RESULTS

Our applied research work which we would like to present in this article constituted a significant part of the Transnational Strategy for the Sustainable Territorial Development of the Danube Area with a Focus on Tourism (DATOURWAY), within the Programme IPA SEE 2008. The framework of the strategy was created by the methodology of our research group highlighted in the following.

The structure of the complex objective pyramid we created for the DATOURWAY programme consists of the following levels (in hierarchical order):

- Vision;
- Comprehensive objectives;
- Strategic objectives;
- Priorities;
- Measures.

In order to achieve a uniform tourism destination and appearance on the tourism market we determined the most important priorities of the DATOURWAY programme’s objective pyramid (all of them strongly connected to transnational co-operation):

- Tourism attraction development;
- Development of tourism services and products;
- Strengthening of the tourism management activities;
- Tourism development of the local resources of the Danube region;
- Strengthening the regional identity and cohesion by the Danube cultural tourism development;
- Human resources development of the Danube region;
- Development of environment culture and environmental protection along the Danube;
- Infrastructural development of the Danube Region.

Within these priorities we highlight the most important measures emphasizing cross-border co-operations in the next chapter (the presented chapters our research group elaborated during the planning period are constituted in the transnational strategy of the Datourway programme).

2.1. The appearance of the development of cross-border cooperation in the strategy of the DATOURWAY programme

2.1.1. The coordinated strengthening of the Danube national parks tourism

The Danube Regional Strategy (DRS) accepted by the EU in 2011 handles as priority the protection of the environment and within that biodiversity and the maintenance of the natural values. And within tourism development the heritage protection received priority, highlighting the advantages in regional cooperation and common actions.

The cooperation among the national parks along the Danube already has some programs supported by the EU. Such an initiative is the Danube Parks project. We also well know the examples of the bilateral and cross border relations. But the majority of them concentrate...
on the protection of the natural values and its maintenance so the utilisation and tourism development have not been raised to higher level of cooperation yet.

As an example we can mention the IPA Cross Border Programme (2007-2013) between Hungary and Croatia. This also contains as a priority activities that can be connected to the measure in the scope of sustainable environment and tourism.

This measure can totally the uncoordinated parallel tourism developments. The keyword of this measure is coordination since in all of the national parks along the Danube (and its sub-rivers) tourism developments are carried out focusing on value protection and maintenance. It is also important to emphasize that this measure should be harmonized with the main actions and priorities of the Danube Parks project. As a result of this study trails, natural and heritage routes, visitor and nature protection exhibition places and forest schools have been created separately in each protected area. Network of water and cycling routes and their services infrastructure have been added to them. The creation of the possible physical connection between the national parks (ecocorridors) should be of great importance as well.

All these were created in each national park but the network connecting them is missing which would make the chain of products characteristic to the Danube. This measure would solve this missing coordination and the harmonisation of the developments and their connection. It comprises the tourism attraction exploration, tourism product creation and the connected products’ and services’ differentiated development into a uniform planning system. The complementary development of the protected areas and the surrounding settlements would be realised within the framework of the measure. The coordination expands to the management and marketing of the existing and planned tourism products as well.

2.1.2. Coordinated development of the specific tourism products at the Danube (eco-, water-, cultural tourism products, local gastronomy)

The linear allocation of the tourism attractions and products is a basic characteristics for the river destinations. The basis for the attractions – complementing each other, or separated from each other – can be found at all tourism products which are based of natural and river values, cultural heritage, monumental values, the historical past or the farming traditions. For all these the cultural values of the past are built upon. The attractions complementing each other provide the chance to create diversified tourism product development.

The supply of ecotourism, based primarily on the protected areas, is built upon the attractions of the Danube. All this is complemented by the networks of water tourism (small ship and boat ports, relaxing and camping sites, ports of excursionist ships), the routes of cultural programs and events, the cultural and pilgrimage routes and the thematic routes exhibiting the production traditions and the local products (food, craftsmen products) such as the wine routes along the Danube. The gastronomy tradition can also be a base for specialised tourism products by gastronomy festivals or local product markets. In order to develop specialised products it is necessary to create an international database on the already existing products. The product development based on attractions complementing each other should be preferred and to create a network to connect the products.

One should stand for the creation of package supply on the basis of the already existing products. The development of the ports of the Danube, as improving the conditions of water tourism, should have an accentuated attention.
2.1.3. The creation of an interregional, region specific thematic tourism experiences

The reason to create this measure is based on the necessity in tourism to create interregional, region specific thematic tourism experiences since the Danube as a linear geographical item can perfectly serve as to create thematic, Danube-based tourism experiences. The basis for these experiences is provided by the Danube and its vast natural geographical and cultural background. So one of the main aims of this measure is to transform the existing attractions to realisable tourism products. A certain tourism destination – such as the forming Danube tourism potential – can only be successful when it provides a complete services background for its visitors. Nevertheless the pulling product is provided by the attractions with significant reach, they are unable to create and inspire satisfaction and future return of the visitors or the tourists to the given area. So in this respect the identification and valorisation of the specific characteristics of the Danube is of crucial importance in this measure. The major actor of the tourism value chain is the tourist who in terms of satisfying its needs would intend to utilise the tourism product in a more and more complex way. Based on the above mentioned the creation of an experience chain in the areas along the river Danube can be built on a specific, characteristic tourism product or supply element.

2.1.4. Establishment of a regional event management network

The main reason to create this measure is based on the necessity to establish a regional event management network in order to enhance the cooperation between the various events that characterise the tourism of the Danube region as well. This network of event management would be able to organise, develop and maintain the event supply of the Danube region providing a more characteristic and varied tourism supply for the potential visitors. One of the most important elements of event tourism is that they can attract the tourists not only for one occasion but later as well to visit a festival or an event. The characteristics of event tourism (experience tourism) are provided by such events which are connected to certain periods of time or location or have regional or greater significance and supply the consumers with a peculiar value of experience. The following offers can be classified into this type: musical performances, open air concerts, theatres and concerts, experience parks, exhibitions and fairs, artistic exhibition with more than regional reach, national and international sports events. The regional and spatial event network management along the Danube would be able to enhance, develop and coordinate the different events of the Danube area promoting to create a common image for the tourists and the tourism market as well. These events, apart from their harmonisation, could also be classified and grouped.

2.1.5. Supply and market oriented accommodation development based on a uniform qualification system

Accommodation development is one of the most important factors of tourism development. A certain area having only attractions on the supply side should also provide its visitors an adequate supply and market oriented accommodation network which should be based on a
uniform qualification system. This latter would provide the adequate quality of accommodations for the visitors. The measure would cover both the commercial accommodations sector and the private accommodations as well. The major aim of the measure is to raise and enhance the quality and quantity of the accommodations, to improve the exploitation ratio of the accommodations and to enhance the income of the prices for the private and public investors of the accommodation services sector. All these developments would consistently follow the principles of the most recent and up-to-date supply and market trends, adapting the changes of the market and the demand side also enhanced with the possible establishment of a Danube label as an added value to the existing classification system.

2.1.6. The creation of transnational network of cycling routes, wine routes, and various walking/hiking nature based educational paths

The creation of a transnational network of cycling routes, wine routes, and various walking/hiking nature based educational paths would further enhance the development of tourism services and products of the area on the supply side attracting visitors and tourists who are interested in the thematic supply of the region. In this respect the demand for the Danube region could further be enhanced on the international level (international tourism) and both on the national and regional level (domestic tourism). One of the most important tourism products of the strategy are wine tourism and active tourism as well, since almost all the studied area of the Danube region possesses of traditional wine cultures and also – connected to ecotourism as well – excellent opportunities to develop the different forms of active tourism. In order to develop these supply, a transnational network of cycling routes, wine routes, and various walking/hiking nature based educational paths should be created, which could serve the management, marketing and tourism development aspects of these tourism products. The measure also proposes to create a strategic concept for an integrated network of Greenways in the DATOURWAY area and the expansion of the network to the Danube region by developing the Greenway networks in the cross border areas along the Danube as well.

2.1.7. Establishment of the tourism management and tourism marketing networks in the region

The Danube Regional Strategy accepted by the EU in 2011 handles the tourism brand development as priority („To develop the Danube Region as a European brand”) and the development of the tourism destinations as well („To establish the Danube Region as important European tourism destination”). As an antecedent of the harmonisation of the marketing strategies and the organisation systems we have to mention the cross border IPA programmes and the Euroregional co-operations. So the greatest task is to create the coordination and the uniform development strategy concerning both two areas. So the measure has to mean the appearance of the uniform marketing strategy which makes the programme coordination of the national, regional and cross border coordination a necessity.
As a part of the marketing strategy the following topics’ analysis and international level standardisation is necessary: market analysis, products strategy, the impoundment of tourism sub-regions, creation of a marketing communicational and promotion plan, incentive of investments and the creation and harmonisation of a touristic informational system.

As a part of the market analysis the elaboration of a uniform market research method, the demand analysis, the competitor analysis, the market segmentation and positioning is a task to be carried out.

Within the framework of the product strategy the aim is to compile a product portfolio and the standardisation of its connected development priorities.

The impoundment of the tourism sub-regions can be carried out with the uniform methodology, which can directly affect the elaboration of the given sub-region’s product portfolio and the establishment of the management organisation.

When creating the marketing communication and promotion plan the most important task is to standardise the marketing communication mix.

The incentive of the investments can be carried out by taking into consideration the state and private sector and also the EU sources in which the Regional Operative Programs’ tender sources distribution play an exceedingly important part.

The traditional organisational forms of tourism information systems should be redefined, we have to urge the creation of new organisation systems based on principle of bottom up operations.

The measure also indicates and proposes to elect/nominate a GESTOR (in the form of an association) that will be the HOST to take care of realization of programs, actions etc.

2.1.8. Establishment of local and regional TDM organisations, and their cooperative network

The Danube Regional Strategy accepted by the EU in 2011 handles the tourism destination development (“To establish the Danube Region as important European tourism destination”), as priority which is based by the establishment of the destination management organisations (TDM). According to the European and American trends the functioning of the classic non profit Tourinform networks will be relieved by the bottom up, vertically organised, multi actor destination management organisation, the TDM. The organisational form presuming the cooperation between the public and private spheres serves new type of tasks such as the application of the classic marketing devices, market research, the compiling of the product packages, and the creation of the uniform market appearance and image with the involvement of the visitor management, the local entrepreneurs and the local population. It is also to be commented that the Danube Delta should be treated separately – this is a 4th project proposal (Regional Development Organization).

The initiation of the new model presumes an organic political will in the Danube Region on the local government and governmental level as well. The most effective device for this can be the creation of a uniform tender source realisation possibility in the ROP programmes of the EU (e.g. Hungary).

From the professional point of view the standardisation of the following criteria system would be necessary:
- The impoundment of the destination areas (subregions)
• The judicial framework of the organisation system (tourism association, TDM non-profit tourism Ltd.)
• The determination of the compulsory and voluntary actors of the TDM members (from the actors of tourism: accommodation providers, guest caterers, travel bureaus and other tourism ventures, local governments and their institutional system, natural persons)
• The standardisation of the task system: tasks related to tourism marketing (product development, market propagation, the improvement of catering conditions, approach forming, communication, networking and partnership) and the Tourinform bureau issuing the touristic information tasks (informing the tourists, the functioning of a uniform booking system, content development)
• The financing sources of the TDM organisation (the founder fortune of the members and their annual support, separate business income, market services to the participants of the TDM, sponsorships)

The connection forms’ fixation to the vertical connection level of the new organisation system (spatial/regional, national, international).

2.1.9. Development of the border and cross border co-operations of tourism

The Danube Regional Strategy accepted by the EU in 2011 handles the cross border tourism co-operations (cross border investments, transnational tourism services, tourism motivated mobility, subsidiary transport means) as priority, which basically are based on the local/regional values and the cultural characteristics.

The tourism development of border regions is a complex matter taking into consideration for example the development problems between an EU and non-EU member, nevertheless it is indispensable since the tourism of numerous regions can only achieve its potential provided by its attractions by complex developments.

The basis for the cross border tourism co-operations can be the former and present international tourism co-operations (e.g. IPA, Euroregions) which serve as an example and basis at the same time.

The establishment of the co-operations is based on the analysis and evaluation of numerous topics:
• The analysis of the bordering tourism attractions and their utilisation.
• The harmonisation of the judicial background between the neighbouring countries in favour of the developments.
• The survey of the common utilisation of natural, cultural areas and other protected units.
• The harmonisation of the coordination of investments for example in the case of transnational destination the creation of an international TDM organisation.

On the presented basis – in accordance with the Danube Regional Strategy of the European Union – in the cross border areas the international tourism and cross border tourism initiatives can be interpreted in the following areas:
• Common tourism product and destination development among the countries.
• The creation of transnational products and product packages.
• The creation of sustainable mobility and transport conditions in the cross border areas utilised by tourism.
• The establishment and development of the port network in order to promote river tourism.
• The creation of international tour and cycling routes.
• The creation of transnational thematic routes.
• The tourism purposed utilisation and protection of cultural values connected to the Danube.
• The organisation of a cross-border environmental week
• The harmonization of the program supply of the ethno-houses

After the transnational developments, the spatial cohesion and management is of key importance which can be carried out in vertical and horizontal forms as well.

2.1.10. Strengthening the co-operation between the Danube region settlements

The priority consists due to the co-operations between the settlements the strengthening of the local/spatial/regional economy and economic relations – of course tourism as well – and further on all the forms of co-operation in the fields of education, culture and art with which the spatial identity and spatial cohesion is strengthened.

The basis for the co-operations among the settlements is provided by the spatial co-operations and European Union’s statistical units, the micro regions and further on certain significant investments serving as catalysers.

Basically all common co-operations have an identity strengthening role and provide cohesion among the participant units. Deriving from the complexity of the measure it means a very wide range for co-operation forms out of which the most significant ones are:

• Common investments among settlements or settlement groups in order to invigorate the spatial economy.
• Attraction of investors to the region by the co-operation of the settlements from which the settlements taking part can profit from (e.g. taxes, jobs).
• Taking the bordering area to common protection.
• Common tenders and applications in order to receive common support and investments.
• Common infrastructural development among settlements or groups of settlements taking into consideration the tourism infrastructure as well.
• Common education institutions by the co-operation of settlements and creation of trainings in order to develop human resources.
• Organisation of cultural and sports events with the participation of several settlements.
• The creation of tourism management and coordination organisation among settlements in order to create a more effective tourism industry in the region.
• Organizing common cultural events among the settlements along the border (folk dance)

The co-operations among the settlements, orienting to the international trends, could provide an adequate basis for tourism which imagine the functioning of tourism on a regional co-operation basis.
2.1.11. Strengthening the civilian networks in the region

The DATOURWAY region’s vision and comprehensive objective contains the creation of the new products’ unique character and their supporting background. One of the most important conditions of the development’s social embeddedness is the obtainment of the local support, where civil-professional organizations, the non-profit supports of tourism can become major actors. NGOs operating in and for tourism are basically of local, small regional organization. We can hope for their regional effect, if their cooperating system comes into life. NGOs also have a key role in awakening the local population’s affinity for tourism.

Besides mobilizing the civil sphere, the measure aims at informing it as well. The regional organizations’ inter- and crossborder relations development is able to create the social embeddedness of the whole strategy. Among the applied methods can be mentioned the analysis of activity of the civil organizations, their categorization according to field of activity and experiences of cooperation and the evaluation of their motivations. Among the categories of main activities of civil organizations a special attention shall be paid for:

- Heritage protection, tradition cultivating organizations, depositaries of Danube culture
- Environmental protection, settlement motivated and alternative environment minded, applying eco and organic methodologies
- Those bringing together the local communities, of local patriot emotion strengthening the local bind
- And those active in different fields of tourism: associations, NGOs organizing rural, wine, eco, cultural tourism

The initiatory role could belong to the professional-civil organizations embracing the different regional levels in the creation of the regional cooperation network.

Considering the organizational methods, it is expedient to bring to life Danube Region NGO forums with a leading orientation to tourism.

Joint actions and finding the way to each other of organizations operating in similar fields shall be supported.

2.1.12. Networking of the middle and high level tourism training institutions in the region

The tense and harmonised cooperation among the institutions of tourism trainings establishes the functioning of tourism as an industrial branch on the adequate quality level. They could carry on monitoring activities by scientific and research actions and also by the analysis of the actual market situation they can determined the relevant development directions. The basis for the accentuated activities is based upon the cooperation of the institutions which covers all their functioning and scientific activities.

The cooperation of the institutions could cover a very wide range of areas out of which there are some accentuated ones which are concerned as priority:

- The elaboration of common research methods and their consequent application.
- The share of the scientific results and their widely publicity as much as possible.
- The elaboration of tutor mobility programmes based on the effective cooperation.
- The elaboration of student mobility programmes in order to deepen the experiences of the potentially applied human resources.
• The involvement of non educating organisations and institutions into the activities (e.g. national parks, civilian organisations, non-profit organisation etc.)
• The organisation of regular professional forums involving the actors of the region in order to be able to effectively change and share opinions.
• The creation of common professional publications and online information network in order to promote fast communication.
• The development of a transnational institutional association of different institutions to work with the same topic.

The harmonised functioning of the featured areas provides a long term competitiveness which ensures the functioning of the region’s tourism orienting to the present world trends.

3. SUMMARY

The overall results of the presented DATOURWAY programme and the tourism relations of the European Danube Region Strategy demonstrated from different perspectives that the Danube as a possible tourism destination still possesses a great potential which is not yet utilised.

One of the most important aims of our planning process was to create a joint, internationally recognised tourism brand and product based on the Danube’s environmental, historical and cultural heritage.

During the possible realisation of the aims cross-border co-operations are the most vital tools to achieve a successful management and development of the Danube’s potential in tourism.

As a final statement of the topic of our paper we also would like to strengthen that in order to achieve more successful results of the cross border co-operations it is also inevitable to join all the countries of the project to the European Union since there will be greater chances of financial support with CBC programmes and other grants and sources funded not only by the member states but by the EU as well.

Our research group’s findings and methodology was supported by a one-year empirical and field research work during which we believe a practical tool and development programme was created in order to achieve a more sustainable and competitive tourism sector around the Danube area.

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