

Similarity and Complementarity in Tourism Development in a Cross-Border Region The Case of Bihor–Hajdú Bihar

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Introduction

DESPITE STAGNANT economic growth, security concerns, political unrest and the migrant crisis, Europe’s travel and tourism industry “continues to see erratic performance” as shown by the latest World Travel Market (WTM) Global Trends Reports and “the number of inbound visitors still increasing year after year”¹. Emerging trends dethrone famous European destinations giving the tourism industry the opportunity to offer new alternative and secondary destinations². There is a big chance for new tourist destinations, but the competition for new arrivals is strong and only the competitive ones will remain on the market. In this context, the case of a county as a tourist destination in a cross-border region is very challenging. On the one hand, there is a high probability that the touristic potential has many similarities and the two counties on each side of the border are in direct competition for certain touristic products. On the other hand, through EU cross-border cooperation, alternative possibilities for tourism development have opened up, as well as new opportunities to devise joint tourism development strategies and develop complementary tourism packages. However, as the literature review of recently published research and policy papers shows, cross-border cooperation is no guarantee for symmetrical tourism development of neighboring borderlands and for spatially equitable distribution of tourism benefits³. Product similarity, market similarity (visitor number, visitor type etc.), thematic similarity and complementarity are, in our opinion, critical for the integrative cross-border development of tourism.

Accordingly, the main research questions addressed in this paper are: What is the situation of tourism in the Bihor (Romania) and Hajdú-Bihar (Hungary) cross-border region? How did the cross-border cooperation contribute to the development of tourism? What are the touristic products that can be developed and successfully promoted by the Bihor County based on similarities and complementarity regarding the development of tourism in Bihor (Romania) and Hajdú-Bihar (Hungary) cross-border region?

The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 provides a literature analysis of the tourism development in European cross-border regions in order to formulate the research hypothesis; Section 2 provides an analytical framework of tourism development in Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region; Section 3 considers the research design used to address the research hypothesis and present the findings of the research, and Section 4 summarizes and concludes the paper.

Tourism Development in European Cross-Border Regions. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

THE SUSTAINABLE development of tourism and avoidance of failures are given by the ability of decision makers to identify, in a timely manner, the changes of behavioral and technological determinants, interactions and their impact on the evolution of tourist consumption⁴. On the tourist market, the consumer has acquired a strong position and has contributed a lot to the emergence of new standards of comfort and quality. Tourists are increasingly looking for more unique and specific experiences in the destinations visited, which implies, for example, unique cultural attractions or landscapes⁵.

The analysis of the empirical case studies of tourism development in a cross-border region emphasizes the role of the tourism industry in furthering a ‘borderless’ regional image and identity and, as Prokkola shows, the fact that “the landscape of state control is gradually becoming a landscape of tourism”⁶. According to Blasco, Guia and Prats, there are five categories of factors influencing emergence processes in tourism development in a cross-border region: institutional similarity, bridging actors, leadership and entrepreneurial capacities, close relationships, and serendipity⁷. The factors of success of cross-border projects in tourism vary from the local character of the project, the involvement of local actors and actual cross-border cooperation, as Husak shows,⁸ to ‘thick’ (cross-border) institutional arrangements, the multi-scalar representation of tourism stakeholders in decision-making processes and the transversal position of tourism in regional development strategies, according to Stoffelen and Vanneste⁹.

The development of local cross-border tourism projects is no guarantee for the tourism development of neighboring borderlands. In some cases, as shown by Stoffelen and Vanneste, these projects “may even reinforce asymmetrical socio-economic development directions”¹⁰ if institutional brokers are not able to assure the integrative character of tourism in the cross-border region building process. In this regard, Stoffelen and Vanneste note about “cross-border institutional under-mobilization” (in the case of Germany–the Czech Republic) and “over-mobilization” (in the case of Germany–Belgium)¹¹. For Nilsson, Eskilsson and Ek, “political issues are downplayed in relation to economic issues, even though in the case of tourism, political issues like regional identity are not possible to avoid”¹², and the explanation is related to two fundamental and contradictory visions grounded in the European project: regionalization and internationalization.

Also, there are a lot of limitations of cross-border tourism projects. According to Ilbery and Saxena, the existing administrative boundaries and weak inter-sectorial collaboration greatly impede a strategic vision in integrated tourism¹³. Moreover, as Prokkola shows, even if the creation of tourism networks is an important objective of cross-border projects, tourism companies rarely have responsible roles in the projects and, therefore, cross-border cooperation remains predominantly between governmental organizations and superficially between companies¹⁴. In order to solve the problems of weak inter-sectorial collaboration and low cooperativity, Chen recommends measures based on clustering innovation from different fields: innovation capability, collaborative networks, service platforms, cultural atmospheres, modular innovation, financial systems etc.¹⁵. Lamers, Liggett and Amelung recommended a collective strategy that should be positioned at the heart of tourism regulation and should be developed to address collective interests in the context of increasingly diverging interests of actors¹⁶. Lewczuk and Ustinovichius introduced the concept of “multi-functional development of cross-border regions”¹⁷, based on the idea of the inclusion of new industries and activities into the existent environment (tourism, construction, processing of raw materials and other businesses).

We can synthesise the cross-border cooperation in tourism development by the following conclusion of Weidenfeld, Butler and Williams: the most important components in the context of spatial proximity and clustering among tourist attractions are clustering, cooperation and complementarity, “product similarities, in general, and thematic similarity, in particular.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, even the role of the tourism industry in furthering a borderless regional identity and image is well known, similarity and complementarity in tourism development in cross-border regions are little studied.

Starting from here, we selected as relevant to our analysis the following studies/reports on the touristic situation of Romania:

- Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017 of the World Economic Forum, according to which Romania Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index and Index Components for 2017 are shown in Table no. 1 and Table no. 2.
- The study ordered in 2010 by the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism of Romania entitled “Development of a new tourism brand for Romania”¹⁹ according to which Romania can offer 6 competitive tourism products on the tourism market, namely: cultural circuits, wildlife and natural parks tourism, rural tourism, health and wellness tourism, city breaks, active and adventure tourism, with the following direct competitors: Hungary, Bulgaria, Austria, Poland and Spain. Hungary is a direct competitor for Romania with the following 3 tourist products: cultural circuits, health and wellness tourism, city breaks.

Accordingly, our research hypotheses have been developed as follows:

- H1: The tourism situation in Bihor County has improved over the past 2 years, being better than Romania’s situation for most of the pillars of the Competitiveness Index in Tourism according to the World Economic Forum (2017), possibly due to cross-border cooperation (HU-RO).
- H2: The supply situation of the 6 competitive tourism products namely: cultural circuits, wildlife and natural parks tourism, rural tourism, health and wellness tourism,

TABLE 1. Romania Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index, 2017

Romania	2015	2017
Rank (out of total number of analysed countries)	66 (of 141 countries)	68 (of 136 countries)
Score (1-7)	3.8	3.8

SOURCE: World Economic Forum, Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017, Country Profiles: <http://reports.weforum.org/travel-and-tourism-competitiveness-report-2017/country-profiles/#economy=ROU>.

TABLE 2. Romania Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index Components, 2017

No.	The Pillars of Romania Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index	Romania's rank (of 136 countries)	Romania's score (on a scale of 1 to 7)
1.	Business environment	76	4.4
2.	Safety and security	39	5.8
3.	Health and hygiene	31	6.1
4.	Human resources and labour market	81	4.4
5.	ICT readiness	60	4.7
6.	Prioritization of travel & tourism	108	3.8
7.	International openness	45	3.9
8.	Price competitiveness	85	4.7
9.	Environmental sustainability	43	4.4
10.	Air transport infrastructure	82	2.4
11.	Ground and port infrastructure	92	2.8
12.	Tourist service infrastructure	62	4.4
13.	Natural resources	68	3.0
14.	Cultural resources and business travel	46	2.3

SOURCE: World Economic Forum, Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017, Country Profiles: <http://reports.weforum.org/travel-and-tourism-competitiveness-report-2017/country-profiles/#economy=ROU>

city breaks, active and adventure tourism in Bihor County (Romania) compared to Hajdú-Bihar County (Hungary) is similar to Romania's situation with respect to Hungary, and Hajdú-Bihar County is a direct competitor for Bihor County with the following 3 tourism products: cultural circuits, health and wellness tourism, city breaks.

- H3: In the tourism development of Bihor County, the emphasis should be laid on the development of tourism products for which Hungary and Hajdú-Bihar County are not direct competitors.

Similarity or Asymmetry in Tourism Development in Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar Neighboring Counties? What Do the Statistical Data Say?

TOURISM HAS been a field of common interest for the counties of Bihor (Romania) and Hajdú-Bihar (Hungary), due to the potential and traditions with which they pride themselves. The creation of the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion at the end of 2002 has meant opening up for a new cross-border cooperation in the field of tourism. Partnerships have been developed on the basis of common work within the framework of the projects financed by PHARE Cross-border Cooperation Romania–Hungary Programme 2004–2006 (four projects) and the Hungary–Romania Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007–2013 (six projects)²⁰.

The two counties are close in terms of both population (568,924 inhabitants, Bihor County and 534,974 Hajdú-Bihar County) and area (7,544 km² Bihor County and 6,210.5 km² Hajdú-Bihar County). Ethnic and religious diversity, as well as the existence of the two towns—county residences with ancient traditions, Oradea and Debrecen, are important similarities, too. Regarding the touristic potential we can identify the following similarities: a. thermal waters capitalized in renowned resorts (Băile Felix, Băile I Mai, Hajdúszoboszló); b. a rich architectural and historical heritage (medieval fortresses, monasteries, cathedrals, churches, synagogues, monuments, memorial houses, various architectural ensembles); c. a diversity of traditions (pottery, weaving, painted glass icons, strung beads, etc.) and cultural events (festivals, fairs, shows, etc.); d. gastronomic habits highly valued when organizing events, conferences, leisure activities and various competitions.

Speaking about complementarity, in Bihor County the principal tourist attractions are: the beauty of the mountain landscapes, the uniqueness of caves, the momentousness of karst coals and the natural lakes and rivers, all surrounded by a delightful biodiversity. Hajdú-Bihar County proudly harnesses its traditions of farming in the Hungarian *puszta*, fishing in artificial ponds and bird watching through tourism.

Tourism generates significant effects in the economic, social and environmental fields, which is recognized both by the authorities and operators from the counties of Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar. In the case of the cross-border region Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar there have been identified a number of benefits of cross-border cooperation mentioned by the literature. First of all we must mention that there is a better use of the tourist potential through access to new markets and increase of revenues. Secondly, the persons concerned have access to new resources that can provide profit margins higher than those from a saturated market by saving on financial resources and reducing operating costs. Thirdly, participants benefit from training and performance programs and have access to modern technologies, the effects of which will be seen in the quality of services²¹. On the other hand, it is also true that the tourism competition between Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar has become even stronger.

Statistical data on tourism activity in Bihor county and Hajdú-Bihar County²² shows a rising trend for most of the indicators for 2000-2016, as we can see in Table no. 3.

The analysis of the data provided by official statistics²³ and calculations based on these led us to the following conclusions:

- Accommodation capacity for the year 2016 was 12,283 thousands beds in Bihor County and 17,412 beds in Hajdú-Bihar County, i.e. 41.75% more. Towards the year 2000, the indicator registered an increase of 1.17 times in Bihor County and of 1.12 times at the level of Hajdú-Bihar County, which allowed the reduction of the difference in the year 2016 in relation to the year 2000 with 6.46%. Growth was interrupted during the period 2010-2013, in both cases as a result of the economic crisis, and presents a sharper growth trend over the last year at the level of Bihor County;
- The number of tourist arrivals increased with 88.70% for Bihor County in the year 2016 in relation to the year 2000 and with 84.88% in the case of Hajdú-Bihar County. The only loss is at the level of the year 2010 in Bihor County, followed by a quick return that allowed the achievement of a number of arrivals of 411,823. In the case of Hajdú-Bihar County, the number of tourist arrivals is higher by 56,847 people;
- The number of overnight stays has also increased in the year 2016 in relation to the year 2000, but on a much smaller scale, i.e. 26.87% in Bihor County and 30.77% in the case of Hajdú-Bihar County. Growth was interrupted more obviously and more persistently in Bihor County in the period 2010-2015, in relation to a lower and shorter decrease in Hajdú-Bihar County during 2011 and 2012;
- The average length of stay has decreased in both counties, with 32.74% in the case of Bihor County and with 29.27% in the case of Hajdú-Bihar County. Another thing to note is the tourist attraction of the territory of upper Bihor County Hajdú-Bihar, which is shown by the indicator of the average time of stay. It is important to note that this indicator is higher in the case of Bihor County for the year 2016, a turnover of 3.37 days-tourist in relation to 2.9 in the case of Hajdú-Bihar County.

On the basis of the analysis of the available, secondary and comparable data, we can say that tourism is more developed in Hajdú-Bihar County than in Bihor County, but Bihor has caught up in recent years, possibly due to the high level of EU funds attracted and to cross-border cooperation. Another thing to note is the tourist attraction capacity of the territory of Bihor County, which is superior to Hajdú-Bihar County. This fact is demonstrated by the “average length of stay” indicator.

Bihor County tourism development is highlighted also by the indicators of accommodation capacity in service—3344.92 thousand beds-days and the index of net use of operational capacity, which has reached a level of 41.50% in the year 2016, as can be seen in Table no. 4.

The significant development of tourism over the last two years in Bihor County is also highlighted by the increase by 20 units of the number of tourist structures with functions of tourist accommodation in the year 2016 in relation to 2015²⁴. We see not only the increase from 179 units in 2015 to 199 units in 2016, but also the emergence

TABLE 3. Statistical Indicators of Tourist Circulation in Bihor County (Romania) and Hajdú-Bihar County (Hungary), 2000-2016

Indicator	County	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Existing accommodation capacity (thousands of beds)	Bihor	10.472	10.455	9.152	9.718	10.284	10.071	10.421	11.690	12.283
	Hajdú-Bihar	15.521	17.330	16.470	15.470	14.333	15.982	18.170	17.211	17.412
Tourist arrivals (thousands of persons)	Bihor	218,24	216	194,1	228,4	268,4	252	293,3	344,1	411,823
	Hajdú-Bihar	253,49	299,73	344,88	335,79	322,83	352,70	399,49	445,39	468,67
The number of overnight stays (thousands of overnight stays)	Bihor	1093,8	1131	885,5	1004,4	1029,2	952,2	1058,1	1137	1388,8
	Hajdú-Bihar	1039,31	1079,03	1138,10	1040,95	1033,05	1093,37	1198,47	1291,63	1359,14
Average length of stay (days)	Bihor	5,01	5,23	4,56	4,39	3,83	3,77	3,60	3,30	3,37
	Hajdú-Bihar	4,1	3,6	3,3	3,1	3,2	3,1	3,0	2,9	2,9

SOURCE: Romanian National Institute of Statistics (RNIS), Territorial Statistics, (2016), <http://www.insse.ro/cms/ro/content/statistici-teritoriale> [10 July 2017], Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO), Regional statistics, (2016), http://www.ksh.hu/stadat_annual_6_4 [10 July 2017], authors' calculation

TABLE 4. Functional Accommodation Capacity in Bihor County (Romania), 2010-2016

Indicator	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Accommodation capacity in service (thousand beds-days)	2908,5	2577	2354,7	2613,2	2703,8	2596,3	2635,4	2925,1	3344,92
The index of net use of operational capacity (%)	37,6	43,9	37,7	38,4	38,1	36,7	40,1	38,9	41,5

SOURCE: Romanian National Institute of Statistics (RNIS), Territorial Statistics, (2016), <http://www.insse.ro/cms/ro/content/statistici-teritoriale> [10 July 2017]

of new structures, more adapted to the current requirements of the market, namely: tourist hostels, hotels, villas, apartments.

An important aspect identified in our analysis is the high degree of seasonality in Bihor County tourism, as can be seen in Table no. 5. The high figures recorded during July and August show the dependence on natural factors and imply the need for development of attractive services and packages for other times of the year as well.

The analysis of statistical data concerning tourism in Hajdú-Bihar County also represents a source of inspiration for developing more attractive tourist packages in Bihor

TABLE 5. Monthly Distribution of the Main indicators of Tourist Movement in Bihor County (Romania), 2016

Month	Arrivals number	Overnights number	The density of tourist (tourists arriving/resident)	Tourist density (no./area tourist arrivals)
January	22.823	55.043	4,01%	3.02
February	23.435	57.778	4,11%	3.10
March	23.861	58.479	4,19%	3.16
April	27.564	80.340	4,84%	3.65
May	34.173	120.268	6,00%	4.53
June	37.379	143.813	6,57%	4.95
July	48.887	185.407	8,58%	6.48
August	57.358	210.698	10,08%	7.60
September	43.261	166.701	7,60%	5.73
October	35.739	132.077	6,28%	4.74
November	30.809	105.903	5,41%	4.08
December	25.600	69.979	4,49%	3.39

SOURCE: Romanian National Institute of Statistics (RNIS), Territorial Statistics, (2016), <http://www.insse.ro/cms/ro/content/statistici-teritoriale> [10 July 2017], authors' calculation

County. For instance, the Hungarian statistics include data relating to catering and the structure of incomes in balneary tourism. Regarding catering, there is a number of 2239 units registered in 2015 with the following structure: restaurants and buffets; confectionaries; taverns and music clubs; public catering units; work place, event and mass catering units. Regarding balnear tourism, the Hungarian statistics is more inspiring and generous. For example, in 2015, the number of visitors of baths in Hajdú-Bihar County was of 3.3340 thousand, out of which 346 thousand were supported by social insurance. The average turnover of the baths was 3.570 million HUF and the average turnover of the bath services was 1.255 million HUF. The turnover of the Hajdú-Bihar county baths has the following structure: medical examination, medical treatment, trade and catering, wellness treatment, sauna, beauty and other treatments²⁵.

Tourism Product Similarity and Thematic Complementarity in the Bihor–Hajdu-Bihar Cross Border Region. What Do the Interviews Say?

BECAUSE THIS research aims to highlight the similarity and complementarity in tourism development in the Bihor–Hajdú Bihar cross-border region at a descriptive level, referring to the description and understanding of the specific situation of Bihor county as well as the extrapolation of the results at the level of Hajdú-Bihar County, the method used was the qualitative semi-structured interview (in-depth interview). This method allows for an in-depth understanding of what was said by the interviewees²⁶.

The interview guide has been organized to capitalize on the respondents' experience in tourism and cross-border cooperation. The interview guide was structured into four parts: 1. general information about the respondent: name, surname, organization, job/position, experience in tourism and/or cross-border cooperation; 2. general assessment of the tourism situation in Bihor County compared to Romania's situation; 3. evaluation of the possibilities of developing competitive tourism products in Bihor County (Romania) towards Hajdú-Bihar County (Hungary); 4. opinions, comments, recommendations of the respondents regarding the development of tourism in Bihor County, as well as on the experience in cross-border cooperation in Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar.

The sample was chosen through a non-probability sampling technique both by evaluation and by identification. The selection of respondents targeted public authorities, associations and agencies with competence in the development and promotion of tourism in Bihor County and with significant experience in cross-border cooperation in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region, on the one hand, and hotels, guesthouses, travel agencies, consultancy or training companies in the field of tourism in Bihor County, on the other hand. In a first step, potential respondents were sent the interview guide via e-mail, and then contacted by phone to conduct interviews. From a total of 90 potential respondents contacted in Bihor County, 30 persons came from public authorities, associations, agencies, and 60 persons came from hotels, guesthouses, travel agencies, consultancy or training firms in tourism). In the end, 18 people were interviewed, as follows: 7 people with significant experience (over 5 years) in cross-border cooperation (project managers/experts in writing and implementing cross-border cooperation projects) from the Bihor County Council, Oradea City Hall, Oradea Metropolitan Area Association for Intra-Community Development; 7 people with significant experience (over 5 years) in tourism (general managers/managers) from 3 hotels, 2 travel agencies, 1 consultancy in tourism company, 1 tourism and hospitality training company in Bihor County; 4 persons with responsibilities/leadership positions (executive directors) in the field of cross-border cooperation, respectively development and promotion of tourism in Bihor County from the Oradea Cross-Border Cooperation Office, the Bihor Destination Management Agency, the Bihor National Tourist Information and Promotion Center, the Association for Promoting Tourism in Oradea and Region. Data collection was done during March-June 2017.

Most of the subjects (94.44%) consider that the situation of tourism in Bihor County has improved over the past two years. We consider it insignificant that one respondent has another opinion, whereby "over the past two years, the situation of tourism in Bihor County has remained unchanged" (M.J). Relevant in relation to the experience of cross-border cooperation of interviewees is the answer to the question: "To what extent has cross-border cooperation (HU-RO) contributed to the development of tourism in the county?" The majority (61.11%) responded "to a certain degree (somewhat)," the 4 persons (22.22%) responding "to a great extent" were involved and have significant experience (over 5 years) in cross-border cooperation, while the 3 respondents (16.66%) who responded "fairly little (not too much)" were not involved in cross-border cooperation projects but had significant experience (over 5 years) in the field of tourism. In

TABLE 6. The Situation of Bihor County According to the Respondents as Compared to the Situation of Romania According to Romania Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index Components, 2017

No.	The pillars of Romania Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index	+ Better situation	~ Similar situation	- Worse situation	Most frequent answer
1.	Business environment	12	5	1	66,66 % +
2.	Safety and security	13	5	0	72,22%+
3.	Health and hygiene	8	10	0	55,55% ~
4.	Human resources and labor market	9	4	5	50%+
5.	ICT readiness	13	5	0	72,22%+
6.	Prioritization of travel & tourism	13	4	1	72,22%+
7.	International openness	13	5	0	72,22%+
8.	Price competitiveness	10	7	1	55,55%+
9.	Environmental sustainability	7	9	2	50%~
10.	Air transport infrastructure	12	4	2	66,66 %+
11.	Ground and port infrastructure	3	11	4	61,11%~
12.	Tourist service infrastructure	8	7	3	44,44%+
13.	Natural resources	13	4	1	72,22%+
14.	Cultural resources and business travel	13	5	0	72,22%+

SOURCE: Processed by authors on the basis of the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017, Country Profiles: <http://reports.weforum.org/travel-and-tourism-competitiveness-report-2017/country-profiles/#economy=ROU>

our opinion, this is particularly important in terms of the impact of cross-border cooperation and confirms what the literature foregrounds.

According to the majority of the respondents, the situation of Bihor County compared to the situation of Romania following the WTF Travel&Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017, is better for most of the pillars, as can be seen in the Table no. 6. More specifically, for 9 of the 14 components of the Travel&Tourism Competitiveness Index, namely: business environment, safety and security, ICT readiness, prioritization of travel & tourism, international openness, price competitiveness, air transport infrastructure, natural resources, cultural resources and business travel, the majority of respondents (55.55%) consider that Bihor County's situation is better than the one existing at the national level. For 3 of the 14 components of the Travel&Tourism Competitiveness Index, namely: health and hygiene, environmental sustainability, ground and port infrastructure, most respondents (55.55%) consider the situation in Bihor County to be similar to the national situation. There is no component of the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index for which the response "worse" is the most common. However, the following two components, human resources and labour market and tourist service infrastructure are critical, with the situation of Bihor County being considered as better by only 50% of respondents in the case of human resources and labour market, respectively 44.44% for tourist service infrastructure.

Therefore, the H1 hypothesis is confirmed, and the situation of tourism in Bihor County has improved over the past 2 years, being better than Romania's situation for

TABLE 7. The Situation of Bihor County (Romania) as Compared to the Situation of Hajdú-Bihar County (Hungary) (matrix of direct competition based on the product-competitor pair)

No.	Tourism product	+	~	-	Most frequent answer
		Better situation	Similar situation	Worse situation	
1.	Cultural circuits	11	5	2	61,11 % +
2.	Wildlife and natural parks tourism	12	5	1	66,66 % +
3.	Rural tourism	5	9	4	50%~
4.	Health and wellness tourism	9	3	4	50%+
5.	City breaks	10	5	3	55,55+
6.	Active and adventure tourism	15	3	0	83,33+

SOURCE: Processed by authors on the basis of the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism of Romania, “Development of a new tourism brand for Romania”, (2010)

most pillars of the Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 according to the WEF, possibly also due to cross-border cooperation (HU-RO).

The situation of the offer of the 6 competitive tourism products, namely: cultural circuits, wildlife and natural parks tourism, rural tourism, health and wellness tourism, city breaks, active and adventure tourism in the case of Bihor County compared to Hajdú-Bihar County is partly similar to the situation of Romania in relation to Hungary as shown in Table no. 7. Hajdú-Bihar County, according to the respondents, is a direct competitor for Bihor County in the case of 2 products: rural tourism and health and wellness tourism, for which 50% of the respondents do not consider Bihor County to be better, but either similar or worse. A small difference is registered for the city breaks, where only 55.55% of respondents consider the situation of Bihor County to be better. Very relevant from our point of view is the frequency of the answers on active and adventure tourism, in the case of which 83.33% of the respondents consider the situation of Bihor County to be better. The answers in the case of wildlife and natural parks tourism and cultural circuits are also relevant, where the majority of respondents—66.66% and 61.11% respectively—consider the situation of Bihor County to be better.

Consequently, the hypothesis H2 is partially confirmed, the situation of supply of the 6 competitive tourism products, namely: cultural circuits, wildlife and natural parks tourism, rural tourism, health and wellness tourism, city breaks, active and adventure tourism in the case of Bihor County (Romania) as compared to Hajdú-Bihar County (Hungary) is partly similar to Romania’s situation as compared to Hungary, and Hajdú-Bihar County is a direct competitor for Bihor County in the case of the following 3 tourism products: health and wellness tourism, rural tourism and, partly, city breaks.

Regarding the strengths of the 6 tourist products in Bihor County towards Hajdú-Bihar County, it is interesting to note the positive emphasis of all respondents on active and adventure tourism, wildlife and natural parks tourism, and cultural circuits, and the many strengths identified.

The strengths identified by the respondents regarding cultural circuits are related, however, exclusively to the cultural heritage of Oradea. One respondent notes “there

are no other cities from a tourism point of view” (L.B.) which the respondents are very much aware and proud of, probably due to the numerous projects funded by European funds and implemented by Oradea City Hall (the second city in Romania when it comes to the attraction of European funds in 2007-2013) the effects of which are highly visible: the revitalization and introduction into the tourist circuit of the Oradea Fortress and of the historical center of Oradea, the introduction of Oradea in the European Art Nouveau Network, the inauguration of the Art Nouveau Museum Darvas LaRoche House, the rehabilitation and introduction into the tourist circuit of the Moon Church, the Sion Neologian Synagogue, and other historical churches including wooden churches, etc., as well as the projects which the City Hall of Oradea or the Bihor County Council have brought to the attention of the general public—the renovation of Țăra Crișurilor Museum (Bihor County Museum), the Jewish Museum in Oradea, the Masonry Museum, etc. The complementary efforts of the Bihor County Council to attract European funds (1st place at the level of the North-West Region during the period 2007-2013) are less obvious but still present in the answers of the interviewed persons, especially for the modernization and expansion of Oradea Airport and for highlighting of the natural heritage of Bihor County and the promotion of mountain tourism.

The strengths identified by the respondents for active and adventure tourism, wildlife and natural parks tourism are similar and are related, in particular, to the natural potential of the Apuseni Mountains. Although they know and enumerate them, in our opinion the respondents are not sufficiently aware or have not been sufficiently made aware of the competitive advantages of tourism in Bihor County due to the karst and great biodiversity of the Apuseni Mountains. Only one respondent notes that “we are the county with the largest number of caves in Romania” (over 8% of the total), but none seems to know the superlatives in this area of Bihor County: the deepest cave—V5 in the Vărășoaia, Padiș System, the longest cave—Wind Cave (Peștera Vântului), Șuncuiuș, the largest underground waterfall—Câmpeneasca Cave, Vașcău, the deepest submerged cave—Izbucul Izbândiș, the largest and most complexly installed cave in the country—Bear Cave (Peștera Urșilor), ice caves: Scărișoara Glacier, Bortig Chasm, the Living Fire, the Ice Chasm in the Vârtop Plateau, Bârsa Glacier, etc. Also, although “natural reservations” are frequently noted as strengths, no respondent knows that Bihor County is best represented at regional level in terms of protected areas (64 protected areas of national interest) and biodiversity (calcareous areas, plateaus and rocks, as well as numerous plant species, which are special tourist attractions). “Mountain resorts” are noted as strengths, but, once again, although they have significant experience, the respondents do not seem to know that only Stâna de Vale has the status of a mountain resort, not Padiș or the newly-emerging Vârtop. In our opinion, they face an image/identity crisis. “Lakes” are barely mentioned, without any particularities, as a result of the lack of significant investments and projects in the field. However it is interesting to note the large number of soft-adventure activities noted by respondents: mountaineering, mountain trails, including high difficulty, paragliding, etc. in the Apuseni Mountains, rafting on Crisul Repede, cycling on routes of different difficulty, aquapark, etc.

The “champions” of the weaknesses in the interviewees’ answers are the following tourism products: health and wellness tourism, rural tourism and city breaks, that is,

the same products for which Hajdú-Bihar County is a direct competitor, which leaves us with a lot to think about. If poor transport infrastructure and tourism infrastructure, poor accessibility, disorganization/lack of organization and almost non-existent promotion are the weaknesses most frequently noted in the case of rural tourism and city breaks, the lack of or inadequacy of investment is the weakest point in the case of health and wellness tourism—a tourist product that deserves special attention.

Faced with the strengths and weaknesses noted by the respondents for this tourism product, it is evident that the respondents are disappointed that the potential and tradition in health and wellness tourism of Băile Felix and Băile I Mai are not being properly capitalized. The list of weaknesses in this case is not only long but also extremely diverse: poor investment (lack of at least a large capacity and diversity aquapark, the lack of leisure facilities for young people, the existence of stands or kiosks, obsolete and non-modernised recovery and treatment centres, poor planning of tourist resorts, etc.), illegal drilling, illegal exploitation of the geothermal resources affecting the deposits, congestion in the peak season, the short duration of the average duration of stay; poorly qualified staff, lack of international visibility, lack of a brand strategy; lack of customization of tourist products; high demand for food and beverages in an all-inclusive system and tourist packages to include them; the lack of collaboration between business owners in this area, an inefficient local public administration in the management of a resort of national interest, etc.

A specific aspect that appears to be mentioned as a weak point in the case of rural tourism is related to that “just like at Mother’s home” or “at the grandparents’ house” charm and that simplicity that hides, in fact, a great complexity (rural entrepreneurs, personnel qualified in rural tourism, quality management, rural conservation strategies, traditions, networks, etc.). A specific aspect that appears to be a weakness in the case of city breaks is the lack of diversification of offers and the weak attraction of new market segments that encourage repeated visits; more events that might attract people to the city are frequently recommended. There is no shortage of weaknesses in what the health and wellness tourism is concerned (lack of camping sites, tents, caravans, lack of specialized guides, lack of landmarks and tourist routes, private construction in protected areas), or for active and adventure tourism (qualified staff: guides, experts, trainers for various soft-adventure categories, but also strategies/locations for emergency intervention).

The recommendations of the respondents regarding the development of tourism in Bihor County are also very interesting. All revolve around two general weaknesses: infrastructure and promotion, especially international. The following responses best synthesize this: “Bihor County has a diverse and significant tourist potential, which requires both promotion and investment in infrastructure. With the development or modernization and rehabilitation of the infrastructure, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive strategy to promote the entire area to make it more known abroad.” (O.N.); “I strongly believe that tourism in the Bihor area has developed a lot lately. But there are still things to be done because they affect tourism to a great extent. I believe that the infrastructure in this county is a great disadvantage for tourism and also that there is not enough promotion of the sites, both informative and on the spot. They should be better signaled

and better promoted to be known by the general public. Also, a greater involvement of local and other agencies would help a lot. Several excursions or tourist packages for this area should be created and organized. People are more receptive to go sight-seeing or visiting a tourist attraction if they have a certainty that they will manage to get around and there will be someone to help. For Oradea, many events of great importance should be organized to attract as many tourists as possible to the area.” (A.D.).

It is encouraging that most of the recommendations go beyond the so-called tangible (hard) assets and target intangible (soft) elements such as local identity, involvement and cooperation of local actors, good governance, cooperation, networks, clusters, etc., which, in the end, are related to the management of the tourist destination: “There must be a collaboration between the public authorities at county level and the local authorities at the level of the municipalities, towns and villages with the highest tourist potential (Oradea Municipality, the Village of Sinmartin), so that tourist circuits and a coordinated promotion of tourism in Bihor County can be carried out.”(M.D.); “Raising awareness of the identity of rural areas, shaping them by integrating natural elements with cultural values. Achieving a regional project for revitalizing endangered traditions: making dowry boxes, weaving, etc.; organization in the form of clusters; the offered tourist packages should be complete; educating entrepreneurs. Given the large number of tourists coming to Oradea Airport, this could be a good place to inform and promote tourism. The Tourist Information Centres in Oradea should recommend complete tourist packages for rural areas; trails, accommodation, restaurants, guide, transport, etc. The tourist information points in the county should be open to the public based on a schedule adapted to the specifics promoted.”(A.A); “Professional management and local tourism regulations are needed, otherwise it is up to everyone’s expertise. A professional urban manager is needed to increase the attractiveness of the localities. It’s not always nice or good, as citizens, local authorities or travel agents might think. Identity and uniqueness should be preserved/sought by professionals. There is a great need for staff qualification: ‘just like at home’ is not enough. There is a need for road infrastructure, rail and better accommodation. The emphasis is on quality, not quantity” (L.B); “Although Bihor County has more natural and cultural resources than the neighboring Hajdú-Bihar County, it must be taken into account that our destination loses the advantage of having rare resources. Competitive advantage should be based on research and information technology rather than exploiting the natural potential.” (G.D.)

Concerning the impact of cross-border cooperation on tourism development in Bihor County, besides the generally expressed view that it has contributed significantly to the development of tourism in Bihor County, the importance of cross-border cooperation projects in the field of health and medical recovery must be clearly delimited, as well as the critical nuances that confirm and complete the picture of the boundaries of cross-border cooperation in the literature: “Public authorities were more interested in projects to increase the attractiveness of the site than in measures to manage tourist activity. The contribution of the public authorities, especially small ones, directly to tourism is still insufficient: on the one hand, they do not impose limits, in order to create identities and a positive local identity, to the ‘fantasies’ of unprofessional operators in tourism, on the other hand, they do not help in concrete ways and substantially those who want

to do business in the tourism sector, and the result is that they do what they want and especially how they can. They don't work like 'a mosaic,' where the contribution of each piece counts for a common purpose and influences the overall end result." (L.B.)

Therefore, hypothesis H3 is confirmed: in the tourism development of Bihor County, the emphasis should be placed on the development of tourism products: active and adventure tourism, wildlife and natural parks tourism and cultural circuits, for which Hungary and Hajdú-Bihar County are not a direct competitor.

Conclusions

AS THE literature review shows, cross-border cooperation could have an important impact but it is no guarantee for "borderless" tourism development. In our opinion, in order to avoid asymmetrical tourism development directions, it is vital to investigate competitive tourism products for each neighbouring borderland and to build integrative strategies on product similarity and thematic complementarity. Our research results show that in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region the tourism situation in Bihor has improved over the past two years, being significantly better than Romania's situation under the impact of cross-border cooperation (HU-RO). For the six competitive tourism products identified for Romania, Hajdú-Bihar County is a direct competitor for Bihor County with the following 3: health and wellness tourism, rural tourism, city breaks.

Consequently, in the tourism development of Bihor County, the emphasis should be placed on increasing the competitiveness of those tourist products for which Hajdú-Bihar County is not a direct competitor, namely active and adventure tourism, wildlife and natural parks tourism, and cultural circuits, as these offer the possibility of developing thematic tourist packages complementary to Hajdú-Bihar County. Cross-border cooperation across Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar has so far yielded positive results: institutional arrangements, networks of tourism stakeholders, integrated tourism development strategies, tourist common packages, etc. which deserve to be further exploited in the decision-making processes and the tourism sector. With regard to health and wellness tourism, rural tourism, and city breaks, from our point of view, the stake is not the cooperation, but each competitor working on its own, as the winners will be those who will bet on differentiation and internationalization. □

Notes

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Abstract

Similarity and Complementarity in Tourism Development in a Cross-Border Region. The Case of Bihor–Hajdú Bihar

The present paper aims to investigate the complementarity and similarity in tourism development in a cross-border region based on the Bihor (Romania)–Hajdú-Bihar (Hungary) case study. The paper is structured in two parts, a theoretical one and a practical one. The theoretical part proposes a literature review on the issue of tourism development in a cross-border region and provides a comparative analysis of the Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar counties' tourism sector based on territorial statistics, as well as the available dataset for the tourism sector. The theoretical evaluation was completed with a qualitative research consisting of the design and application of an in-depth interview involving 18 individuals from Bihor County with significant experience in tourism development and cross-border cooperation. The paper includes discussions and conclusions meant to bring about competitiveness for Bihor County and to highlight the similarity and complementarity in tourism development in Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region.

Keywords

cross-border region, cross-border cooperation, tourism development, competitive touristic products, Bihor (Romania)–Hajdú Bihar (Hungary)