



The Project “Maramureş-Transcarpathia Info Tour”. Tourism Cross Border Cooperation within the HU-SK-RO-UA ENPI CBC 2007-2013 Programme

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Keywords: projects, tourism, cross border, cooperation, Maramureş, Transcarpathia

ABSTRACT

The project has been awarded with a grant of 185,224 Euros by the Joint Managing Authority of the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI 2007-2013 CBC Programme and is implemented at present in Romania and Ukraine. The total national co-financing for the grant is 20,604 Euros. The territorial administrative units in which the activities are being implemented are Maramureş County (Romania) and Transcarpathia Region (Ukraine). The territorial extension of the project is identical to that of the Historical Region of Maramureş, which nowadays overlaps on the north-east part of Maramureş County in Romania and on the districts Rahiv, Tiaciv, Hust, and Mijghiria in Ukraine. The tourism development poles in which most of the project activities will be implemented are: Săpânța village, Botiza village and the town of Sighetu Marmăției in Maramureş County (Romania), and Solotvino locality in the Tiaciv District, Transcarpathia Region (Ukraine) respectively.

1. INTRODUCTION

The project implementation area of the Programme Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI CBC 2007-2013 is situated at the border between the homonymous countries. This area holds approximately 598.9 km of common frontier with Ukraine and it covers the whole Slovakian-Ukrainian frontier (97.9 km), Hungarian-Ukrainian (134.6 km) and partly the Romanian-Ukrainian frontier (366.4 km) [1].

The Programme itself is designed for the mitigation of regional discrepancies at the external border of the European Union, concerning all the domains that its priorities and measures cover, as a financing instrument, from ENPI CBC 2007-2013. The acronym ENPI-CBC stands for European

Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument-Cross Border Cooperation.



Fig. 1. Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI CBC 2007-2013 Programme Region.

On the Second Call of submitting projects on ENPI CBC 2007-2013, 47 projects were submitted within Priority 1: *Promote economic and social development, Measure 1.1. Harmonised development of tourism*. This aspect meant that from ENPI it was requested the amount of 16,673,448 €, yet, in the end, it was allocated only the amount of 2,333,800 € to the awarded projects.

Within this category of projects fits also the awarded project, being implemented at present: “*Maramureş-Transcarpathia Info Tour*”, which we will analyse in this paper, from the perspective of the context that it is presented in its third month of implementation, at the moment of writing the paper, from the total of 18 months.

2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The methodology of research we have

employed consists of GIS analysis, SWOT analysis, and the classic methodology for writing projects (the Gantt chart, the Logical Framework for the Project, the Budget for the Action, the Critical Path Method, etc). The project documentation consists of a very complex methodology concerning the implementation of the action. The highly empirical aspect of the project is due to the fact that it was designed to solve real problems and achieve quantifiable results in territory.

3. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The project holds as a general objective “*Strengthening and consolidating tourism infrastructure, and increasing the quality of tourism services within the regional development poles of Săpânța, Botiza, Sighetu Marmăției (RO), and Solotvino (UA), from the cross border region of Maramureş – Transcarpathia*”.

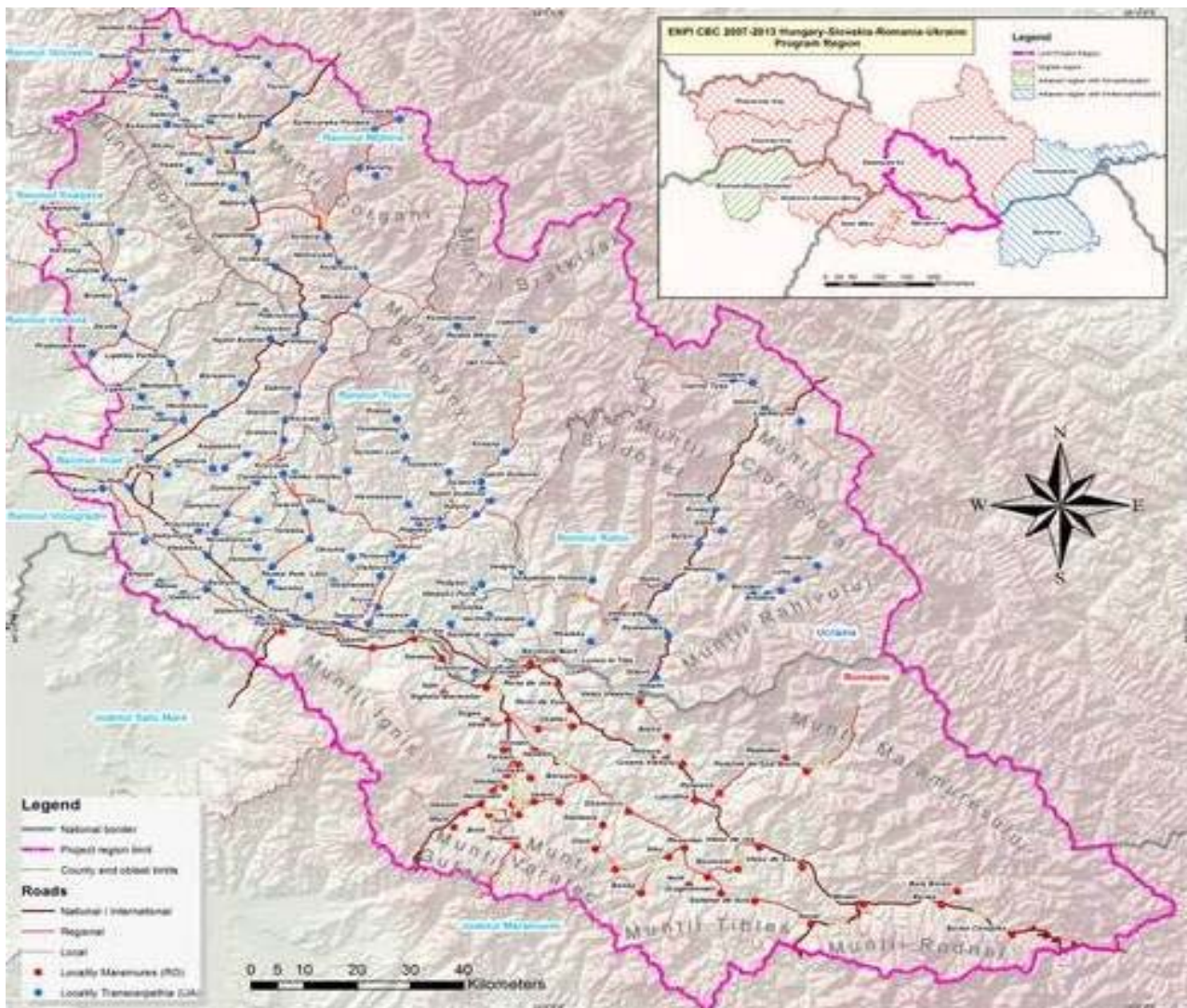


Fig. 2. The “*Maramureş-Transcarpathia Info Tour*” Project Region.

This objective is in accordance with the general objective of the ENPI Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-

Ukraine ENPI Cross Border Programme concerning the intensifying and the strengthening of cross border

cooperation in the programme region. The objective of the project is in perfect harmony with the aims of Measure 1.1: Construction and modernization of tourism infrastructure in the cross border region of the ENPI programme eligibility, the creation of cross border tourism products, improvement of the multi language information flow in cross border tourism, training in tourism, creation and development of service based upon information technology, common, integrated tourism promotion and marketing.

The specific objectives of the project are the following:

Specific objective 1. "Arranging 4 tourist information centres, tourism prospective research of the project region and the marking of 8 tourist tracks in Săpânța, Botiza, Sighetu Marmăției (RO) and Sototvino (UA)". It has the means of constructing a solid base to create a cross border tourism network in the historical Maramureş Region. The objective will be achieved by specific activities such as: hiring personnel in tourist information centres, purchasing modern equipment for communicating and presenting tourism potential and last, but not least, supplying the 4 centers with maps, leaflets, tourist guide books, etc.

Specific objective 2. "Improving the quality of human resources in the rural tourism in Săpânța, Botiza (RO), and in Sototvino (UA) localities". It will be achieved through rural tourism courses (Activity 3 of the project). In Săpânța and Botiza there are many rural guesthouses, and qualification courses are a must especially due to the new profile legislation. Qualification courses for rural guesthouse administrators will be subcontracted. In the case of Sototvino (UA) there will also be a course on rural tourism development as a complementary alternative to curative tourism relying on local salty mineral waters. The Sototvino course will be taught by the project team, by tourism specialists, who previously participated at rural tourism development projects in the Maramureş County (Romania).

Specific objective 3. "Awareness of the cultural patrimony and consolidating ethnographic identity in Săpânța, Botiza (RO), and in Sototvino (UA) localities". It holds as purpose organizing workshops in order to preserve traditions with high potential for tourism industry. The purpose is to organize these gatherings with guests from the 3 project localities (Săpânța, Botiza from Romania and Sototvino from Ukraine). In addition we hope to attract also tourists from the locality. Within the alternative workshops in the three localities the young people will be presented craftsmanship and tourism entertainment techniques. There will also be environmental protection issues and reducing the negative impact of tourism on the local ethnographic identity. NGO members, craftsmen, and guesthouse administrators will be present.

Specific objective 4. "Promoting Săpânța, Botiza, Sighetu Marmăției (RO) and Sototvino (UA)

localities and the cross border region of Maramureş – Transcarpathia on the tourism market". It holds as purpose designing a website to display the tourism potential of the historical Maramureş Region, but also the tourist information centres, rural tourism guesthouses, spas, and the marked tourist tracks in the cross border project region. Alongside these there will be a series of graphic and cartographic materials together with the action of distributing them.

4. PREMISES OF THE PROJECT. ANALYSIS OF THE CROSS BORDER PROJECT REGION DRAWBACKS

The problems that the population from Romania and Ukraine are generally facing are rooted in the process of institutional, social, and economic restructuring, which began after 1990. The needs and constraints which characterize the two regions (Maramureş and Transcarpathia) were identified by the partners both through direct knowledge of the realities, as well as through some statistical data, from institutes and from scientific papers [2].

Transcarpathia region, although it has a surface of 12,800 square km and a population of 1,243,000 (in 2006), is one of the least developed regions in Ukraine, the minimum gross salary in January 2007 being 100 \$ (67.5 €), which is far below the E.U. standards, and more than half the population lives in the rural area (58%), the unemployment rate being very high (100 unemployed/new job created). The Ukrainian locality of Sototvino (8,920 inhabitants in 2008, and 59.6% of them are Romanian) is situated north of the Tisa that draws the frontier with Romania, and has natural tourism resources insufficiently exploited through curative spa tourism (salt mine and lakes).

The Maramureş County has a surface of 6,304 square km and a population of 515,610 inhabitants (in 2005). The minimum gross salary was 700 RON (157 €), which was far below the E.U. standards. The number of employed people dropped with 68,700 during 1991-2005. During 1990-2005 the county population dropped with 43,783 inhabitants, the greatest drop being for the 0-14 years category, while the category of over 60 years old dropped with 16,680 people. The international migration trend greatly affects the economic relaunching possibilities because of young population's emigration. In the tourism sector overnights dropped from 264,400 to 209,000 during 1995-2005, with direct consequences in dropping the accommodation utilization index from 31.7% to 21.4% in the same period.

The Romanian Săpânța locality has a population of 3,345 inhabitants, and valuable anthropic tourist sights, some of them unique in the world (The Merry Cemetery) together with important insufficiently

exploited natural sights (e.g. gorges, waterfalls, mineral waters).

The Romanian Botiza locality has a population of 2,906 inhabitants (90% Orthodox, 10% Catholics, population recording a drop off in recent years due to the mining halt - 300 layoffs). Closure of mines re-orientated economic activities towards rural tourism development, today 70 guesthouses functioning here, and craftsmanship being greatly improved after 1995.

The Romanian Sighetu Marmăției locality has a population of 41,909 inhabitants (in 2007), (69.04 Orthodox, 20% Catholics, 3.9% protestants, and 7.06% other religions, and 79.54% Romanians, 15.8% Hungarians, 3.01% Ukrainians, 1.1% Roma, and 0.55% others). At the 2002 census, 88% from the active population was engaged in economic activities and 12% was not. The restructuring of the fordist economy at the end of the 20th enabled economic recession and unemployment increases.

5. DESCRIPTION OF THE TARGET GROUPS AND FINAL BENEFICIARIES

The target group of the rural guesthouses in Săpânța is made up of the owners' family members in the locality. This target group includes investors in the tourism sector (85 persons from 25 guesthouses and a camping) and the temporary employed in the tourism sector (family members and folk craftsmen's, entertainers' and transporters' families, which totalize 85 persons). In the majority of cases family member work together within the guesthouse and women are the ones that coordinate tourism service activities mostly, a fact which leads to a women's role increase in rural society. Otherwise the majority of families are generally younger than 40, content with their activity (98%) and wish to continue tourism activity. The total average of the Săpânța target group reaches to approximately 200 persons.

The target group of the guesthouse owners in Botiza is formed of 220 persons (70 guesthouses). To this target group we add the one formed by the temporary employed in the tourism sector (family members which totalize 80 persons). Botiza locality has the greatest number of rural guesthouses in the Maramureș County and revival of craftsmanship traditions has led to the increase in number of the women involved in manual wool carpet weaving (about 90 persons) and to the appearance of new jobs for travel guides and transporters. The total target group in Botiza reaches 400 persons from the tourism and crafts sector.

The target group which includes the guesthouse owners' families and the tourism employees' families from Solotvino is formed of 600 persons. These persons live from the tourism activity working in the 40 tourist bases developed after 2004 near the salt lakes.

We include in this target group the employees from the two allergology hospitals, where also curative tourism is involved. The craftsmen's families from Solotvino are about 10 persons. We have a total target group at Solotvino of approx. 600 persons. Within Săpânța, Botiza, and Solotvino we can speak about 1,200 people in the target group, who are involved in the tourism activities (we include here also tourist guides and transporters or local folk music entertainers, dancers, etc.). The final beneficiaries are approx. 272,080 persons (tourists and the population of the three localities: Săpânța - 3,345 inhabitants, Botiza - 2,906, inhabitants, Sighetu Marmăției - 41,909 inhabitants, and Solotvino - 8,920 inhabitants).

According to the ethnic structure, in Săpânța prevail the Romanians (only 8 Ukrainians and 2 Hungarians). According to religion the majority is Orthodox, and there is a small group of Adventists. In Botiza live only Orthodox Romanians.

In Solotvino, 59.6% are Romanians, the others being Ukrainians, Hungarians, and Russians. The population of the two rural localities is involved especially in agriculture and lumbering in Săpânța and Botiza, mining (salt extraction) in Solotvino, tourism being an important activity because of the mining halt (1,500 layoffs only in Solotvino and 300 in Botiza), as well as due to the important tourist sights that these localities have. In recent years, in Sighetu Marmăției tourism has registered an increase both in the number of the employed and in accommodation facilities (338 jobs) and in restaurants (1,044 jobs).

At the final beneficiaries we also add tourists that visit Săpânța, Botiza, Sighetu Marmăției, and Solotvino. In Săpânța come about 30,000 tourists/year out of which 25% are foreign, especially E.U., with the peak season in July-August and with 200-300 visitors daily, who visit the main tourist sights – The Merry Cemetery and the Peri Monastery. In Botiza come about 35,000 tourists/year especially from Belgium and France as well as from Romania, the average stay period being higher than in Săpânța. In Sighetu Marmăției come about 50,000 tourists/year. At Solotvino come approx. 100,000 tourists/year, Ukrainians most of them, but also from the Baltic countries, Russia, and from the E.U., for curative spa tourism in sanatoria and salt water tourism bases.

The project "*Maramureș-Transcarpathia Info Tour*" takes on 4 specific problems of the tourism from the cross border region drawn by the upper Tisa river basin. Thus, firstly, we have the tourism business support infrastructure issues and those of tourism arrangement. The following problems debated in the project are: the quality of human resources in cross border tourism, the problem of cultural and ethnographic patrimony in the project localities and finally of great importance is the issue of common cross border tourism marketing strategy.

The target groups made of rural tourism operators and craftsmen from Săpâna, Botiza, and from Solotvino participated in the writing of the project through the suggestions they made or indirectly through the support granted for the analysis that preceded the elaboration of the project strategy. In Sighetu Marmației the structure of the tourism firms (companies) is different from that in the rural area. We focused on the target group formed by the families of the guesthouse owners and craftsmen in the target groups because the guesthouses and the craftsmen workshops (in Săpâna, Botiza, and in Solotvino) are in their vast majority established as family business, family members doing the respective activities.

The individual needs of tourism enterprises in Săpâna, Botiza, and in Solotvino are diverse. Out of these we selected only the ones concerning the target group. We list: the need for a tourist information centre, marking cross border tourist tracks which diversify the offer through complementarities of resources, the need to engage qualified workforce in tourism, to increase the professionalism of rural tourism administrators and employees, to protect the environment, to keep the cultural heritage, to achieve spatial tourism arrangement for the three localities, the need for efficient promotion to increase overnight stays. The main constraints limiting the achievement of these needs are connected to the young's emigration, lack of local initiatives, peripheral position in their own countries and in the E.U., deficit of transport infrastructure, and to the lack endowment with new technologies.

The target group has the obligation, by law, to provide quality tourism services and to participate at professional tourism instruction courses. These obligations get the target group closer to the project team conducting the activities which meet the needs of the target group.

6. RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT TO THE NEEDS AND CONSTRAINTS OF MARAMUREŞ-TRANSCARPATIA PROJECT REGION

The development needs of Ukraine and Romania are stated through national strategies. The project “*Maramureş-Transcarpathia Info Tour*” comes to support tourism development national strategies, and it is also in accordance with these strategies in Ukraine and in Romania. The accordance with the regional tourism development strategies is even more obvious. Within the tourism development strategy of Maramureş County and within the Plan for Arranging the Territory of Maramureş County, the main problems are: lack of rural tourism information centres, the deficit of marketing and especially lack of information panels, leaflets, tourist maps, and tourism guidebooks. The project we are proposing holds as main means

exactly actions to solve the above problems. At a local level it is important to underline the fact that in the three localities in Romania (Săpâna, Sighetu Marmației, and Botiza) as well as in the Ukrainian locality Solotvino the priority is to develop tourism.

The development strategies of the 4 localities focus on problem analysis of the local tourism state, on the necessity of arranging tourism information and counseling centres, on the increase of human resources quality in rural tourism, on capitalising mineral waters, and on the ever more effective promotion on national and international tourism markets. The project “*Maramureş - Transcarpathia Info Tour*” was elaborated based on the needs of the target groups from Săpâna, Botiza and Solotvino localities, relying on the consultation and cohesion of the following strategies elaborated at a European, national, regional, and local level: The ENPI CBC Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Programme, The National Development Plan of Romania for the Maramureş County 2007-2013, The Development Strategy of Transcarpathia Region 2005-2015, The Development Strategy of Tyachiv District 2005-2015, The Development Strategy of Săpâna locality 2008-2013, The Development Strategy of Botiza locality 2008-2013, The Development Strategy of Solotvino locality 2005-2015.

7. PARTNERS AND ACTIVITIES

The Romanian partners of the project are: 1) The Town Hall of Săpâna Village - Beneficiary; (2) The Town Hall of Botiza Village; (3) Association Maramureş Project Link; (4) Centre for Ecology and Tourism Maramureş; (5) Association of Applied Geography Sighetu Marmației.

The Ukrainian partners of the project are: (1) The Town Hall of Solotvino; (2) Nadia Association.

The main activities of the project are the following: (1) Establishing tourist information centres in Săpâna, Botiza, Sighetu Marmației (RO) and in Solotvino (UA), purchasing equipment, hiring personnel; (2) Tourism prospective research in the tourism development poles of Săpâna, Botiza, Sighetu Marmației (RO), and of Solotvino (UA) and in the cross border region of Maramureş-Transcarpathia; (3) Rural tourism course for guesthouse administrators; (4) 6 workshops with rural guesthouse administrators and craftsmen; (5) Marking 8 tourist tracks in Săpâna, Botiza, Sighetu Marmației, and in Solotvino; (6) Editing and printing the project publications (tourist guidebook, maps, leaflets); (7) Designing a website for the project region; (8) Designing the double electrically lit tourist panels; (9) Organizing a scientific symposium on tourism development in the cross border region of Maramureş-Transcarpathia; (10) Distributing publications, project results, and organising the final seminar; (11) Monitoring and evaluating the project.

8. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The corresponding expected results of these activities (the project) are the following: (1) 4 cross border tourist information centres in Săpânța, Botiza, Sighetu Marmației (RO), and in Solotvino (UA); (2) a tourism data base; (3) 8 marked tourist tracks, charted and described in the tourist guidebook and in the web page; (4) 56 trained rural guesthouse administrators and potential rural tourism investors in Săpânța, Botiza (RO), and in Solotvino (UA); (5) Social cohesion of the rural guesthouse administrators and craftsmen; (6) a tourist guidebook for Săpânța - Botiza - Solotvino - 1,000 pcs., tourist map for Săpânța - 1,000 pcs., tourist map for Botiza - 1,000 pcs., tourist map for Sighetu Marmației - Solotvino - 1,000 pcs., cross border tourist map for Maramureș-Transcarpathia - 2,000 pcs., tourist leaflets in Romanian, Ukrainian, and English for the project localities - 4,000 pcs.; (7) Tourist web site; (8) 3 double electrically lit tourist panels with maps and photos for Săpânța, Botiza, and for Solotvino; (9) Distributed promoting materials, project poster: 50 pcs.; (10) Scientific symposium (including 10 university professors attending); (11) Project implemented with maximum cross border impact.

During the unfolding of the activities the project team members will receive feedback from the target groups and will adjust their strategies for future projects.

9. CONCLUSIONS

The aspects connected to the financial sustainability of the Tourist Information Centres, continuing the workshops as tourism entertainment, and the tourism promotional activities are very important for the target groups, for the partners and for the beneficiary. So they will be supported through tourism companies taking advantage of the town halls in aspects connected to the necessary space, even for the support of logistic aid, being early on establishing exactly the respective categories. The activities which ceased their effects are no longer necessary but on the short and medium term will be resumed in future projects. The tourist information centres in the 4 localities will be able to support their activities with promotional materials (leaflets, maps, etc.) edited for tourism business in the corresponding locality.

The fact that the partners from the project will continue to exist even after the project ends is a reason for continuing their collaboration. As already mentioned, after the project they will create a cluster based on the advantages of the already formed networks. The sustainability of the project from an institutional point of view will be ensured first by the partner associations, which have common objectives according to their statutes - developing cross-border cooperation and partnerships.

Inside the cluster the role of the town halls will be to ensure the necessary infrastructure for the functioning of the group. For Săpânța and Botiza these local authorities will provide support for the continuation of the project activities, which are useful and justifiable. The authorities in Solotvino, through the wish to collaborate with the Romanian partners, through the prestige and acknowledgement of their importance in the target groups of Ukraine, will ensure the continuation of activities supporting the development of target groups and of final beneficiaries.

The project, as a demarche of applied tourism geography, will lead to a replication in the cross border historical region of Maramureș, to the emerging of tourist information centres in the town halls in the area, which will gradually form an integrated network.

We will initiate another scientific paper on the concrete results of the project activities, whose coordinates will be sketched during the scientific symposium, at the end of the project.

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