

The importance of cross-border regions and trends in tourism development in the Danube-Criș-Mureș-Tisa Euroregion

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Abstract: The Danube-Criș-Mureș-Tisa Euroregion (DKMT), as a defining element of cross-border cooperation, has a varied tourist potential, which gives it the possibility of ensuring a special economic and social development. The promotion actions undertaken so far have been only timid attempts, which have not contributed to the expected results foreseen in the Euroregion development plan. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the need for effective promotion so that this area can be valued at its true value. The objectives of the study are to delimit and characterize the DKMT Euroregion in terms of tourism potential, to present the promotional actions carried out and to identify the conditions and modalities for promoting sustainable tourism in the Euroregion, based on green marketing and an integrated destination management system travel.

Keywords: Euroregion, development strategies, tourism promotion, tourism marketing

JEL Classification: M31, Z32

Introduction

Although found in other regions, cross border regions are characteristic of the European continent. They appeared in Western Europe, especially along the borders of Germany, France, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands; after the events of '89 and '90 they also appeared at the contact between the former socialist countries and the Central and North European countries - Baltic Euroregion (Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania), Carpathian Euroregion Danube-Cris-Mures -Tisa etc.

Many cross-border initiatives were eligible as projects under the Interreg Programme launched by the EU in 1990; the initiative was reconfirmed as Interreg II in 1994 and Interreg III in 1999, which is being continued nowadays. The advantages and disadvantages of these cross border entities are more than obvious (Table 1).

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of cross border regions

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process of European integration requires regional cooperation and cross-border regions contribute to the preparation for EU accession countries; • Euroregions help to ease tensions and maintain stability in the Balkans; • Euroregions represent a necessary stage in the transition from geostrategy to geo-economics; • Euroregions stimulate human and material resources which would otherwise remain unused; Euroregions contribute directly to reducing economic gaps and diminishing poverty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Euroregions generate agreements whereby local authorities may intervene in the policies of the countries involved; • Euroregions create the possibility for some local communities to sign agreements against their own governments; • Border regions are often isolated from decision-making centers and economic activity, as demonstrated by the lack of transport infrastructure; • Poor development of services, inadequate technological infrastructure; • Lack of cooperation between national authorities and local or regional authorities;

Source: Eu-Ro Jurnal CCIB

Many governments are concerned that Euroregions are at great distances from the central authority, trying to undermine and diminish their importance by enhancing cross-border relations with neighbors. Euroregions are not creating a new governmental structure across borders, their business being limited to the powers of local and regional authorities which constitute them (Bârzea, C., 2001 pp.113-120). These territories are actually focused on economic partnership in various fields of activity where 2-3 bordering countries can collaborate, they can develop human and material resources by initiating and carrying out multiple activities (agricultural, industrial, transport and communications, tourist, commercial or cultural industry), all based on programs (Neguț, S., 1998, pp.67-89).

The foundations of the Danube - Criș - Mures - Tisa Euroregion were made almost 21 years ago (November 21, 1997), following the signing of the Szeged (Hungary) protocol, which created an Economic Partnership for the development of mutual projects and improving living standards in this geographic area. This is divided into administrative-territorial units belonging to the composition of Hungary (Bacs-Kiskun, Bekes and Csongrad counties), Romania (Arad, Caras-Severin, Hunedoara and Timis) and Serbia (Autonomous Province of Vojvodina) (Figure No.1). Concentrated around the historical Banat, DKMT is spread over 71 879 km², with a population of about 5.4 million, an average population density of 82 inhabitants / km² (therefore, much higher than many European countries), this being an area of demographic, economic and cultural interferences.

DKMT Euroregion is at the the contact between the Carpathians and the Pannonian Plain, at the crossroads of some European corridors, having the role of a gateway between Central Europe and the Balkans. This geographical area is the link between Central and Western Europe, Western Mediterranean, the Balkans, the Carpathians and the Black Sea. This very favorable position in Central and Eastern Europe allowed the development of some major communication and transport lines: the trans-European railways Vienna-Szeged-Istanbul-Thessaloniki and Budapest-Arad-Bucharest, the European roads E68, E70 and E75, the main trans-European corridors (4, 10A and 7 - Danube), these being the main destinations for European investment and partnerships.



Figure no. 1. The Danube-Criș-Mureș-Tisa Euroregion
 Source: Rute tematiche DKMT

Overall, the region is dominated by rural areas, it has got three urban centers with dynamic development, Timisoara, Novi Sad and Szeged, but it is located in an area where, within a radius of 600 km, there are 10 European capitals, constituted in transport and trade hubs.

1. Trends in the development and promotion of tourism

The Euroregion has various natural landscapes, from the high mountains to those of the plains fragmented by rivers, numerous national parks (Koros-Maros, Kiskunság, Duna-Drava, Retezat, Iron Gate, Fruska Gora), where protected species can be closely observed as a result of the implementation of a special visit system.

Another attraction factor of the region is the specific cultural tradition based on the various ethnic composition (eg. Romanian, Hungarian, Serbian, German, Bulgarian, Slovak living together for centuries), represented on the one hand of the built environment and material culture, and on the other hand, traditions and habits. Under these circumstances, the most important issues for the entire territory of the Euroregion are represented by:

- reduced tourist traffic in many regions with downward trend, with reduced duration of the stay due to poor infrastructure and tourist services;
- high concentration of tourists in a few attractions represented by the famous tourist resorts, with negative effects on the environment;

- inadequate tourism infrastructure (high density of accommodation compared to tourist demand, low quality of tourism services);
- poor accessibility to many natural and cultural attractions (the poor condition of roads, difficulties in accessing public transport);
- the region is crossed by significant transit traffic, though they only contribute to a tiny extent to the income from tourism activities;
- the tourism marketing is poorly developed and / or inconsistent, the region is not internationally known;
- region lacks mass tourism attraction elements;
- timely Euroregional cooperation in the field of tourism (conventions, protocols only exist in the declarations of intent);

Although development strategies set by each of the component areas (Southern Plain of Hungary, the Western Region of Romania and the Autonomous Region of Vojvodina in Serbia) underlines the existence of an untapped valuable tourist potential, or valued only partially, concrete measures for the development of some types of tourism appropriate for this potential are missing; also, their appropriate promotion, with an impact on potential customers is missing, too, fact underlined by key tourism indicators available at DKMT (table no. 2).

Table no. 2. The main tourism indicators within DKMT

Statistical indicator	Southern Plain Region	Autonomous Province of Vojvodina	Western Region
Number of staying tourists	404 401	282 837	493 000
Income from accommodation	11,3 M EUR	22,6 M EUR	No data
Number of overnight stays	969 049	613 740	1 909 000
Average length of staying (days / person)	2,4	2,8	3,8
Accommodation capacity places	335 163	743 000	4 885 000
Accommodation capacity utilization (%)	26,5	No data	39,1

Source: Database adaptation of the national statistical offices

In the Southern Plain, for example, about 400 thousand tourists annually arrive for visiting (registered in accommodation services), representing only 6.5-7.5% of the total number of tourists arriving in Hungary. Between Romanian and Serbian tourists who arrive in Hungary only 8-10% (13 to 16 000 visitors) choose the Southern Plain. Although the number of accommodations has increased from 22 thousand to 26.5 thousand (8.1% of the total accommodation places at national level), the number of tourists does not show a significant increase.

Over time, the three component regions of DCMT - the Southern Plain, Vojvodina Region West - were made, according to the development opportunities and practicable forms of tourism, several programs and strategies of tourism development and It laid the foundation for diversification of the tourism forms (table no. 3).

Tourism has been continuously diversifying and presents increasingly more products "cultural", which is based on sightseeing or discovery of unique and singular ways of life. This new guidance will help integrate, more and more actively, the cultural goods and exacerbate the restoration of monuments and the preservation of national traditions.

At the Euroregion, through joint development of tourism products and by organizing joint marketing activities, tourism may be the most effective means of cooperation between certain territories of the this area,

with measurable results (Băcanu B. , 2009, pp.19-38). It is considered an important economic sector in terms of strategic and regional economic development perspective, a means of diversifying the economic structure, mainly by creating their own activities or branches (leisure industry, travel agencies). Thus, as a way of capitalizing on the tourism potential of the "integrated tourism" region (Reiser, H, pp. 20-24), this could lead to an acceleration of the economic development of this region.

Table. 2. Main indicators of tourism within DKMT

Southern Plain Region development tools	Autonomous Province of Vojvodina development tools	Western Region development tools
Operational and development programs of the Great Plain region (1999, 2000, 2001-2006). Borderless routes and adventures in the DKMT Euroregion (2011-2012)	The program of economic development of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (2003).	Analysis of socio-economic potential of the Western Region (2003). Borderless routes and adventures in the DKMT Euroregion (2011-2012)
Thermal and spa tourism; Cultural and events tourism; Water sports; Equestrian tourism; Eco-tourism; Gastronomic tourism; Agritourism; Tours and hiking on foot; Hunting and fishing tourism. Wine tourism	Transit tourism; Thermal and spa tourism; Recreation and rest tourism; Business and professional tourism; Cultural and religious tourism; Mountaineering and caving, hunting and fishing tourism; Other: river cruises, gastronomic, agrotourism.	Transit tourism; Hunting and fishing tourism; Nautical sports and recreation tourism; Cultural-event tourism; Agrotourism and rural tourism; Balneary tourism; Thematic touristic trips. Gastronomic tourism; Wine tourism.

Source : DKMT databank, 2018.

However, the diversity of activities which give content to the benefit of travel, as well as the presence of some of them in the structure of other economic sectors (transport, catering, medical spa treatment) gives tourism the nature of an interference branch (Ilieş Al., 2002, pp. 9-16). Hence, the link scale and complexity that develop between tourism and other sectors of the economy. These relationships have different forms, acting itself directly or indirectly, permanently or periodically, either horizontally or vertically. In its turn, through the products it offers, tourism contributes directly to consumption and health insurance, sharing this task with health protection and trade.

DCMT tourism promotion has been focused, mainly, on the conduct of thematic routes, submitted through the website www.thematicroutes.dkmt.eu:

- "Recreation without borders", focused on health tourism, spa and wellness, which included 22 cities (including in Romania - Buziaş, Herculane, Geoagiu, Moneasa);
- "Folklore without borders", focused on traditional architecture, religious and secular customs specific to folk art, which included 22 villages (Binis, CRISTUR, Târnavița, Almas, Buteni, Eftimie Murgu on Romanian territory);
- "Belle Epoque" as historical period with a special architecture, when many public and private buildings were built . This program included 12 urban areas in general (including the cities of Arad, Deva, Timisoara);
- "Wandering in the pantry of the monarchy" - highlights the historical and ments industrial monuments, old agricultural and industrial techniques, route developed in 26 localities (Buteni Romania, Resita, Iron Ocna, Brad, Anina, Govăjdie).

- "Roads without borders, revelations in the DKMT Euroregion" - highlights historical monuments, vineyards and wine cellars as well as gastronomy in Romania and Hungary.



Figure no. 2. *The Danube-Cris-Mureş-Tisa Euroregion*
 Source: DKMT themed routes

2. The diversification of tourism products and promotion of tourism

Intensive promotion by mix marketing implies switching from a limited vision on the disposal of the products by promoting them on the market, to the vision of marketing integration; from using simple, traditional methods and techniques, to the complex modern computer-based technique; from isolated, sporadic actions of promoting products, to overall actions, coordinated by complex programs, subordinated medium-term and long-term strategies, with large area of operation.

According to EU requirements significant changes are imposed, regarding the organization of economic entities in tourism, marketing activity, which, in infancy, it was mistaken for sale (distribution, advertising) and in modern marketing phase, consists of a set of functions, that, in turn, constitute strategic marketing (market study, development of communication strategy) and operational marketing (promotion, distribution, sales, after-sales service). The two-way marketing promotion takes place simultaneously and they are not mutually exclusive but complement each other; they enhance the propagation effect.

The phenomenon of product diversification is accompanied, naturally, by promotion intensification, which becomes a function of modern marketing through integrated vision, by increasing complexity and quality techniques and methods used and does not exclude further widening of the area of marketing in other fields related to tourism. Of course marketing evolution is not linear, its implementation being a lengthy process,

which is accomplished gradually as a result of its development both horizontally and vertically, demonstrating its universality.

Widespread promotion, by all marketing means, proves to be an act of utmost importance in the developments, often hardly predictable of the factors that act as uncertain situations catalysts in various markets. No enterprise can efficiently conduct business without perfect knowledge of the current situation and trends in different markets, without the valorisation of the short and long term opportunities, subordinating all their activity to the marketing concept. Widely marketing promotion concern, on one hand, extension of its action area in other fields and on the other hand, increasing the number of economic agents to operate based on the principles and marketing techniques. Of course, achieving these goals must be based on the principles of sustainability. Sustainable tourism development within the Euroregion can only be achieved through an effective correlation of green marketing with quality management in tourism destinations (Stoican, M., Camarda, A., Şonea C, 2013, pp. 335- 343).

In light of this theory and to sustain and develop tourism, the factors responsible of DKMT created and promoted several tourist programs involving rural and urban areas throughout the Euroregion. Operationalization of a regional promotional strategy has complicated lately because important social, economic and political mutations have appeared, events that have influenced the orientation of domestic and international tourism demand.

This conjuncture imposes defining effective promotional strategies in tourism, which have influence and particular persuasion on the tourist clientele, by actively promoting Romanian, Hungarian and Serbian touristic product image. Administrative-territorial units listed in DKMT have a lot to catch up with, especially regarding means of communication, developing and diversifying facilities and equipment for leisure and tourism service quality.

Promotional strategy should be a strategy of communication and media, as it involves techniques to improve communications between providers of tourism services and different categories of tourists, between sales staff, service suppliers and potential customers.

Tourism units network implementing marketing at Euro region should gradually increase as competition becomes tougher and the risk is obviously increasing, which oblige the tourism facilities in this area borders to understand that their success depends on the products and tourism offer adaptation to market requirements, requirements that are determined based on adequate research.

Overview and assessment of tourism potential, it follows that this Euroregion has valuable tourism resources. The actions taken after the cooperation of state and private institutions to make this euroregion functional aimed an overall economic development, including tourism development, which, in DCMT's case, may be directed to the support and development of several forms of tourism namely:

- historical and religious tourism, focused on the existence of places of worship belonging to three different religions -ortodoxă, catholic, reformed;
- hiking and mountain tourism and adventure sports, focused on mountain units located on the mountain side of the Danube, in the ravine;
- scientific and ecological tourism, supported by the existence of protected areas (Iron Gates Natural Park, Greater and Lesser Gorges Reserves) etc .;
- rural tourism and agrotourism, practiced in rural areas along the Danube, in the mountain and hilly area;
- leisure and rest tourism, based on the existence of resorts with valuable mineral and thermal waters.

DKMT turns out to be a relatively attractive tourist region, European and even international interest, varied tourism potential, which constitute the starting point for tourism activities multiplication and tourism products diversification. The implementation of some tourism programs is just the beginning for the hospitality

and travel industry. Promoting its potential, the existing facilities and equipment, the tourism programs, the proposed cultural routes is a mandatory condition for tourism to become an important economic sector.

Based on the documentation made, it has been concluded that economic units in Romania, Serbia and Hungary should work more closely to initiate joint promoting actions, to achieve a much larger promotional range focused on:

- creating a special website dedicated to tourism, including separate documents for tourism resources, facilities, thematic tours, religious and secular events calendar;
- rotational organization, in each country, of some joint meetings of Chambers of Commerce and Industry to conduct business in tourism, mutual structural funds projects;
- achieving through professional associations, entities, local governments, exhibitions and tourism fairs which take place in the Euroregion;
- cultural organization and especially the ethnographic organization of the three regions; some photographic exhibitions and craft traveling, to make known the identity
- realization of tourism centers to provide tourist information on the activities and tourist services;
- realization of a joint tourism school through which characteristics of the components of each national region to be known, starting with cultural aspects and finishing with the gastronomic ones;
- organization of joint training courses for local population, owners of tourist establishments, guides training, to support regional and local tourism;
- formulation of a uniform promotion policy for all the Euroregion and all major types of tourism;
- realization of a common financial fund for promotion and a strategy to promote on medium and long term.

Marketing and promotional strategy will have to be based, at least every 3-4 years, a market study that can be supported by research centers of the economic universities in this Euroregion. The conclusions of this study can form the background note for target selection, promotion methods and techniques, to face competition from neighboring regions.

Tourist promotion of the Euroregion DCMT also involves creating a brand and a logo to be specific to the Euroregion and to attest the value of the entire existing tourism potential and quality of services, the identification and promotion of joint tourism products, to be carried on throughout the year, the development of tourist guides, thematic brochures, leaflets for places with tourism potential and tourist facilities, to attract as many tourists segments.

Since DCMT can operate, on the whole, as a possible unitary tourist attraction target it is imposed to make an Association of Tourism Promotion and Development and a consulting center and local business development in tourism for the entire Euroregion. A common database at the the Euroregion is needed on all aspects of the tourism industry - products, business, services, events, etc. to be later used for promotion and promotion can be done with relatively low cost, the following ways:

- Establishment of documentary on tourism in the Euroregion and its presentation at local and national television
- conducting interviews with the owners of tourism facilities, cultural facilities, with various artistic and cultural event organizers and these interviews' dissemination on radio to make known the tourist offer of the Euroregion;
- realization of posters and billboards in major stores and travel along the European and national roads, with the existing tourism offer,
- touristic messages to be attractive and capture elements of the Euroregion's tourist offer.

All these initiatives are very important, because Romania at its disposal a fund to promote, which is lower than in other countries in the region - Hungary, Croatia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Greece. Therefore, this part of the country can benefit in the future by promoting much better than what was achieved at national level, through annual promotion programs.

Conclusion

The presentation of this case study highlights that tourism can develop better through the partnerships, hospitality and journeys from this Euroregion, having more chances of development and promotion than it seems at a first glance. Its strengths are given by the predisposing factors: varied, attractive and authentic tourism, potential facilities that meet current requirements, but it is required, according to external trends and new foreign tourists motivations, the development and modernization.

The current international situation will make tourists prefer closer destinations that do not require high transportation costs and thus encourages the circulation of regional and local, the guidance of the tourists to geographical areas with well managed and clean, natural landscapes to local, authentic and traditional cultures.

Making a successful promotion for DKMT Euroregion development requires a systemic vision of marketing tourism of promotional strategy. So far, the documentation prepared and publicly presented by the DCMT management aimed the start of economic partnerships between the participating countries, together to harness available resources and reduce disparities.

Tourism development within the Euroregion will lead to decongestion other more requested destinations from participating countries, will give a chance to the development of cities and towns that do not have other important economic resources. Diversifying the local economy will increase the number of jobs, higher incomes for local people and modernization of communication and technical utilities for localities with potential and tourist facilities. Tourism will be a reference point for local poverty reduction, preserving the demographic stability and economic viability.

The approach of promotion is still weak because the cooperation phenomenon between the public and private sectors is just beginning. The private sector does not have a single representative, specialized in marketing, to be consulted by the public domain to initiate promoting actions. Each association or entrepreneur is trying to promote without partnerships with other specialized units. In the private sector are lacking, both at regional and local level, the knowledge and practices related to tourism market, methods and techniques existing in international promotion, which is valid for most tourist resorts and most travel units in the country

An effective tourism promotion is achieved with an adequate budget, the ultimate goal being to attract a large number of customers through more aggressive tools and techniques and imposing a well individualized brand that is recognized by the foreign tourist market.

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