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Hajdú-Bihar Region?**

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European Border Regions in comparison: The cross-border cooperation in Basque Country – a good example for Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Region?

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Abstract: *The Cross-border cooperation constitutes one of the most tangible effects of European integration. The Basque Country, formed by territories of France and Spain is one of the Euroregions where the Social Economy and the Culture and Identity have played a crucial role in the development of a good and solid cooperation. Could this case be a good example for us?*

The aim of this article is to stress the most important instruments used by the Basque Country in order to cooperate across the borders and to make a comparison with the Bihor – Hajdú -Bihar Region. Is the Basque Country a lesson of cooperation for our living place, the Euroregion Bihor – Hajdú -Bihar?

From another perspective, the two euro-regions mark points of view of cross-border cooperation at the borders of Europe, one at the Western Border and the other at the Eastern Border of the European Union.

Key words: *Basque Country, Bihor – Hajdú -Bihar, Euroregion, cross-border cooperation*

Introduction

According to the Article 2.1. of the “European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities” signed in Madrid, 1980, “transfrontier cooperation shall mean any concerted action designed to reinforce and foster neighbourly relations between territorial communities or authorities within the jurisdiction of two or more Contracting Parties and the conclusion of any agreement and arrangement necessary for this purpose. Transfrontier cooperation shall take place in the framework of territorial communities' or authorities' powers as defined in domestic law”.² In other terms, the cross-border cooperation is any type of action between public or private institutions from the borders of two (or more) states, having the common objective to reinforce the neighborhood relationships, to solve common problems or to manage jointly resources between communities through any type of cooperation. This definition is large enough to include also the simple town twinning.³

During the time and during the evolution of the European integration, the cross-border cooperation took several aspects: from cross-border arrangements, taking place outside of the EU framework, to the new European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), which has a legal

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² Council of Europe, “European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities”, Article 2.1, accessed July 01, 2016, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680078b0c>.

³ Luis de Sousa, “Understanding European Cross-border Cooperation: A Framework for Analysis,” *Journal of European Integration* (2012): 5, accessed July 01, 2016, http://www.ics.ul.pt/rdonweb-docs/ics_lsousa_understanding_ari.pdf.

coverage at European level.⁴ The degree of cooperation and involvement varies from a region to another, depending on a combination of factors of political, economical, geographical and historical nature.

In common terms, a short definition of cross border cooperation could be any type of concerted actions between public or private institutions at the borders of the countries driven by factors such as political, cultural, economical, historical or geographical in order to reinforce the good relationships, to solve common problems or to manage together common resources. At the same time, border regions constitutes a special space where can be analyzed the fluxes and exchanges of goods, capitals, people and in which measure these evolved in time.⁵

The regularity or complexity of cooperation between the border regions may lead the authorities to institutionalize the existent arrangements of cooperation. In this case, the Euro-region, or more recently the EGTC, appears associated with the implementation of joint projects or the administration of public resources. These projects do not correspond usually to any governmental institution, do not have political power and their competencies are limited to the regional and local authorities from both regions. Some Euro-regions may display a more transfrontier character, with a permanent administrative structure, others have only non-profit associations or foundations or others function as a regular forum composed of representatives from different local and regional authorities.⁶

Basque Country and Bihor- Hajdú-Bihar as Euro-regions

De Sousa points out in his article “Understanding European Cross-border Cooperation: A Framework for Analysis” that the most common drivers for a cross-border cooperation could be: economic drivers, political leadership drivers, cultural/identity and state formation drivers and geographical drivers. In this article we will stress out the most important projects in the cooperation from two Euro-regions: the Basque Country and the Hajdú-Bihar - Bihor. The reason of choosing these euro-regions is a personal choice. The first one, the Basque Country, is part of the Spanish and French Culture which is part of the interests of the author. The other region, Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar, is the living place of the author. Besides the personal choices, it is a very interesting comparison between two spaces, two Euro-regions at the borders of Europe, the Western Border and the Eastern Border.

The Basque Country as a Euro-region

The Basque Country is the name given to the territory in the western Pyrenees extended between France and Spain on the Atlantic coast. It comprises the Autonomous Communities of the Basque Country and Navarre in Spain and the Northern Basque Country in France.

The Basque Country counts about 5 million inhabitants⁷. The territory is characterized by a real urban continuity and substantial daily cross-border movements. Even though the space is not completely integrated, in terms of the development and establishment of businesses it nevertheless shows genuine consistency and economic uniformity.

⁴ Adrian-Claudiu Popoviciu; Constantin Țoca, „Romanian-Hungarian Cross-Border Cooperation through a Possible EGTC Oradea-Debrecen,” in *Regional and Cohesion Policy - Insights into the Role of the Partnership Principle in the New Policy Design*, ed. Ioan Horga, Adrian Ivan, and Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, 2011, 4, accessed July 02, 2016, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2560275.

⁵ de Sousa, p. 4.

⁶ Ibid., 7-8.

⁷ „Euroregion Aquitaine-Euskadi,” accessed July 10, 2016, <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/bdd-territoires/territories/territory/show/euroregion-aquitaine-euskadi/>.

Figure 1: The Basque Country



Source of the map: “Euskal Herria,” accessed July 10, 2016, http://www.eke.eus/eu/kultura/euskal_herria/karta.gif.

The cooperation between the two regions forming the Basque Country, the Spanish part and the French part, began very early, in 1990. The very first projects permitted to the actors of the regions to collaborate mostly in the area of common job market, as members of the Association *Communauté de Travail de Pyrénées*.

As for examples of cross-border institutional cooperation is the Bayonne-San Sebastian Eurocity, which established cooperation in planning matters between the two areas. The economic issue at cross-border level is that of “coopetition”, meaning that the economic players are in a situation of both competition and complementarity.⁸ Another example is the Bidasoa-Txingudi cross-border consortium (1998), which brought together the French town of Hendaye and the Spanish towns of Hondarribi and Irun. The Treaty of Bayonne, signed by France and Spain in 1995, strengthened the legal framework for cooperation. Small-scale cooperation between border municipalities and valleys flourished.⁹

Peio Olhagaray, the economic development director of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) in Bayonne states that in the Basque Eurocity certain activities are highly competitive, for example the domestic markets like personal services, food or construction where cooperation can be very pertinent. But, he states that in others areas like logistic, tourism and transport, the “complementarities” are more obvious and can enable businesses to improve their performance directly. An example was a joint stand at the subcontracting trade show in Nantes, France, where a cross-border subcontracting service was presented and it had a great success, especially because a lot of contracts were made.¹⁰

⁸ Peio Olhagaray, „Towards a Cross-border CCI in the Basque Country,” *Mission Opérationnelle transfrontalière* 43 (September 2008), accessed July 12, 2016, http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Newsletter/Archives_en/43_Cross_border_news_September_2008.pdf.

⁹ Xabier Itçaina, “Social Economy, Culture and Identity across the Border: Lessons from the Basque Case,” accessed July 10, 2016, [http://www.unrisd.org/UNRISD/website/newsview.nsf/\(httpNews\)/D7BE3ADF1D2C0DB1C1257CCA002F2E84?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/UNRISD/website/newsview.nsf/(httpNews)/D7BE3ADF1D2C0DB1C1257CCA002F2E84?OpenDocument).

¹⁰ Olhagaray.

Later, in 2004, the Euroregion has acquired legal personality, before taking the form of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) in 2011.¹¹ This status allows it to benefit from a stable legal framework and financial autonomy. Four lines of action were identified in the Strategic Action Plan of the EGTC for 2014-2020: Euroregional citizenship; Knowledge economy, innovation and business competitiveness; Sustainable territory; Opened governance. Setting these priorities allows many projects to be supported and to improve the accesses to future projects.¹²

Finally, the Aquitaine-Euskadi Euroregion, inaugurated on 12 December 2011, represented a new phase in setting up a framework for cross-border cooperation. The activities and the projects of the EGTC are defined through the four axes of the Strategic Action Plan. As regarding the development of a European regional citizenship, the EGTC wants to support minority languages, as Basque Language, making the culture the central axis of cooperation and to develop the exchanges between schools. In terms of knowledge economy, innovation and business competitiveness, the plans are to develop a project in the field of higher education between the universities in the region and to develop cooperation in the field of research and also an Euroregional Erasmus, but there are other plans as well such as round tables organized by the CCI Bihartean and the Basque Institute of competitiveness Orkestra, or the MOBYDIC project which aims to develop a European regional innovation strategy. Another important project is the creation of a Euroregional institution acting on employees' mobility, vocational training and the development of employment opportunities. The ambition of plan starring on the health Euroregion is also in this axis.

About the axis sustainable territory, the question of creating an area of sustainable mobility and therefore adequate transport infrastructure is central. Several projects have already been committed such as: the construction of the High Speed Line (LGV) South Europe Atlantic, the improvement of cross-border public transport and the establishment of a rail service between San Sebastian and Bayonne, the improvement of the rolling road and maritime transport. Also reached in these strategic environmental issues, the protection of natural areas, the promotion of organic farming and quality, the cooperation in tourism, are important points of the Plan. As regarding the opened governance, it's composed from a Forum of reflection of agents of cross-border cooperation with the aim of strengthen the position of the EGTC on the European stage.¹³

The small number of examples mentioned here is not relevant for the importance of consolidation of cross-border network governance. Normally, the initiatives motivated by a shared cultural identity, despite being constructed historically as political and economic alternatives, are today effectively spearheading cross-border governance networks. In any case, the emergence of cross-border forms underlines how urgent it is to create new forms of active solidarity within a territory undergoing profound changes.

¹¹ „Euroregion Aquitaine-Euskadi,” accessed July 10, 2016, <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en/resources/territories/territoires-niveau-regional/euroregion-aquitaine-euskadi/euroregion-aquitaine-euskadi-1/>.

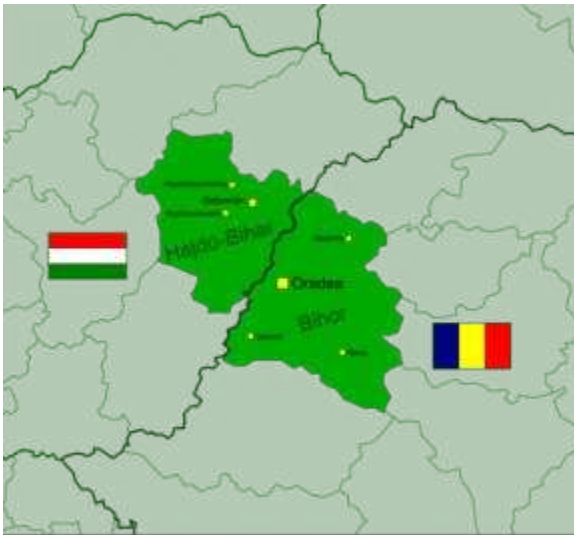
¹² Euroregion Aquitaine-Euskadi, „Plan Stratégique du G.E.C.T. Euroregion Aquitaine-Euskadi 2014-2020,” accessed July 11, 2016, http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Documents_Territoires/PLAN_STRAT_euroregion_aquit_eusk.pdf.

¹³ Ibid.

The Bihor- Hajdú- Bihar as Euro-region

The Bihor- Hajdú -Bihar Euroregion was created in 2002, as a “newly created structure within a diversified area in terms of ethnic-confessions, culture and not least of cross-border cooperation”.¹⁴ The Bihor – Hajdú- Bihar Euroregion is formed by Bihor County at the North-West border of Romania and Hajdú-Bihar County at the North-East border of Hungary. The main cities are Oradea in Bihor and Debrecen in Hajdú -Bihar. The two counties do not have a homogenous structure, but they somehow find themselves propelled to establish new ways of cooperation due to the challenges experienced by the inhabitants living on both the Romanian and Hungarian border. Moreover, the differences of resources make it possible and somehow necessary for a certain economical cooperation between Bihor and Hajdú - Bihar.

Figure 2: The Bihor- Hajdú-Bihar space



Source of the map: “Nu Bihor, nu Hajdú -Bihar, nici măcar Biharia. Ci Bihar(med),” accessed July 10, 2016; <http://www.calincorpas.ro/2011/06/nu-bihor-nu-hajdu-bihar-nici-macar-biharia-ci-biharmed/>

The data referring to cross-border cooperation at the level of Bihor- Hajdú -Bihar Euroregion had been made available by the Regional Office of Cross-border Cooperation Oradea (BRECO), created in 2004. Within the Phare Program CBC 2004 Romania-Hungary, a number of ten projects had been effectuated and finished, and Within the Phare Program CBC Romania-Hungary, a number of 39 projects had been completed during 2004-2006. The fields of application of these projects are: administration, infrastructure, education and business environment.¹⁵

¹⁴ Constatin-Vasile Țoca, “Ethical Analysis within Bihor- Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion,” in *Ethnicity and Intercultural Dialogue at the European Union Eastern Border*, ed. Mircea Brie, Ioan Horga, Sorin Șipoș, 2013, accessed July 2, 2016, https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/62054/1/MPRA_paper_62054.pdf

¹⁵ BRECO, accessed July 12, 2016, <http://www.brecooradea.ro/index.php/despre-noi/breco>.

“Neighbors and Partners: on the two sides of the border” is the name of a volume edited in Debrecen and it’s one of the important firsts steps for the academic collaboration in the Bihor- Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion. The two Universities from Oradea and Debrecen have a good collaboration in the fields of research and academic environment, but there is also a good cooperation in other fields such as it was demonstrated in the analysis “Sociological research. Thinking the future together the Debrecen – Oradea cross border agglomeration”.¹⁶

Constatin-Vasile Țoca in his article “Different Territorial levels of Romanian-Hungarian Cross-border cooperation” points out that there are two directions for cooperation in Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion and they are coordinated by commissions designated for this particular purpose. These Commissions are: the Commission for International cooperation (in charge with the international cooperation of the Euroregion) and the Commission for Cooperation and Sustainable Development (which pursues funding opportunities and expresses opinions on the projects).¹⁷

From the perspective of Romanian - Hungarian border cooperation, the development of cooperation is noticed and obvious by the number of projects and results. The project "Windows to Europe" and the cross-border cooperation programme, part of the Hungary-Romania Cross Border Cooperation Programmes 2007-2013 CBC implemented in the past within the region (Interreg IIIA in Hungary and Phare CBC in Romania) stimulated the cross-border cooperation in the period 2007-2013. The project was supported through the European Regional Development Fund and the contribution of the two Member States.¹⁸ As for the "Windows to Europe" project, we can mention some of the most relevant and important conferences organized: in 2006 “Future cooperation between the towns of Oradea and Debrecen”, in 2008 the Euroregional conference "The role of public administration in the Euroregions, in 2009 Debrecen and Oradea in the European Union – developing strategies, in 2010 The development of potential for the Euro-region Bihor- Hajdú-Bihar (with the identification of common collaboration points between the two regions) and in 2011 The fortress of Oradea as touristic objective of major importance in Bihor- Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion. So, the levels of cooperation can be noticed in the fields of culture and common history, common administration leadership, infrastructure.

At the present moment, besides the cross-border tools where a Euroregion can be identified, Constatin-Vasile Țoca propose in his book “Romanian-Hungarian cross-border cooperation at various territorial levels, with a particular study of the Debrecen-Oradea Eurometropolis (*European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation-EGTC*)” another level of cooperation by approaching a type of collaboration strictly based on the most important centers in the counties of Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar, Oradea and Debrecen, called “cross-border agglomeration”. Once with the evolution of the European thought on the development of cross-border cooperation relations, a new instrument can be implemented, that is EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation-EGTC).¹⁹

¹⁶ Constatin-Vasile Țoca and Ioan Horga, “Sociological Research. Thinking the Future together the Debrecen – Oradea Cross-border Agglomeration”, in *Neighbors and Partners: On the Two Sides of the Border*, Ed. István Süli-Zakar (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó 2008), 80-81.

¹⁷ Constatin-Vasile Țoca, “Different Territorial Levels of Romanian-Hungarian Cross-border Cooperation” in *The Frontier Worker – New Perspectives on the Labor Market in the Border Regions*, 2013, accessed July 12, 2016, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2560776.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹ Constatin-Vasile Țoca, *Romanian-Hungarian Cross-border Cooperation at Various Territorial Levels, with a Particular Study of the Debrecen-Oradea Eurometropolis (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation-EGTC)* (Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2013), 16.

In other words, he proposes the creation of this instrument, EGTC, existed in others countries, for a better cross-border cooperation between Hungary and Romania. This could be a step forward in the Euroregion Bihor- Hajdú - Bihar.

Some lessons to be learnt. Conclusions

Today, the cooperation between territories with natural frontiers has an old tradition on the European continent. Some of the Euroregions of today were established sooner, others later. Always there are lessons to learn and examples to take one from the other regarding the cooperation and collaboration. Nevertheless, it is important to adapt and to take those examples which are relevant for each border region, because not every project of collaboration is appropriate in any situation.

As for our two Euroregions, the Basque County and the Bihor – Hajdú -Bihar Euroregion, one in the West and the other in the East of Europe, they have lessons to learn one from the other. A good example for Bihor – Hajdú -Bihar Euroregion would be the implementation of the EGTC project. This could bring advantages on the long term, such as it was in the case of the Basque County. It would give a stable legal framework and financial autonomy for the Bihor – Hajdú -Bihar Euroregion. It could be established axis for better cooperation and priorities. The EGTC is a very important instrument for interregional cooperation and by this decision the European Union took a great decision in promoting and supporting the territorial cross-border cooperation. It is a useful tool in favor of socio-economic development and a new dimension of interregional cooperation.

On the other side, the Basque Country could learn better the lesson of academic collaboration. The exchanges between Universities and the research environment improve usually the communication and the accessibility to the culture of the other. Moreover, if regional cooperation and cross-border collaborations can facilitate a common work for research centers, for sure they will improve the productivity as well, they can diversify the area of joint projects, they can develop new jobs on the market and maybe a better understanding of people. Academic partnerships can be useful for improving the transition of young people from the education level to the labor market.

Others examples can be given and a more deep investigation can be done. This is not an exhaustive paper, but it can be considered as a begging and a started point for a research work.

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