

THE CONTRIBUTION OF COHESION POLICY IN THE „LOWER DANUBE” EUROREGION: THE MAPPING OF THE IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS’ OUTPUTS AND THEIR IMPLICATION TO TRANSITION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

Through its programmes, the European Union supports Euroregions so as to help develop joint projects, meant to enforce the economic and social cohesion. Do these programmes of the Cohesion Policy also support the transition processes towards sustainability? This study examines this aspect, by achieving an overall image of the results of the projects implemented in the “Lower Danube” Euro-region. This work uses the method of mapping the results in order to understand the way in which the cohesion policy supports the Euroregions in terms of territorial cohesion and durable development. Therefore, there are roughly analysed the types of results which prevail and their implications in ensuring the sustainability. This method can be adapted for other territorial structures (towns, regions etc) so as to appreciate the transition towards sustainability of the studied territory. The financial support for ensuring the territorial and social cohesion needs to be rethought depending on the potential and social-economical characteristics of the region.

Keywords: cohesion, instruments, projects, outputs, Euroregion, sustainability

Introduction

Important for the economical and social development in many European countries, the cohesion policy is the main politics of investments of the EU. Without a clear definition (Podarera Rivera, Calderón Vázquez, 2019, p. 41), this was associated to an increasing number of ample objectives of the EU, (Allen, 2005, p. 203), including sustainable development. Similar to other policies of the EU aiming for the European integration, the cohesion policy produces ambiguous effects on the capacity of the cross-border institutions (Popescu, 2008) affecting their role as „defender” of the standards and patterns of the European order from a „sub-European” order (Bădescu, 2011, p. 279). Contrary to expectations, the studies note

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that the financial support of the policy did not generate a significant political help in terms of support for the European integration (Bachtler *et al.*, 2016, p. 15; Krieger-Boden, 2018, pp. 12-13). For more than two years, the Commission has performed a study and has undergone a consulting process known as „The Analysis regarding the Cross-Border Cooperation”. On this occasion, it was shown that the border regions are less developed than the rest of the regions in a member state. 29.2 % of the EU-27 citizens, (without including the United Kingdom) lived in underdeveloped regions in 2013. It is estimated that this number will decrease to 25.2% by 2020 and to 22.3% by 2027 (Darvas *et al.*, 2019, p. 8). The European Parliament noted that the 6th Report concerning the cohesion paid insufficient attention to the cross-border cooperation, when this represented per se an objective of the cohesion policy ever since the 2007-2013 period of programming (Report, 2016) and finds that the Commission did not fully undertake a role of general coordination for the performed actions and requires an effective strategy and a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation as concerns the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (EP Resolution, 2019). Other research in the field outlined the limited result of the INTERREG III community initiative as concerns the strength of the structure of cross-border governance and sustainable development (Leibenath *et al.*, 2008).

In most cases for the evaluation of the cross-border cooperation and the development of the Euroregions certain indicators were taken into account – the creating of jobs, expenses for research-innovation, or GDP increase, which is a useful indicator, but incomplete and biased (Kuhlman and Farrington, 2010). The respective indicators can be the cumulative result of the interventions sustained by European, national or local financing, whereas the comparison to sustainability is briefly analyzed. The results of the projects are „accounted for” by each financing body, and for each programme in turn. But this thing does not give an overall image of the way in which the Euroregion responds to the measures of financial support by various projects. The final effects of these European influences are presented especially as the results of a complex interaction of actors, institutions and discourses at European, national and local level (Leibenath *et al.*, 2008). The studies concerning the triad of problems aiming for sustainability – environment, society, economy in the cross-border context are limited. Mostly, the works that refer to the cross-border effects present especially an ecological approach (a social-ecological one), whereas the intergenerational aspects are tackled in the studies on the future welfare (Miola *et al.*, 2019). For these reasons study develops a tool for mapping the results of the implemented projects via the programmes of the Cohesion Policy.

Using the results map, the impact on the development of the Euroregion is not followed, but the extent to which these results increase the possibility of the impact on the development and support the processes of transition to sustainability. The endeavour is developed in three sections. First, the conceptual framework of cohesion policy and its intervention tools is briefly presented. Secondly, it will resort to a deconstruction of the Euro-regional discourse, insisting on the role of the Euro-regions in the cohesion scenario. Recourse to deconstruction is necessary, given the



multitude of ideologies, visions, motives, economic and geostrategic theories that support the re-territorialization approach of the euroregions. Third, the outputs of the financially supported projects under cohesion policy in the „Lower Danube” Euroregion are examined through an empirical analysis. The analysis in the current work refers only to outputs, which are different from outcomes (Robichau, 2009). When we say outputs, we take into account the first level of results associated to a project, without considering them indicators of the effectiveness. An output is the product, what actually offers the project – a software system, a new action framework, a standard, modified law, methodologies, tools etc. Mainly, but not exclusively technical and conceived in a pragmatic sense, the outputs produce specific independent effects and they are also structuring the public action according to its own logic. In this sense they are important not only as concerns the application of the community policies, but also of those related to the functioning mode of the public scope (Bachtler *et al.*, 2016). Organising a forum concerning the sustainable agriculture represents an example of outputs. It is only a space creating ideas and representations on that policy, which can be interpreted according to the rules of the game specific for the forum, by the actors, interests that make it up and the force relations between these actors (Boussaguet, 2010, p. 284). It would be hazardously to say that organising a forum would solve the problems in agriculture. Eve Foilleux, who analysed the changing of the reference system of the Joint Agricultural Policy notes that a forum of farmers wants to put forward their own view on agriculture, in their circle and before the public authorities. Thus, the forum becomes a space of reusing, of institutionalizing ideas by transforming them into instruments of policies, which are to generate and activate new cognitive and normative matrices in the field (Boussaguet, 2010, pp. 283-289) and an element which can support the innovative and sustainable development (Blatter, 2000).

The analysis is summarized in a single Euroregion (a common and accepted fact for such studies) – the „Lower Danube” Euroregion, taking into account that the potential of cross-border cooperation and promotion of the contribution to the development of the Euroregion can be affected by a variety of contextual characteristics of the subnational territorial collectivities which come into its composition (Jessop, 2002; de Sousa, 2012; Durand and Decoville, 2019). This thing means that there are possible different models of achieving sustainability, depending on the specific situation of a region and the needs and interests of the actors involved.

1. The conceptual framework of the cohesion policy and its instruments of intervention

Starting with the end of the ‘80s in the 20th century, the cohesion policy was a main mean to fight economical, social and territorial inequalities throughout EU, currently focusing also on the poor countries and regions in the Central Europe, Eastern and Southern Europe (Bachteler and Begg, 2017). The implementation of the cohesion policy is ensured by three main financial instruments: 1) The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), 2) The European Social Fund (ESF), 3) The



Cohesion Fund, by which there are supported the durable development and connectivity in member states with a GDP below 90% of the EU-27 average.

The cross-border cooperation in the European Union is incorporated in the cohesion policy, the euro-regions serving as preferred instruments for the territoriality of social life (Popescu, 2006; Sum, 2002; de Sousa, 2012). Thus, setting up the Euroregions has become a geopolitical enterprise (Popescu, 2008), the national governments being forced to carefully analyse the pros and cons of these „small pieces, but interesting theoretically, of the European governing mosaic on several levels” (Svensson, 2015).

The strategic community trends for the 2007 - 2013 period focussed on the consolidation of the synergies between the environment protection and the economical development so as to ensure the long-term sustainability of the economic growth. However, researches show that the operational programmes were stronger aligned to the Lisbon Strategy for Economic Growth and Jobs and weaker to the EU Strategy of Sustainable Development (Hjerp *et al.*, 2011). Authors concerned with projecting transitions towards sustainability consider that sustainability requires more than the development of markets, institutions and of correct values. Painful, but pragmatic (O’Riordan and Voisey, 1998, p. 8) the transition to sustainability requires also risk analysis (Ionescu *et al.*, 2018) and social impulse (Mancebo and Sachs, 2016, p. 2).

A complementary elements to obtain an effective governance of the cross-border cooperation is represented by the territorial strategies of durable development (Cots, 2017), policy orientation towards results (namely to approach real problems for which it was conceived an intervention) and not oriented towards indicators (such as measuring the lengths of the built roads), a series of principles, implicit or explicit, norms, rules and procedures for taking decisions as concerns the common problems, especially for problems that exceed the local level (Thierstein *et al.*, 2018, Avendaño 2013; Kurowska-Pysz, 2018).

Ranjula Bali Swain and F. Yang-Wallentinb (Swain *et al.*, 2019) examine the inconsistencies of the Goals of Sustainable Development (SGN) and argue which of the basic social, economic or environmental pillars of SGN are the most effective ones for achieving durable development. The data show that developed countries must stay focussed on their social and environmental policies. On the other hand, developing countries are more focussed on the short-term economy and social policies, even if the environmental policies remain significant for durable development. Criticised for its ambiguity (Swain, 2018; Hove, 2004; Merle, 1994) the concept of sustainable development still remains a process of social construction which implies major changes in the day-to-day life of the citizens.

2. The role of the Euroregions in the cohesion scenario

What is the role of Euroregions in the „cohesion scenario”, of which John Peterson claims it is written by the member states, even when the European

Commission and a variety of regional and local actors create their own roles and their own interpretation of the sense and the purpose of these scenario (*apud* Allen 2005, 205)? The role of Euroregions in the cohesion script gets outlined due to the fact that the arrangements of structural intervention have always favoured a philosophy of regionalism as being the best means to achieve cohesion (Allen, 2005, p. 205; de Sousa, 2012, p. 670). In this philosophy of regionalism, the Euroregions are seen as soft space – feasible governing arrangements, which are meant to increase the institutional borders and rooted practices, by inserting new ways to do things. A distinct characteristic of soft spaces is that they allow to introduce new and innovative ways of thinking, especially in the fields where there exists a significant resistance towards trans-sectorial approaches and of the multilevel governance. It is considered that these characteristics help Euroregions adapt to the structures of stimulation for quick change (Telle, 2017, p. 94). Moreover, the Euro-regional political way encourages the making of joint platforms of cooperation and governance and of equipping the Euroregions from several areas with the institutional capacity necessary to elaborate strategies and policies (Haselsberger and Benneworth, 2010; Kurowska-Pysz *et al.*, 2018; Wróblewski and Kasperek, 2019; Perkmann, 1999).

Also, the Euroregions are usually considered as an easier way for accessing European funds. With the joining of 10 new member states, the weight of the border regions in the total area of the EU increased from 22% in the EU-15 to over 35% in EU-25, while the percentage of the population living in border regions increased from 15% to almost 25% (Niebuhr, 2008). Today in EU there are 185 Euro-regions.

The Euroregions made up at the EU borders have a special role in the integration process due to their vicinity to the new member states (Smallbone *et al.*, 2007). Plus, the Euroregions seem to play the role of „incubators” for third-party organisations, especially public agencies, such as information centres’, investor centres or agencies of territorial marketing (Perkmann, 1999). The way in which the Euro-regions asserted themselves throughout time led to different appreciations: from „integration laboratories” (Kessler, 1999), to „opportunist strategy for obtaining public subventions” (Scott, 1999). The Euro-regions are used as instruments in international politics to promote the interests of the European Union states and of the sub-national actors. Under these circumstances, the cross-border re-territorialisation in the Eastern Europe remains an enterprise from up to down which does not enter deep enough in civil society so as to allow the breakthrough of some durable cross-border life spaces. Up to now, the significance of the Euroregions resides more in their territorial potential than in their achievements (Popescu, 2016).

3. Materials and methods

In this study there are synthesized the results of the implemented projects and their implications in the transition towards sustainability of the „Lower Danube” Euroregion. The territorial collectivities in the composition of the „Lower Danube” Euroregion were eligible in 6 of the 12 programmes of territorial cooperation of EU,



sustained by ERDF and ENI/ENPI. In the analysis, there are included 3 programmes of territorial cooperation implemented in the 2007-2013 period. The period is significant, taking into account that during such time, the objectives in the cohesion field were extended and aimed at the cross-border territorial cooperation.

Table 1. Sample distribution of the projects in the euroregion „Low Danube”

Programs	Nr. of the projects	Total
JOP RO-UA-MD 2007-2013	22	75
JOP Black Sea 2007-2013	34	
South-East Europe programme 2007-2013	19	

Source: author’s representation

Fundamentul teoretic al studiului îl reprezintă teoria rețelelor. Din perspectiva acestei teorii sunt analizate relațiile dintre stakeholderii implicați în implementarea proiectelor transfrontaliere și rolurile acestora. Informațiile privind actorii transfrontalieri (noduri în rețelele sociale) și relațiile dintre aceștia (legături în rețele sociale) s-au colectat din analiza documentelor de management ale proiectelor.

The fundamental source of collecting data is represented by the website keep.eu, an aggregated database regarding projects and beneficiaries of European Union cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation programmes among the member States, and between member States and neighbouring countries. As complementary sources we used the official websites of the Association of Cross-border Cooperation „Lower Danube Euroregion” (in Romanian original ACTDJ) and of the entities comprised in the Euroregion. This fact allowed the identification of all the implemented projects in the Euroregion. The projects in which at least one entity in the euroregion is declared leader or partner are analyzed. The collected data set refers to the number and geographical distribution of the projects, priorities and themed areas where it fits into, the involved actors, the results of the projects. In order to map the results, a matrix was drawn up, including 7 categories of results and their specific types (see Table 2). The seven categories resulted from the analysis of the management documents of projects.

Table 2. Categories of results and their specific types

Category	Types
Practical & reusable resources for the practitioners	Guide, Software, New methodologies and techniques, spin-of activities, toolkit
Organizational and working documents	Reports, maps, statistics, strategies, agreements, plans
Partnerships and cooperations	Network, seminar/networking/exchange of best practices

Community building tools	Online platform, Educational programme, Thematic or multifunctional centers
Research material bringing forward the reflection in the sector	Studies, Online database, Research publications, Industry Think Tank
Dissemination material	Website, Conference, Seminar, Exhibition, Printed brochure, Leaflets
Infrastructure	Equipment, facilities

Source: author's representation

The identified types of results are related to the six transformation of the SGD listed for the European Union: Well-educated workforce and innovative economy, Health and wellbeing for all, A climate neutral and circular economy, Sustainable food systems, land use, and oceans, Sustainable cities and communities, Digital and other modern technologies for sustainable development (SDSN & IEEP, 2019).

4. Lower Danube Euro-region: context overview

The key-actors behind the setting up of the „Lower Danube” Euro-region (besides of all the Euro-regions in the South-East Europe) (Popescu, 2008) were institutions of the EU at supranational scale and the central governments at national scale. By the 1990s of the 20th century, the border area between Romania, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine had a low priority on the EU agenda. This area comes into the attention of the European Union as Romania advanced towards adhesion. An important factor that stays at the base of this cooperation is the EU desire to take on a stabilizing role, but also a transformative role of post-Soviet countries (Scott, 2014). For this purpose, the EU promoted and actively sustained the setting up of Euro-regions in the border areas of Romania, Ukraine and Moldova, by creating financial programmes for the support of cross-border cooperation (Popescu, 2008).

The collaboration relations between the border regions of the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine were set ever since the mid ‘80s, yet this had a more formal nature. After 1989 it is reported a revival, but it is still quite limited due to the lack of clarity in the intrastate relations between parties. The experience on the matter of cross-border cooperation among the Ukrainian, Moldavian and Romanian territories was difficult, since the practice of the Socialist period was hard to apply under the new circumstances (Șoitu and Șoitu, 2010). Moreover, the Euro-regional cooperation at the mouths of Danube is marked by the Romanian-Ukrainian litigation on the Bystroe canal, as well as to that referring to the belonging of the Snake Island and the delineation of the continental plateau around Chilia area (Săgeată, 2006; Șofîneți and Dobrotă, 2004). The initiative regarding the promotion of the cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine was launched by the president of Romania at the beginning of the year 1997. By the basic Romanian-Ukrainian treaty on 2nd June 1997, there were laid the foundations of a close cooperation in various fields, including the cross-border cooperation. In accordance with art. 8 of the Treaty, the countries vowed to support the cooperation between the



administrative-territorial units in the border regions and it was also envisioned the creation of the „Upper Prut” and „Lower Danube” Euroregions where the local territorial collectivities in the Republic of Moldova could participate. Thus, in the South-East Europe, there appears a Euroregion, which according to the typology drafted by R. Săgeată (Săgeată, 2004) it is a region made up by the borders of three states, based on the unitary ethnical structure, symmetrical (with a relatively similar degree of economical-social and technical-urbanistic development). According to the criteria drafted by Kramsch and Hooper (*apud* Häkli, 2008) it can be qualified under the category of the less-advantageous Euroregions, occurred in the buffer border areas, after the Cold War.

All the three countries had their own interests in creating the Euroregion. For Romania, it represented the theoretical and practical acceptance of regionalism (Roşcovanu, 2003) Also, the „solution” of the Euroregion satisfied the Romanian government because it offered the chance of getting closer to the Romanian ethnic people in the territories occupied by the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) at the end of the Second World War and inherited by Ukraine when it became independent in 1991. In turn, Ukraine (with a certain dose of caution as concerns the Romanian intentions) is interested in the Euroregion, considering it a device of integration into Europe. As regards Moldova, a state without a sea outlet, the Euroregion might seem a necessity, given the access granted to it by Danube and the Black Sea (Popescu, 2016).

For ten years, the Euroregion worked without an actual legal form, being rather a regulated forum, where representatives from the local public authorities of the three countries would gather. The new European context, respectively the acquiring by Romania of the status of member state in the European Union and the necessity to capitalize the opportunities created by the new structures of external financing represented catalyst factors in creating new leverage of viability of the Euroregion.

Thus, in March 2009, it is created the Association of Cross-border Cooperation of the „Lower Danube” Euro-region (ACTEDJ) – a structure of executive management of the Euroregion, organised as Romanian legal entity, headquartered in Galaţi. The main motivation was the necessity of a joint structure of management with direct duties in the application and administration of the financial programmes of EU available for the border regions.

5. Projects and outputs

The first projects by which the bases of cooperation in the „Lower Danube” Euroregion are laid out are mainly cultural, followed by environmental projects and economic development. The effort is acknowledged by the fact that after just four years since its founding, it receives the „Sail of Papenburg” award, being the first Euro-region to open the annual granting of this prize by the European Association of Border Regions (EABR). The cross-border award of EABR was offered for



intense social-cultural cooperation, which was set despite the extremely difficult situation at the border between Ukraine, Moldova and Romania.

During the ten years of activity within the Euroregion, there were implemented over 50 projects of cross-border cooperation. A new dimension in the cross-border cooperation is given starting from 2003. By the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), EU doubles its efforts to promote the cooperation with its immediate neighbours.

The Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013 was financed by the European Union by means of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, being granted a budget of EUR 126.7 million. At the end of the RO-MD-UA Programme, there were reported 148 contracted projects, of which 8 major investment projects. Of the 8 major investment projects, in four cases, the project leaders are institutions in Romania, while two of them are from the Republic of Moldova and two from Ukraine. The Republic of Moldova is part in 7 projects, whereas in Ukraine is in 5 of the 8 major projects of investments. The Republic of Moldova is the main beneficiary of these investments. An important factor, which contributed to this positioning was the privileged relation with Romania, plus the financial aid given by the Romanian state for implementing these projects (Bărbulescu, 2016).

The actual benefits for the Euroregion following the implementation of major investment projects financed within the JOP Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013 are given by four projects, these actually resulting in:

- Infrastructure investments in the field of citizen safety (equipping a SMURD regional centre at Cahul as a solution for integrating the system of medical emergencies, resuscitation and extrication at the border area between Romania and the Republic of Moldova;
- Joint infrastructure of telecommunications (optical fibre and radio relays for data and voice. The target-groups are represented by the services for emergency situations, police, local public authorities, populations, railway stations, but also other institutions and entities of the state;
- Improved capacity of the customs personnel at the common points for crossing the border Romania – Republic of Moldova, equipping with mobile customs laboratory as an efficient instrument in the activity of ensuring the economic security of the state, proper cashing-in of the import rights, as well as fighting off the illicit trafficking of goods;
- Modern monitoring system for the prevention and protection against the floods in the basin of Prut river;
- Maps, charts and studies from the Lower Danube region regarding the risks caused by the sources of the pollution of soil and water for human and environmental health.

The majority of the projects for supporting the communities in the Lower Danube of the twenty-one contracted by the organisations in the Euroregion were trilateral, simple, partially or entirely implemented in the geographic area where the project leader came from. The most had as project leader organisations from Galați,



Romania. At the opposite pole is the town of Cahul (Republic of Moldova) with only one project. The most targeted was Priority 3 „People to people” – 47% of the projects. The projects within the Priority 1 „Competitive Economy in the border area” represent 38%, and the smallest weight that of 14% is represented by the projects in Priority 2 „Environment and preparation for emergency situations”.

The financed projects cover various themed areas. The projects that have as priority the development of a competitive economy in the border area were developed especially by institutions from Odessa. However, it is noted that in many projects, the partners come from other towns, different from those in the region, especially from the towns of Bălți, Yassy and Chişinău. The institutions from Romania and the Republic of Moldova preferred the involvement in „People to people” activities (see Table 2).

Table 3. Roles and themed areas covered by the cross-border cooperation projects within the JOP RO-UA-MD 2007-2013

Tematics	RO	UA	MD
SME and entrepreneurship	xxo	xxxxo	oo
Health and social services	x	x	o
Tourism	xo	xo	o
Agriculture, fisheries and forestry	x	x	o
Water management	x		o
Climate change and biodiversity	x	o	o
Managing natural and man-made threats	x	o	
Social inclusion and equal opportunities	xx	o	o
Institutional cooperation and cooperation networks	xo		xo
Cultural heritage and arts	xo	x	o
Education and training		x	

Note: x / o – number of projects; x- project leader; o – partner

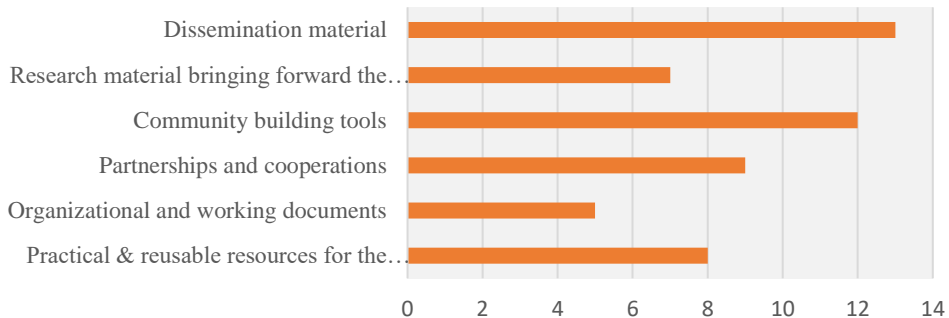
Source: author’s representation

The outputs analysis of the projects reveals a certain degree of their homogeneity. When we say homogeneity, we bear in mind the fact that for specific goals, for specific problems, similar solutions were thought for.

Outputs in the category „Dissemination material and Community building tools” are dominant. The types of outputs from these categories with the highest occurrence are developing new structures, such as centres for information, mediation or recreation, and the equipping of the existing ones. The character of novelty is brief, being preferred by study visits, the change of experience or activities with the participation of all the partners such as: round tables, conferences, festivals, exhibitions. In the category „Partnerships and cooperation”, it prevails the creation of networks and the exchange of good practices. A high enough occurrence is representative for market studies, feasibility studies, followed by informative and

instructive guides, technical documents – set of maps for landslides and process of erosion, polluting points, industrial park project technical materials for territory planning.

Figure 1. The outputs of the projects from the JOP RO-UA-MD 2007-2013



Source: author's representation

With a lower occurrence, but with relevance for the communities where the projects were implemented are the outputs aiming for the development of infrastructure. It is about an aquatic base with entertainment facilities in Galați, cross-border tourist route, two networks of water supply and sewage created in a rural community, three centres for processing fruits, modernized laboratory for medical care in Galați, setting up a Reservation of the Biosphere (Lower Prut – the first Reservation of the Biosphere in the Republic of Moldova).

Generally, the social-economic added value generated by the programmes was determined to a great extent by the major investment projects (LIP) (Bulat *et al.*, 2018) being the only projects with visible cross-border relevance.

The number of cross-border projects financed by the Joint operational programme Black Sea Basin 2007-2013 is significantly larger – 34 projects. However, one should notice that in these projects the eligible institutions in the Euro-region have more the capacity of partner, than that of leader of project. In only five projects, the capacity of project leader is ensured by four institutions in Romania and one institution from Odessa. The themed areas are diverse, the highest level of cooperation being maintained in the field of sustainable management of the natural resources, environment and institutional cooperation.

At the level of outputs, there prevail outputs from the category „Practical & reusable resources for the practitioners” and „Organizational and working documents”. Types of outputs, such as the drawing up of studies, reports, drafting of danger map for earthquakes, landslides and floods at regional and local scales are found in 41% of the projects. In 25% of the projects, the results target activities of training, transfer of knowledge, change of experience. The creation of networks,



common platforms are the results to be found in 14%. The tangible outputs, such as the creation of a platform of organic waste, are in a more reduced number.

Table 4. Roles and tematics areas covered by cross-border cooperation projects within the JOP Black Sea 2007-2013

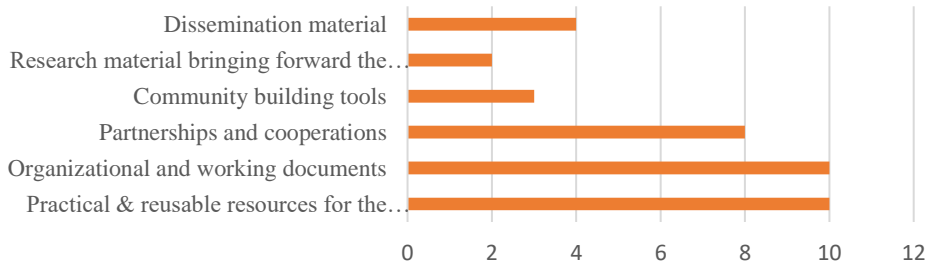
Tematics	RO	UA	MD
Costal mg & maritime issue		xo	o
Agriculture, fisheries and forestry	oo	oo	
Waste and pollution	xoo	o	o
Knowledge and technology transfer	o	o	
Sustainable management of natural resources	xooo	oo	oo
Cultural heritage and arts	x	ooo	
Energy efficiency	o	o	o
Institutional cooperation and cooperation networks	xo	oooo	
Logistics and freight transport		o	
Tourism	o	ooo	
Improving transport connections		o	o
Clustering and economic cooperation		o	
SME and entrepreneurship	o	o	
Managing natural and man-made threats		oo	
Education and training		oo	
Water management	o	o	

Note: x / o – number of projects; x- project leader; o – partner

Source: author's representation

The South-East Europe Programme is one of the 13 programmes of active cross-border cooperation during the programming period 2007-2013. It was the programme with the largest geographical area of cooperation – 16 participant countries. With four priority axes, it is considered a „sole instrument” of European Territorial Cooperation. Covering geographically six candidate countries and potential candidates and two countries which participate at the European neighbouring policy (Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova), it is launched under the slogan of a „moral obligation to continue cooperation” (southeast-europe.net).

The participation of institutions in the „Lower Danube” Euroregion in this programme is just as partners or observers. With actual benefits for the Euro-region, there were 19 projects implemented. The objectives of the projects targeted especially the river Danube and the protected areas. Social innovation, regenerable energy, the countryside and the periphery were fields less exploited within the South-East Europe 2007-2013 Programme.

Figure 2. The outputs of the projects from the JOP Black Sea 2007-2013

Source: author's representation

Table 5. Roles and themed areas covered by the cross-border cooperation projects within the South-East Europe programme 2007-2013

Tematics	RO	UA	MD
Agriculture, fisheries and forestry	o	o	
Waste and pollution	o		
Climate change and biodiversity		o	
Sustainable management of natural resources	ooo		
Tourism	o		
Improving transport connections	o		
Managing natural and man-made threats	o		
Education and training	o	oo	
Water management		o	
Infrastructure	o		
Transport and mobility	oo	o	
Waterways, lakes and rivers		o	
Rural and peripheral development	o		
Social inclusion and equal opportunities	o		
Renewable energy	o		

Note: x / o – number of projects; x- project leader; o – partner.

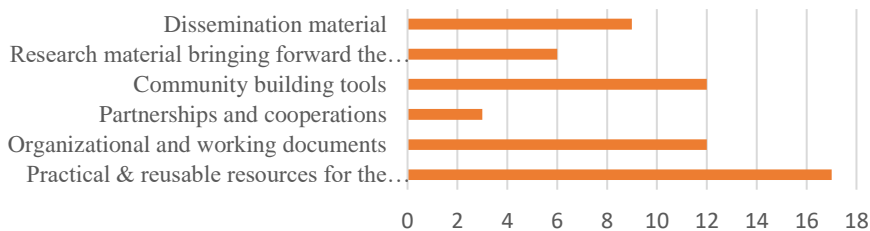
Source: author's representation

At the level of outputs, there prevail those in the category „Practical & reusable resources for the practitioners”, „Organizational and working documents” (analysis and evaluation reports, creating joint platforms, drawing up studies of feasibility) and „Community building tools”. It is noted the increased occurrence of activities of the spin-of type, these referring particularly to the innovative models and methods for using the potential of the protected natural areas, the protection of river basins against agricultural polluters, common methodologies concerning the research of environmental problems, regarding the prevention of dangers and floods



in the Danube Delta, forecasting system of the dispersion of oil spills based on prognosis models of winds, waves and the circulation of oceans. By comparison to the JOP RO-UA-MD and JOP Black Sea Basin, it is noted a greater occurrence of outputs of the „Research material bringing forward the reflection in the sector” type. The results of „software” type are brief (a single IT instrument to monitor the quality of surface waters (indicators of water quality)).

Figure 3. The outputs of the projects from the JOP South-East Europe programme 2007-2013



Source: author's representation

In the outputs category with increased relevance for the Euroregion, there are the development of common action plans, practices of regeneration of fields, developing ways for durable tourism. The effects of the latter result are seen in the increase of the number of tourists in areas that were once uncaptalized. A rural locality in the Euro-region attracts more tourists than the riverain town of Galați.

Conclusion and discussion

The programmes of the cohesion policy analysed in this study have improved the application field of the cross-border cooperation in the Lower Danube Euroregion. Despite the difficulties which the functioning of the Lower Danube Euroregion has to face, the cross-border cooperation is gaining ground in Romania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. The results of the projects cover in different proportion the requests to ensure durability in the Euroregional context. The categories and types of outputs are different. Of the six transformations that aim durability in the EU, the most supported ones with various categories of results are the following: „Well-educated workforce and innovative economy” and „Sustainable food systems, land use, and oceans” (in the case of the Lower Danube Euroregion, there are taken into account the Black Sea and the Danube Delta). On the opposite side, there are „Health and wellbeing for all” and „A climate neutral and circular economy”).

The financial support of the cross-border cooperation between 2007-2013 followed the „to support” objective. The logic of the financial help from the EU is

based on the fact that it is necessary to support projects or initiatives „functioning as catalyst,, and which trigger cooperation. This thing explains the increased occurrence of the results in the „Partnerships and cooperation” category, especially in creating networks and from the „Resources for practitioners” category. Notable sometimes, these results do not represent the final answer to the challenges of European integration, all the more so as concerns the durable development. These offered the possibility of involving the public and private actors to participate, but this thing does not have to be confused with proper and enough interactions, that might offer cohesive properties to the Euroregion as a whole. The cross-border cooperation was most likely determined by strategic and security reasons, expressed by the European Union. The majority of the programmes adopted an ascending approach when they decided what projects to support. The financing requests were in accordance with the objectives and priorities of the programmes, but the financing was granted in a less coherent and structured way.

With regard to cooperation flows, it is noted that there is a wide network of partners and institutions in the Lower Danube region. The initiatives and actions carried out are supported by networks of relatively stable actors, providing a degree of institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation.

Actors with a political-administrative role have acquired a central position in the evolution and functioning of the Euroregion. They are mainly representatives of local governments in the main cities of the Euroregion. In the category of public institutions, a significant share is represented by universities, most of which are in Odessa. In Romania, the institutions actively playing partners or project leaders are a university and institutions that have as their field of activity the river infrastructure or the administration of the Danube Delta. The non-governmental sector in the Euroregion is most often represented by the same organisation. For example, three out of five NGOs in the Republic of Moldova are partners in 85% of the projects.

Although stable, the cooperation relations continue to be rather thin, with a limited impact on the Euroregion as a soft space. There is a tripolar flow of ideas and activities, but new or innovative modalities of action are delayed, bearing in mind that many of the decisions or solutions to certain problems, especially those relating to infrastructure, also involve government decisions. For example, the setting up of a communication route on the Danube between the localities Isaccea in Tulcea County (RO) and Orlovka (UA) for the transport of goods requires the conversion of Isaccea and Orlovka into border crossing points, a problem which has to do with the competence of the central authorities of the two countries. A modernized cross-state infrastructure on the Odessa-Izmail-Reni-Giurgiulești-Galați route is still in the project phase.

From the perspective of the theory of collective efficiency, the networks represent one of the conditions that matter in the construction of communities, because they „capture the local expression of ideas, interests and values” (Hataley and Leuprecht, 2018). In the case of the Euroregions, the networks are a flexible instrument of interaction which keep the adapting capacity as problems change and new answers are learned so as to cope with things (Cots, 2017). However, in order



for them to be effective, the networks require capacities of political leadership and management. In handling networks, the quality of the relations between different levels and sectors is more important than the formal division of the competences between various actors (Cots, 2017). The positive endogenous effects for cooperation generated by this type of outputs will be seen in time. The major difficulty in capitalizing on financial instruments is that they must have a European justification and, at the same time, respond to the priorities and interests of the region. This made it difficult to pursue a coherent strategy to promote territorial and social-economic development and integration, although most individual projects made a contribution to this.

The main lesson of the 2013-2017 period is that cross-border cooperation initiatives were financially supported in the absence of a database on previous funding and their results.

Consequently, a significant share of the projects had budgets for the establishment of platforms and networking, the preparation of studies and reports, etc. in the same areas of intervention. For these reasons, the monitoring of projects implemented in the 2014-2020 period should also include the mapping of results. The results of the previous period, as well as information on cross-border actors (nodes in social networks) and their relations (links in social networks) should remain in the „institutional memory” of funding programmes, as well as of beneficiaries. The „supporting” logic must be replaced by the „consolidation” logic. The Association of Cross-border Cooperation of the „Lower Danube” Euroregion is the most appropriate structure that could assume the exercise of mapping the results of projects implemented in the Euroregion. An alternative could be the development of partnerships with higher education institutions or research institutes to carry out regular and thematic evaluations of the programmes or its components.

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