

The role of the EGTC in cross-border spatial planning

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Abstract

Since the appearance of the EGTC instrument in 2006,¹ much experience has been gained among those applying it that has highlighted some of its shortcomings and – in some cases – some of its potentials, which were not foreseen at the time of its creation. The EGTC instrument is now used by 69² collaborations across Europe. However these collaborations differ in terms of the purpose for which they have been established, among those of significance are those aiming for more efficient spatial development of cross-border functional regions. Many of these initiatives had to first gain some experience in the field of spatial planning – traditionally contained within the well-defined frameworks of national policy – in order to develop a more systematic and conscious functioning. Thus over the last decade and a half, a considerable number of EGTCs have challenged not only the traditional territorial boundaries, but traditional governance competencies as well. These attempts, which were literally expanding horizons, highlighted some of the interesting technical aspects of spatial planning. This paper tries to draw some conclusions, considering and evaluating the knowledge accumulated in the field of cross-border spatial planning, during the activities of EGTCs (mainly focusing on regional development) located along the Hungarian borders.

Keywords: EGTC, spatial planning, cross-border cooperation, planning methodology

Specialities of cross-border planning

Cross-border and borderland planning have several specialities derived from the different applicable logic of spatial perception, and these specialities present serious difficulties for the planner to overcome. Planning which goes beyond the conventional administrative frames, means a practice which is expanding horizons from the perspective of planning methodology.

1 <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/about/Pages/regulation.aspx>

2 <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRAactivities/Pages/egtc-list.aspx>

One of these fundamental and special difficulties lies in the availability of statistical information. While in the case of spatial-planning carried out within a country the planner is able to work using the sets of indicators of the same statistical office, which are equally available in the case of each municipality concerned; this practice involves at least two different statistical offices in the case of a cross-border region. Although Eurostat offers comprehensive data harmonisation primarily for NUTS2 level units, this work of data reconciliation is typically unfinished on the local levels needed by EGTCs. The range of available indicators, the methodological details underlying the production of indicators with the same name, the date range applicable or even the size of the lowest level unit can differ – and do actually differ. (In Hungary, for example, this lowest level unit can mean a single settlement; whereas in Serbia, it can cover the territory formed by 10-15 settlements.) As a result, this narrows significantly the possibilities for comparison and analysis of the territorial statistics; an essential process for the status analysis. Considerable additional work is required from the planners in order to create data harmonisation and to overcome the shortcomings. Furthermore, flow indicators, which are actually cross-border indicators and which are probably the most important indicators from the perspective of the cooperation, are not collected by any of the national statistical offices (especially not at a local or at a regional level). As the operation of the institutional system is adapted to the administrative limits of its territorial jurisdiction, it generally does not and cannot exceed them. Resolving this gap of basic information should be carried out individually, usually by the individual execution of field data collection, or by collecting qualitative information.

Probably the biggest and most specific challenge of cross-border planning is the measuring and valorising of the potentials of border areas. Several attempts have been made (e.g. ESPON TIA Tool³ and ESPON TIA CBC⁴; ITEM TIA publications⁵; CCBS, 2015; Medeiros, 2014; 2015) to develop tools to measure cross-border territorial impacts. However, the identification and assessment of the actual cross-border effects available to CBC projects still remain problematic. Several cases can be found for the realisation of some mirror projects (in the best case) on the two sides of the border, but these do not provide any meaningful solution towards strengthening the cohesion of their cross-border region and therefore cannot be characterised as truly cross-border. Rather, these are much more the results of some ad-hoc, short-term partnerships, grown out of necessity. So the actual cross-border effect and the sustainability of the projects implemented, respecting the potential of cross-border territories and based on a conscious planning process, are of great importance. In ensuring this, the EGTCs could have a vital role (as stakeholder and

3 <https://www.espon.eu/tool-type/tia>

4 <https://www.espon.eu/TIA-CBC>

5 <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/research/institutes/item/research/item-cross-border-impact-assessment>

as tool at the same time). In order to secure the development of all of the processes (basically the strengthening of the cohesion of the border regions, or making more efficient the utilisation of the territorial capital), it is essential to apply some novel approaches and methodologies during the planning and development, as a basis for shaping a shared borderscape.

It is important to emphasise that cross-border development shows a special complexity resulting from the various factors affecting it directly or indirectly (mostly hampering factors), that obviously need to be taken into consideration during the planning. (Jaschitz & Ocskay, 2018) Enhancing the competitiveness of a border region can be achieved by the liberation/exploitation of the territorial capital resulting from its location in a border area. The capacity of overcoming the borders can facilitate the realisation of some potential such as hospitals or universities operating on both sides of the border. However, this realisation meets obstacles in the separating effects of the border, understood both in psychological and physical terms. This obstacle can be overcome with a cohesion-based spatial planning; but for its implementation, it is first essential to solve the data harmonisation problems described above and this requires a special, cross-border statistical observation. This planning methodology, with its focus on cohesion, makes integrated, cross-border spatial planning possible. The implementation of this methodology would however meet another obstacle: unless the need for cross-border territorial governance is satisfied (for example the models based on the Madrid Outline Convention,⁶ more specifically, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation). However, the plans and the tools are not enough in themselves. As we will see later, the availability of the corresponding quantities and qualities of capacities and the preparedness of the management teams of the EGTCs are also key-factors for their successful operation. Assuming that operational cross-border multi-level governance is realised with the help of all of these tools, the next obstacle which may come up during the process of reaching the common targets may result from the legal obstacles deriving from the position of borderlands. In order to remove these obstacles, targeted measures are needed; realised both in the forms of community-based and bilateral initiatives. (Perkmann, 2007)

It is therefore apparent that the cross-border planning process does not benefit from databases and information ready for application and it cannot stay content with a space-perception based on the “container-logic” theory of space. It should also go further than the setting of strategic goals, and connect these to overcoming the special obstacles deriving from their position along the borders expected to appear during their implementation. It should also take into consideration the emerging issues in the fields of governance, management and law.

6 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/106>

Briefly on the methodology

The complex challenges described above resulting from the regions' position along the borders set high-level methodological requirements, which need a specific type of approach. The EGTCs with Hungarian participation are given here as examples of a strategic planning approach applied in all of the cases that have been based on the same principles of planning. As this methodology directly reflects the most important goals of these EGTCs (among others: mitigating the separating effect of the borders; enhancing cooperation among the regions along the borders; strengthening the principle of partnership and mutual understanding; contributing to a better use of the joint potentials which are divided by borders and of those which are complementary; and overall improving the cohesion of the cross-border regions on social, economic, and territorial levels), it is essential to briefly demonstrate the approach.

The so-called 'cohesion-based cross-border planning' methodology, elaborated by the CESCO is a non-exclusive alternative, but it is one possible and feasible approach. The basis of this approach is the appropriate spatial perception of the concept of border issues, understood from the perspective of the territorial development of the border regions. This approach not only studies and compares two or more neighbouring regions, but considers the cross-border territory in question as a functional, organic whole; focusing the spatial planning on enhancing the internal cohesiveness of the region. These territories cannot be considered as the aggregation of two different 'containers' with clear development goals and governmental competencies. (Berzi, 2017) These territories are complex; with unique development problems and interests (Perkmann, 2003) that make the application of a special planning approach necessary.

Planning in a cross-border region must have a clear territorial determination. In terms of cross-border planning and development, a cross-border region is a territory that is shared by several local or regional authorities, which are co-located in different nation states. The cross-border region is both physical and soft space where environmental, social and economic processes are flowing through the border, where social and economic relationships of societies are frequently crossing administrative barriers. (Jaschitz & Ocskay, 2018) A cross-border region is highly defined by its given border regime. It could be fully integrated on both sides, cooperative or co-existent (Martinez, 1994). From the aspect of their evolution, cross-border regions can be physical, functional and normative. (Scott, 1999)

Therefore the cohesion analysis elaborated by CESCO means basically a specific kind of status analysis, taking into account the cross-border complexity, in which we analyse the obstacles and challenges that can hinder high-level cross-border territorial, economic and social cohesion. It uses some standard methods (territorial

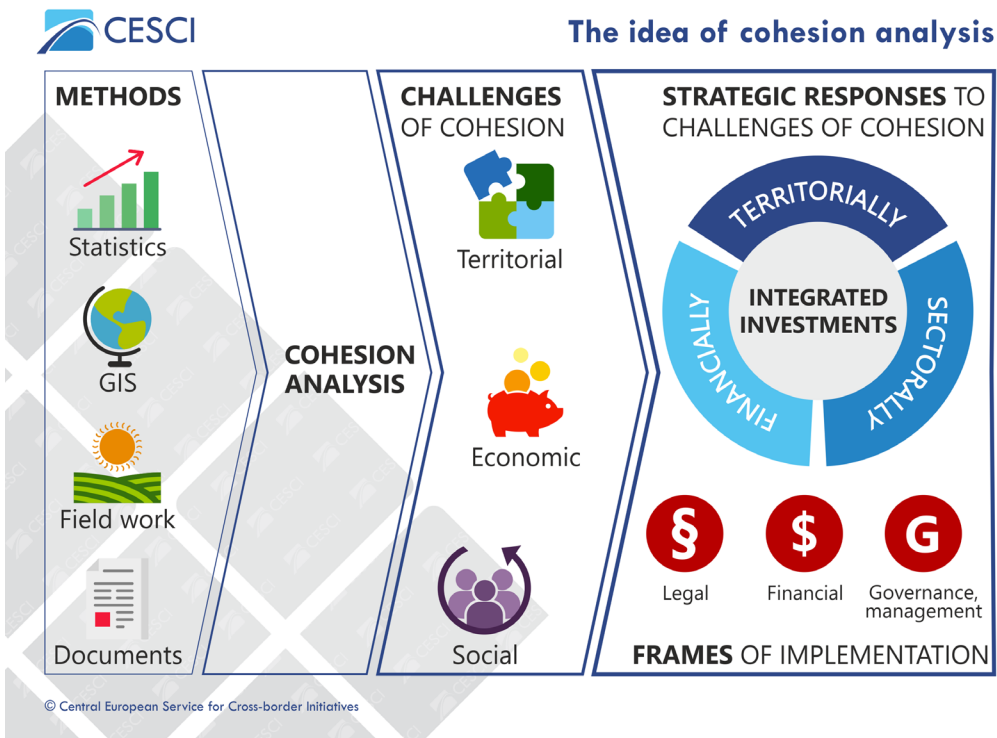
statistical analysis, GIS-analysis, analysis of documents from both sides, fieldwork, interviewing), but applies an unconventional logic of spatial concepts.

During the examination of territorial cohesion, the focus is on such aspects as the internal and external relations of the municipal networks of the region concerned; its spatial organisation; commuting conditions; the settlement hierarchy; the distribution of central functions; and institutional relations. Natural and landscape features are also taken into consideration, as well as the determinative hydrographical, orographic and vegetation factors (taking into account the possibilities of the realisation of an eventual, common and sustainable cross-border landscape management); the determinative environmental factors (such as climate conditions, water regime, soil conditions, land cover, etc.) and site conservation. Just as important is the investigation of the given border regime, and the examination of the hard (border crossing points) and soft (regulations) infrastructure, providing opportunity for the crossing of borders; so on the whole, the identification of the bottlenecks arising from the permeability of the border. In the context of economic cohesion, all the sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary) in the region are explored; as well as the capacities on the two sides of the border which can mutually complement each other's development, the state of the related economic infrastructure, and the deficiencies of its connectivity. For the analysis of social cohesion, the most important aspect is consideration of the success of cross-border cooperation fundamentally determined by how local actors are involved in its implementation and how they can rephrase the narrative which might once have been hostile. So the analysis is not limited to the assessment of the social situation. Some other conditions are also explored, such as demographic trends; migration patterns; the state of the common labour market; labour supply; education and training conditions; and wage inequalities. Language skills and the cultural heritage of the two sides; inter-ethnic relations; civil and institutional network connections; and twinning arrangements between towns and municipalities throughout the region are also taken into account. The summary of the analyses carried out in this way is concluded in all cases by a matrix, including those factors enhancing and weakening the territorial, economic and social cohesion in the cross-border region concerned. These should help to determine the cohesion challenges for which the strategy can be built as a response.

The initial analysis, which applies a large number of spatial statistical analyses and thematic maps repositioning the border region concerned, is given support in two areas which are of central importance from the perspective of the strategy's further implementation. One such activity is related, extensive fieldwork: carried out by recording data and information; surveys; and by conducting in-depth, structured interviews with stakeholders who will influence the common future of the region. The additional information obtained in this manner on the one hand brings us closer to a much more realistic picture delineated from the cross-border databases,

which are in many cases incomplete. On the other hand, it lays the foundation for public acceptance of the future document and for its support by decision-making bodies. As regards the other significant complementary activity, it is basically a very thorough and extended document analysis. All the above analyses are framed by the existing planning documents (local, regional, national, macro-regional strategies and plans) of the target area, since eventually these are the documents that designate possible (fundable) development directions. Therefore the related materials and regulations of the EU, national, regional and local levels are evaluated accordingly. It should be pointed out that during the fieldwork and during the collection of the related local planning documents, the EGTCs' institutions play an important role – both in the successful conduct and in enhancing the willingness to participate – as they provide an official institutional framework to the planning. Besides, as a kind of synergic retroactivity, the fact of the community planning itself can also enhance and improve the visibility and the legitimacy of the EGTC concerned

Figure 1: The logic of cohesion based cross-border planning



Source: CESCO

During the strategy-framing process, we are trying to find appropriate responses to those identified challenges in interventions that are not just strengthening the cohesion, but are also ensuring that their implementation is integrated from territorial, financial and sectoral aspects. The proposed actions are based on the endogenous resources of the border area and grouped according to the three aspects of cohesion. Furthermore, to strengthen the feasibility of the implementation of these strategies, an action plan is elaborated that takes into consideration and is intended to provide solutions to the specific legal, institutional, management and governance challenges of cross-border spatial planning. So, this part can facilitate long-term sustainability of the strategic results. The role of the EGTCs is huge at this final step, as it gives an institutional framework to the implementation of the strategy. The member territory of the grouping eventually manifests that coherent unity and an independent planning entity (overlapping with national administration narratives) that constitutes the spatial basis for the implementation of interventions set up in the strategy. This will promote the regions concerned to change their narratives – which are in many cases competitive, and separated along the border – to a narrative promoting win-win situations accepted and supported on both sides, in which the separation and delimitating effects of the border play a less important role.

Experiences from around Hungary

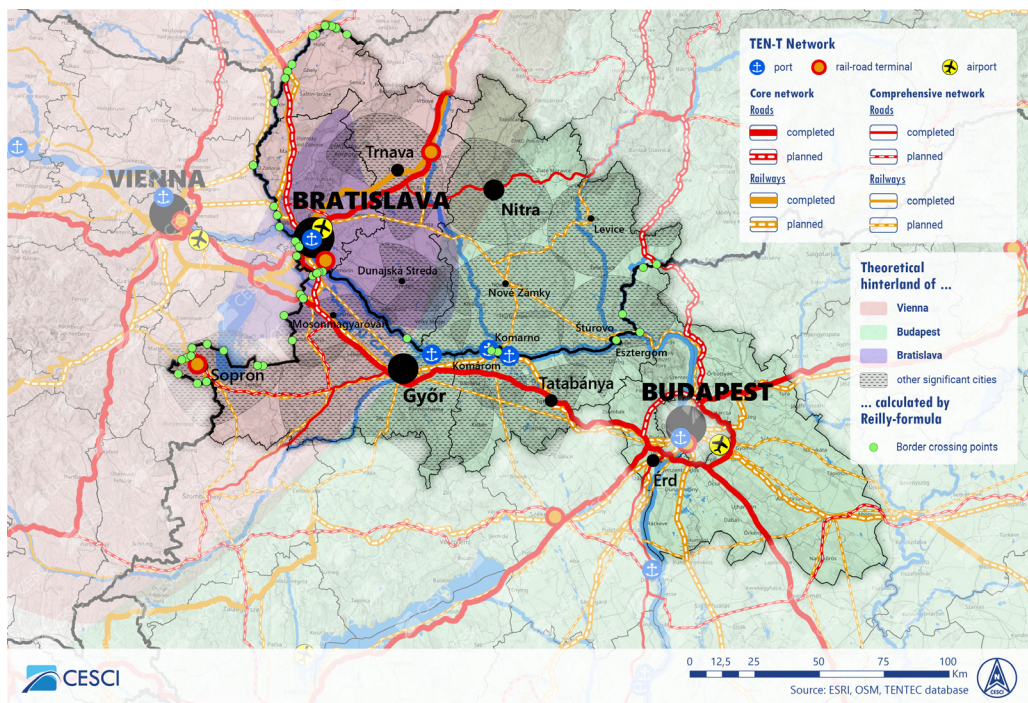
The author has contributed to the development of the cross-border, integrated territorial strategy of eight EGTCs (RDV, Arrabona, Sajó-Rima, Via-Carpatia, Tisza, Gate to Europe, Banat-Triplex Confinium, Mura Region) as chief planner. He also participated in the planning of the implementation of some specific cross-border developments of six EGTCs (Arrabona, Pons Danubii, Ister-Granum, Via Carpatia, Tisza, Gate to Europe) and had an overall view of practically all of the developments/planning activities of the EGTCs located along the Hungarian borders.

For all the EGTCs mentioned above – each following its own territorial strategy – planning was based on a demand for the creation of a long-term, sustainable, cross-border regional development and regional connection. The monitoring of these cases, the logic and the underlying methodology of the strategies based on the observations derived from it showed many similarities. However, in spite of all of these significant similarities, some individual experiences and solutions surfaced in the various regions that in some way concern the situation of the objectives set out in the planning documents and these are worth mentioning individually.

Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC was formed in 2011, with its seat in Tatabánya, Hungary. The founding members in Hungary and Slovakia were Győr-Moson-Sopron County, Komárom-Esztergom County, and Trnava Region. In 2015, Pest County

and Bratislava Region joined, followed by Nitra Region in 2019. The six members of the EGTC form a coherent area along the Danube by the western part of the border region between Hungary-Slovakia. The EGTC's activities, achievements, large number of approved and implemented projects, and long-term vision make it a significant player in the region. Its approved projects mainly focus on sustainability and the promotion of active ageing. The general objectives of the grouping are to promote cross-border cooperation between its members, so as to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion. The primary activity of the grouping consists in carrying out and implementing cooperation projects (e.g. silver economy, herbal economy, and circular economy projects) in the administrative territory of the members. Moreover, the grouping is one of the managing body of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Small Project Fund, which provides support for smaller local projects up to 2022. Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC also provides services – project application support; project management; project coordination; analyses and studies; organising presentations and workshops; and PR activities – for cross-border cooperation activities of municipalities, businesses and organisations.⁷

Figure 2: Example of transport network analysis



Source: CESCI

⁷ <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRActivities/Pages/R%0c3%0a1ba-Duna-V%0c3%0a1g.aspx>

Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC made the first status analysis of the region from a cross-border perspective in 2013, and based on this elaborated its integrated territorial development strategy. When it was set up, the only official Slovakian member of the cooperation was Trnava Region. In order to respect the functional geographical unit, during the spatial planning they took into consideration the territory of Nitra Region as well; which was a very far-sighted action. The strategy focused the EGTC's development narrative on its favourable exposure along the Danube, prioritising the objectives defined at the time of the foundation. Later, in 2019, with the expansion of the member territories of the EGTC (apart from Nitra, the two adjacent capital regions also became parts of the cooperation) the grouping decided to renew its territorial strategy; at the same time supervising the founding purposes, and partly strengthening, restricting and focusing them. As the members of Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC are regional authorities, the defined goals were adjusted to this level of competence. It may be asserted that the EGTC's management proceeded slowly and sequentially in the serving of the goals set out in the original strategy. This was not only caused by the personnel changes effected in the respective managements, but also by the capacity shortages generated by many project development activities of the EGTC and by the operations of the Small Project Fund.

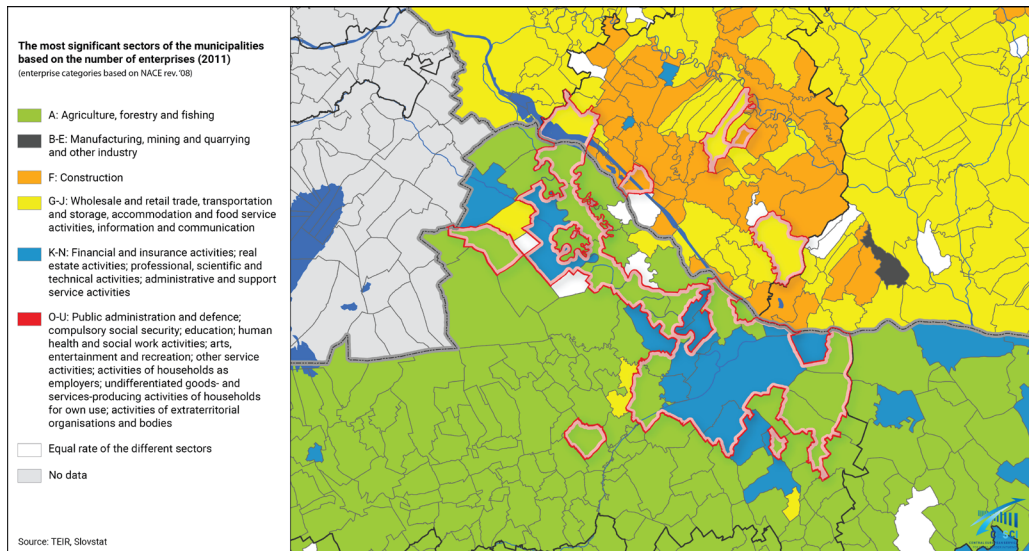
Arrabona EGTC was set up in 2014 by two Hungarian cities, Győr and Mosonmagyaróvár and the Slovakian municipalities of Dunajská Streda and Šamorín in the Szigetköz and Žitný ostrov border regions. Today, the EGTC has 35 members (seven municipalities from Slovakia and 28 from Hungary). The grouping is situated in the Budapest-Vienna-Bratislava axis region, which is one of the most dynamically developing metropolitan regions in Central Europe. Győr serves as the centre of a cross-border region, where urban and rural tourism can develop in symbiosis. A cross-border tourist region could be established through effective destination management. This has been the objective over the past few years, with a particular focus on the development goals of the municipalities concerned, while also considering cooperation with other sectoral partners. The EGTC is the first example in Hungary of managing a community-led local development (CLLD) project that will also strengthen the region's institutional fabric.⁸

Arrabona EGTC started to make the status analysis of its region from a cross-border perspective immediately after its foundation, and based on this, initiated the elaboration of the integrated territorial development strategy. As in the previous case, the work during the planning process, affected not only the membership territories in the strict sense. Rather, the founders planned from the beginning to create a functional region: considering all of the natural factors of all of the settlements located in the natural geographic regions of Szigetköz (HU) and Žitný

8 <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRActivities/Pages/Arrabona.aspx>

ostrov (SK). Thus, the process of dissemination/consultation about the regions' state and its possibilities for cross-border cooperation was not exclusively with the mayors of the settlements. Due to this foundation, the EGTCs' management can still use these strategies for the coordination of its projects and developments. The Arrabona EGTC can be regarded as one of the most successful groupings, taking into consideration the number and total value of implemented projects. It can be seen however, that only the smaller part of these projects aligned to the original system of strategic objectives, serving the strengthening of territorial cohesion of all the cross-border area. Rather, a significant part of these have been supporting the island-like developments of Győr. A recurring challenge for some EGTCs can be the excessive dominance of a member of the grouping with outstanding political importance, budget or activity, who even unconsciously can promote his own interest too vigorously. By taking advantage of the passive, less dominant attitude of the others and engaging the management of the cooperation, the broad legitimacy of the functioning of the EGTC is thereby eroded. From the viewpoint of planning approach this possibility underlines the importance of a balanced inclusion of stakeholders to the process – as it happened in the case of Arrabona EGTC in 2014.

Figure 3: Example of sectoral analysis

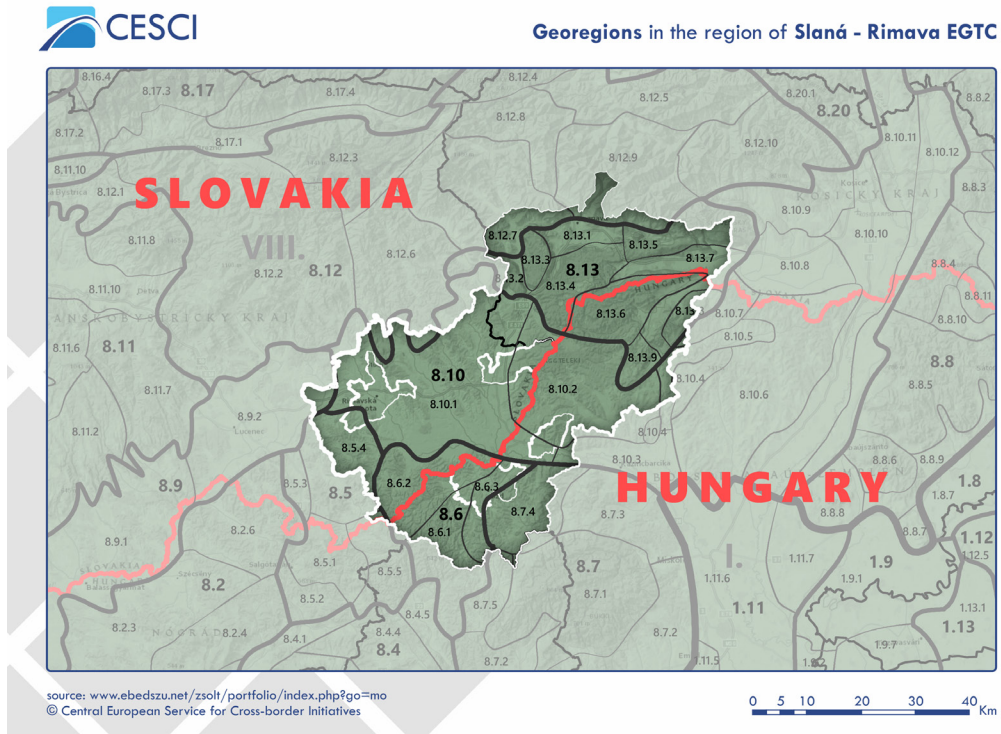


Source: CESCI

Sajó-Rima EGTC is located in the catchment area of the Sajó/Slaná and Rima/Rimava rivers, and brings together the municipalities of the region (Putnok and Ózd on the Hungarian side and Rimavská Sobota and Tornaľa on the Slovakian side). The grouping was registered in 2013. The general objective of the grouping is to strengthen economic and social cohesion between its members through cross-border

cooperation financed by both countries. The specific goals of the grouping are to prepare and implement joint programmes for economic development, agriculture, industry, trade, services, and tourism.⁹

Figure 4: Example of analysis of georegions



Source: CЕСCI

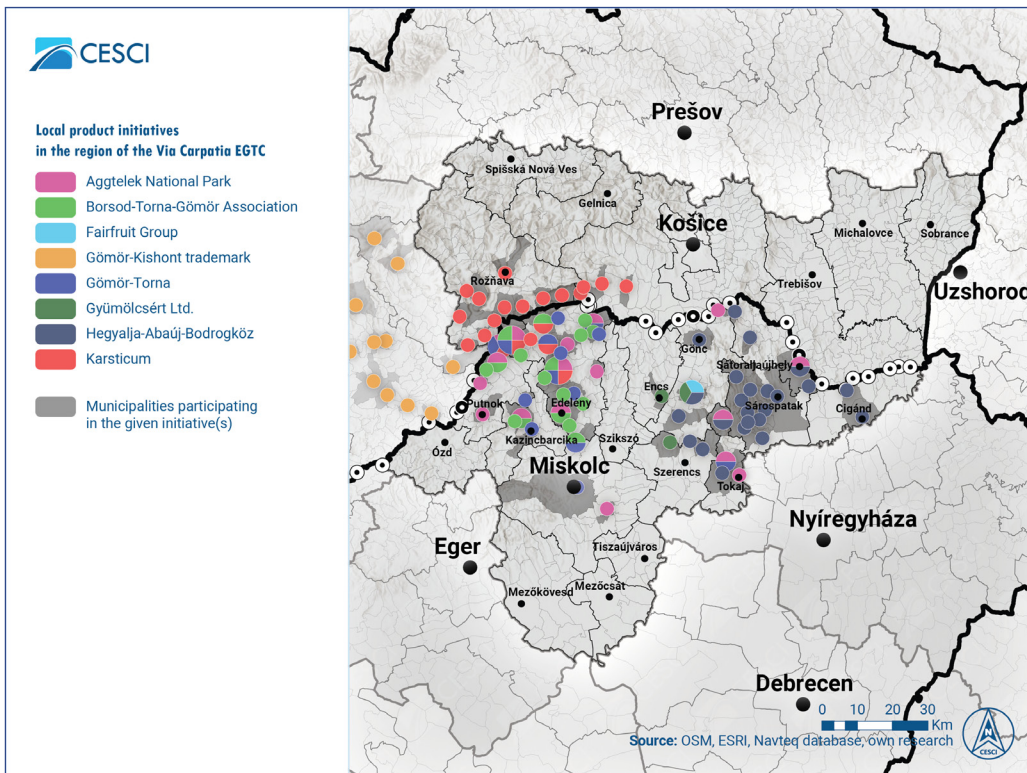
Sajó-Rima EGTC decided to create its integrated territorial strategy in 2015, soon after the establishment of the EGTC. From an institutional point of view, the "Sajó-Rima model" is a very interesting concept (just like the Pons Danubii), and the spirit of the planning work was adapted to this. As the region contains mainly local authorities with very low budgets and with maintenance problems, only those regional centres and cities which had bigger budgets – enabling the widening of possibilities (for example for the regular payment of membership fees) – joined the EGTC. But during the planning of the EGTC's objectives and activities, they took into consideration all of the settlements of the entire cross-border functional region. Thus, the territory of the EGTC's four members contains 193 settlements, 66 on the Hungarian side and 127 on the Slovakian side. Planning was based on this area, demarcated according to the natural influencing zones of these central cities.

⁹ <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRActivities/Pages/Saj%0c3%b3-Rima.aspx>

However, soon after the completion of the planning process, a crisis in the EGTC's management organisation meant that it couldn't guarantee the appropriate specialists needed to achieve the defined goals on a daily basis. So the completed, well-founded strategy is still awaiting the recuperation of these management capacities.

Via Carpatia EGTC, founded in 2013, with its seat in Košice (SK), is one of the most successful groupings; not just among the border regions of Hungary, but in the whole European Union as well. The EGTC, set up by Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County and Košice Region (SK), became the promoter of a lot of valuable and significant cross-border projects over the past few years.

Figure 5: Example of local product analysis



Source: CESCO

The EGTC was established to strengthen and support cross-border, transnational and regional cooperation between its members. It aims to strengthen economic and social coherence through the realisation of a common development strategy. The EGTC facilitates and supports cross-border, transnational and regional cooperation. The main objective of these projects is to improve the level of cross-border inter-institutional cooperation and to enhance the development of tourism. Just like RDV

EGTC, Via Carpatia EGTC also gained a primary role in the Small Project Fund of the Interreg VA SK-HU cooperation programme.¹⁰

The case of Via Carpatia EGTC can be considered unique from the point of view that it only started the development of its official territorial strategy in 2020, in the seventh year after its foundation. At the same time, among the EGTCs located along the Hungarian borders it was probably the one which carried out its activity in the most conscious and most successful way; even during its early years, while lacking an official strategy. This was mainly due to the preparedness and strong capacities of its management system, which held the grouping on a well-planned development/activity trajectory – even without a formal planning document – making ‘sub plans’ for the goals emerging in the meantime (for example, developments in transport, local tourism, local products, community development, etc.). So the comprehensive planning document of the cooperation focussed on these areas that members considered important, drawing upon the experiences of the very successful operation so far. Furthermore, in addition to the creation of general documents for regional development, the EGTC also elaborated a strategy for institutional development, assigning the appropriate governance tools to the existing planning and management frameworks.

Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County (HU), Transcarpathia County (UA) and Kisvárdá municipality (HU) set up Tisza EGTC in 2015. It was the first grouping in Europe that had been formed by the border areas of an EU Member State (Hungary) and a non-EU country (Ukraine). The general objective of Tisza EGTC is to foster cross-border cooperation between its members in order to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion. The task of the grouping is to generate and implement projects and programmes launched in the cross-border cooperation area to achieve the above objectives. Main priorities of the grouping’s activities are defined by its cohesion focused integrated development strategy elaborated in 2016. The main focus of the grouping is environmental protection.¹¹

The key priorities of its activity are determined by the integrated development strategy, elaborated in 2016, based on the cohesion analysis by which the EGTC has undertaken several important projects since that time. The main focus of the grouping is environmental protection.¹²

Tisza EGTC started its operation with the elaboration of a territorial analysis of its region, and with the definition of its strategy. The speciality of this planning consisted of the special border regime. During the planning process, it was extremely challenging to deal with the deficiencies resulting from the lack of harmonisation of

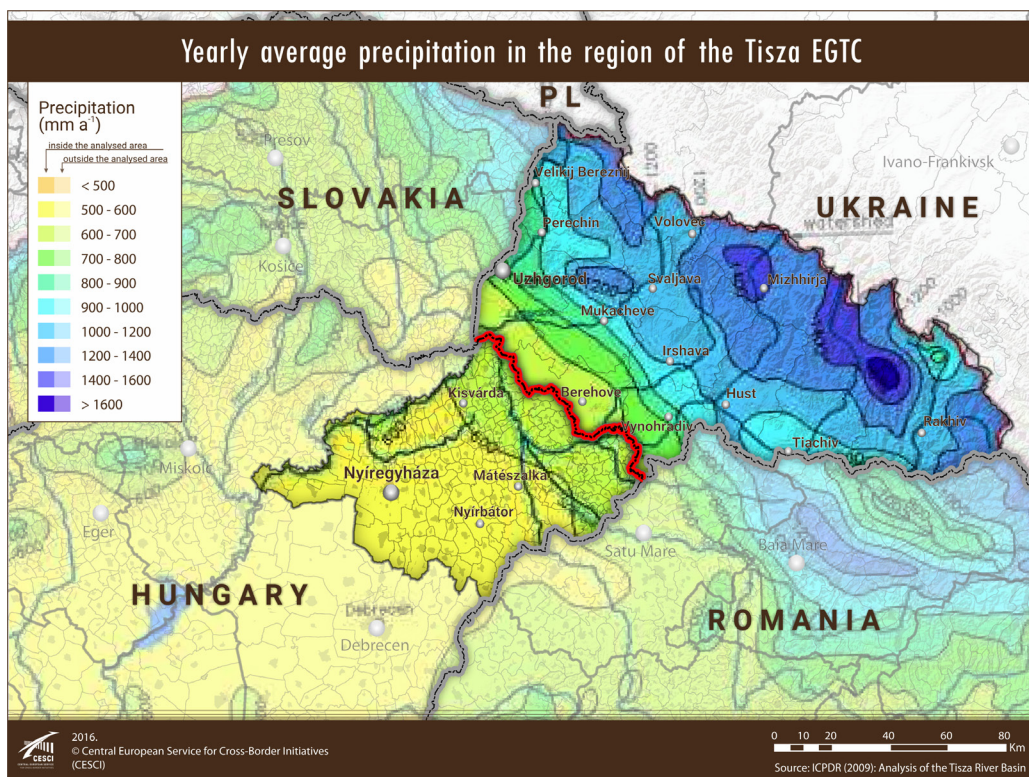
10 <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRActivities/Pages/via-carpatia1.aspx>

11 <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRActivities/Pages/tisza-egtc.aspx>

12 <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRActivities/Pages/tisza-egtc.aspx>

the EU-controlled and the non-EU controlled statistical databases. Because of this circumstance, more emphasis was put on qualitative research methods, and on the results developed from the field work. The border regime, which is much more closed and restrictive compared to the other cases in the European Union, makes the day-to-day operations of the EGTC much more difficult. Nevertheless, the existence and the activity of the EGTC contribute strongly to the development of the region's cross-border relations and indirectly affect Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic rapprochement. At the same time, we should also remark that it would be necessary to strengthen the capacities of the management organisation significantly to accelerate reaching the objectives set out in the strategy.

Figure 6: Example of climate analysis

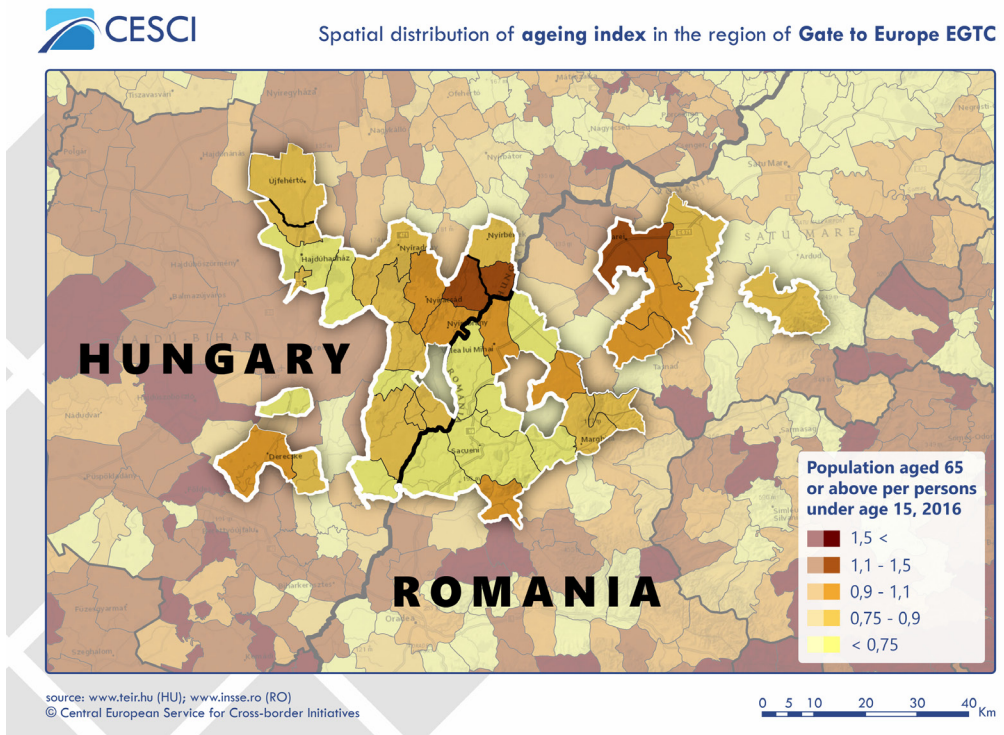


Source: CESCI

Gate to Europe EGTC was established in 2012. It has 35 members: 20 municipalities from Hungary and 15 from Romania. The EGTC's main field of work is supporting project applications and the aspirations of its member municipalities' civil society organisations, local authorities and small businesses. Because the main source of income in the area is agriculture, Gate to Europe EGTC regards cross-border popularisation of local products as its most important work. It also supports

farmers, the development of a local irrigation strategy, and preparations to reduce the effects of climate change. Gate to Europe EGTC wishes to be actively engaged in the Hungarian-Romanian border region in the framework of Interreg 2021-2027. Projects relating to climate change, the community, cooperation, employment and local development are its priorities. Gate to Europe EGTC places importance on community activities that involve the younger generation in cross-border, educational and vocational programmes and therefore takes a particular interest in the Erasmus+ programme. Alongside its broader objectives, the EGTC is developing a climate strategy focusing on sustainability of the cross-border ecosystem.¹³

Figure 7: Example of demographic analysis



Source: CESCO

Gate to Europe EGTC, similarly to other municipalities operating in the rural regions along the Hungarian borders, mainly focuses its strategy of strengthening the cohesion in its region on its existing territorial potential. In this case also, the planning area is in reality a region extended with the areas of a few dozen settlements; more fitting to an actual functional delimitation than the official membership territory at the time of the actual planning. Alongside rural development and agricultural and

13 <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRAactivities/Pages/Gate-to-Europe.aspx>

touristic interventions, the completed strategy – as a result of the status-analysis – placed strong emphasis on climate adaptation, and on the thematically relevant issues of vocational training and research. The planning was started quickly after the registration of the EGTC, and subsequently, the 2013 strategy was updated in 2016. However, not even Gate to Europe EGTC's operation proved to be smooth in terms of the capacities of the respective managements. Although the EGTC created some thematic working groups to achieve its designated priorities, weaknesses in the capacities and the general shortage of resources slowed the implementation of the strategy's target system and made this process incomplete. In parallel, relative to that of the initial cooperation, the commitment to this initiative from a significant section of the members weakened.

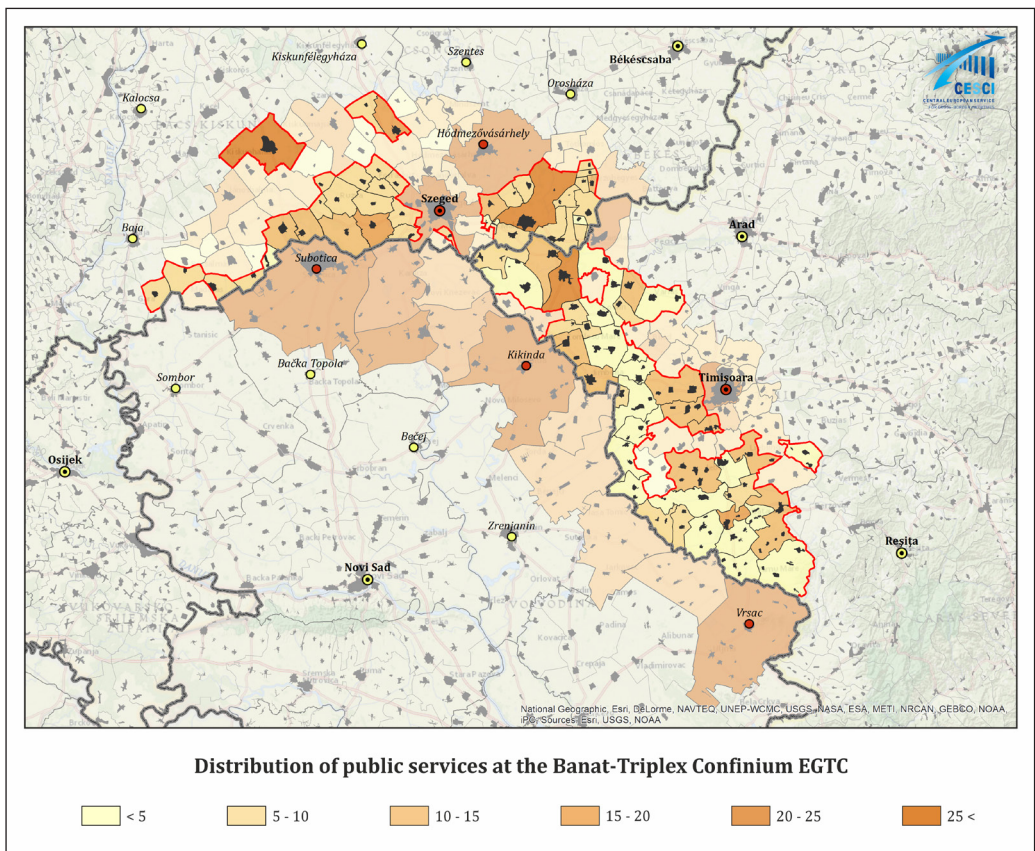
Mayors of three countries set up the Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC in 2009. The aim was to promote economic, social and regional cohesion in the Hungarian-Romanian-Serbian border triangle by reducing developmental differences and thus promoting harmonious growth. Members from the border triangle area include 40 Hungarian local authorities, 37 Romanian local authorities and as observers, eight Serbian municipalities. The EGTC is engaged in ongoing trilateral communication between the relevant ministries with a view to the Serbian municipalities becoming full members. The activities of the BTC EGTC – helping SMEs and boosting employment in the Serbian-Hungarian-Romanian border region – provide significant support for its members and stakeholders. One of the main development concepts was a water management programme for the Hungarian-Romanian-Serbian border triangle, in addition to unitary management and utilisation of renewable energy resources. Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC plans to address the issue of unequal employment relations through an integrated employment/cultural programme. Because of its small and medium-sized businesses that are creating jobs, the strategic plan of the Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC emphasises the development of such enterprises, and supports their cooperation and operation on a level playing-field.¹⁴

Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC agreed its integrated territorial strategy in 2013, long after its foundation. However it was still among the first. It was typical for this association to designate as the planning area a continuous strip along the border, which was much wider than its ordinary membership area. It is inclusive of the settlements on the Serbian side which, because of the Serbian regulations, cannot join the EGTC officially, but which participated in the collaboration with observer status from the beginning. Some similarities are shown also by the subjects of the strategy derived from the status analysis: like other EGTCs located in rural areas, complex rural development plays a prominent role here also. Moreover, the cooperation,

14 <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRAactivities/Pages/B%0c3%0a1n%0c3%0a1t-Triplex-Confinium.aspx>

which was composed of settlements at a lower level of hierarchy and with smaller populations, gave serious consideration to the network capacities of its urban environment and to its insertion into this fabric of settlement network. However, the realisation of this strategy and the action plan related to it took an unexpected twist in the years following the work of planning. This had some causes related to management capacities. On the other hand, a partial subordination to the objectives of the settlement became a significant element in the life of the association, most of the implemented projects can be associated with the development of the seat, Mórahalom rather than with increasing the cohesive force in this vast region in a balanced way.

Figure 8: Example of functional analysis

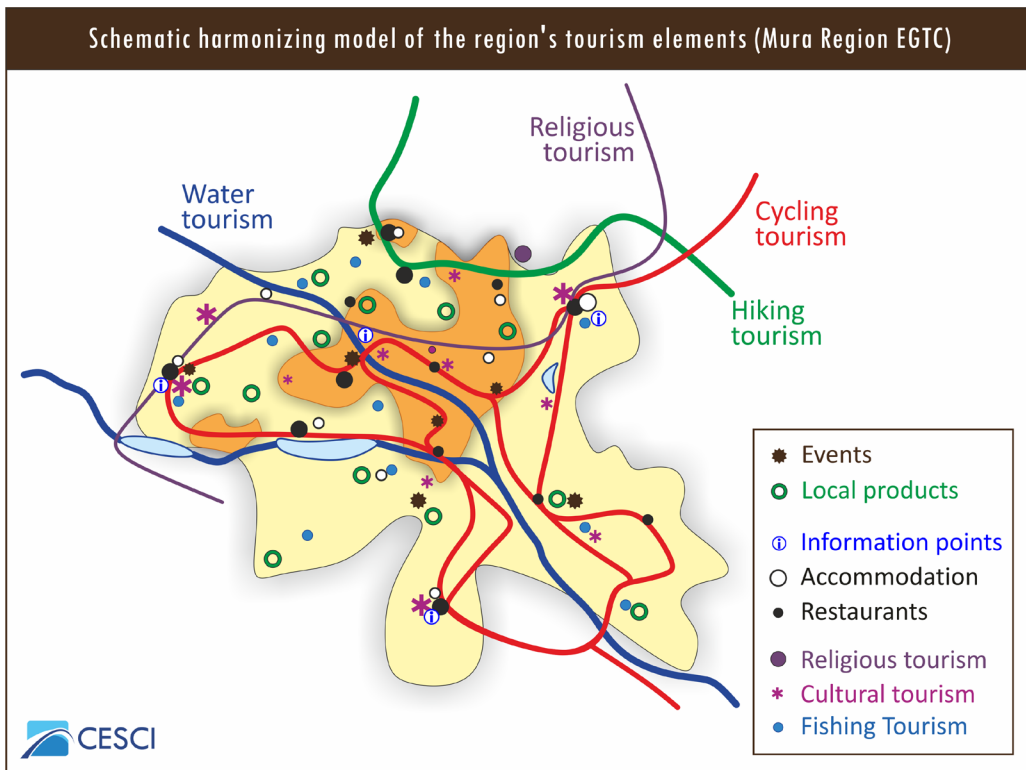


Source: CESCO

Mura Region EGTC was set up in 2015, and the number of its members has grown since. Currently, the grouping includes all municipalities on both banks of the Mura River along the Hungarian-Croatian border. The grouping was formed after Croatia's accession to the EU. One major aim was to increase cooperation between members

of the Hungarian-Croatian twin-city network of the multi-ethnic border region. The grouping aims to develop the economic partnerships based on educational, cultural and NGO relations that have been built up over the past decades. The objectives of Mura Region EGTC are to reduce disparities within the border region, building on those relations and to help strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion, with a particular focus on infrastructure projects. To address cross-border employment issues and emigration of the young workforce, the EGTC has been actively involved in planning the bridge between Murakeresztúr and Kotoriba (Mura Bridge) and has submitted an application under the Interreg HUHR Cooperation Programme. Additional aims of Mura Region EGTC are: improving business cooperation; supporting cross-border trade and business network solutions; improving legal accessibility; promoting local goods across the border; supporting local farmers; promoting the Mura 'brand'; and joint water tourism projects on the Mura River as well as the conservation of the border river's diversity.¹⁵

Figure 9: Example of tourism analysis



Source: CESCO

15 <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/CoRActivities/Pages/mura-region.aspx>

MURA Region EGTC started to elaborate its territorial strategy immediately after its foundation. Just as in some previous examples, we can see that during the planning process, they not only took into consideration the membership territories in the strict sense, but also considered all of their further intentions for enlargement; which has since been carried out. They aspired to the creation of a functional region covering all of the borderland, so the basis of the planning was determined by a relevant delimitation of the area. During the planning process, the stakeholders saw the possibilities for the enhancement of the region's cohesive force in the capturing of their positional energies. Therefore, the elaborated strategy is based mainly on sustainable rural actions (agriculture, tourism, social services, community building), focusing also on the improvement of the availability conditions. Since the planning, the management team of the EGTC has been progressing successfully in the achievement of its designated objectives.

The planning work carried out along the borders of Hungary enabled the collection of various experiences. There are examples of accessible initiatives planning the activity consciously: operating at the internal Schengen borders; at the internal, but non-Schengen borders; at the more controlled borders of EU member candidates; or at the more closed, external EU neighbourhood borders. Overall, it can be seen that the planning of all of these specific examples of our examined cases was characterised by a rather far-sighted spatial perception. All of the groupings were interested in the delimitation, creation and reinforcement of the functional cross-border regions. Likewise, in their planning approach, all of them focused mainly on increasing cohesion, trying to make use of the rural development potentials of their cross-border position. All of them recognised that making their planning dependent upon loose cooperation and simple communication among the characters strictly within the administrative territories designated by the borders of the nation state cannot be sufficient; nor can it in itself bring a change in the vision of space perception which can lead to the functional union of these regions.

In many cases, the overcoming of difficulties and the strengths showed some similarities and the social and economic relevance of the analysed plans rests on solid foundations. This can be attributed to the dissemination/consultation, and to the field work in all the cases covered here. It can be seen that the realisation of the action plans and the target systems specified in the plans does not depend primarily on the planning. In the examined cases, the success of the gradual achievement of the carefully set goals depended much more on the suitability, the permanence and the capacities of the management, on the good cooperation of the governance levels and on the balanced cooperation between the members.

Untapped potentials

As is apparent from the specifications, the cohesion-based cross-border strategic planning methodology presented above has already been applied in many cases. In addition to the planning strategies of the EGTCs presented, this same methodology constituted the backbone of the Slovakia-Hungary Interreg V-A programme. The Territorial Analysis that was prepared as a basis for the development of the Danube Interreg V-B Programme was also elaborated according to the approaches of the cohesion-based methodology. Further to the above, some of the background analyses of the following planning cycle of 2021-2027 (Hungary-Slovakia, Hungary-Serbia, Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine CBC programmes, next Danube Transnational Programme) also were elaborated according to these same methodological approaches. However, the impacts cannot yet be fully identified.

Within the frames of Slovakia-Hungary Interreg V-A Programme the approach has been deepened further within the so-called territorial action plans for employment (TAPES). This new tool integrates in a synergic way several regional projects aiming to improve the level of employment and the intensity of cross-border labour migration in a given border area. In these terms, TAPE is similar to Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) launched by the Cohesion Policy Regulations dating back to 2013; the Integrated Territorial Plan, or PIT (since 2007); and (along with its new abbreviation) PITER (since 2014) models developed by the ALCOTRA programme (between France and Italy).¹⁶ However, the PIT and the TAPE models are much easier to apply. The example of TAPES developed in collaboration with the Joint Secretariat of the programme shows how the theoretically based approach can be put into practice with a view to enhancing cross-border territorial, economic and social cohesion. (Jaschitz & Ocskay, 2018)

So, from the perspective of the cohesion-based cross-border strategic planning methodology, this practice – which was applied in some cases of the EGTCs and which can also be applied to a programme – seems to improve the professional legitimacy of the EGTCs' strategies developed along a similar logic. Moreover, in the National Development and Territorial Development Concept of Hungary,¹⁷ there is a clear reference to the importance of supporting the EGTCs' work in their significant role of trans-border territorial development. (However, this issue does not receive the same emphasis in the similar concepts of the neighbouring countries.) At the same time, from the perspective of planning policy, there remains a determining factor that the planning documents of the EGTCs still do not form an integral

16 On the integrated territorial plans, more information is available on the programme's website: <http://www.interreg-alcotra.eu/fr/deposer-mon-projet/presentation-generale-de-la-vie-dun-projet/plans-integres>

17 <https://regionalispolitika.kormany.hu/nemzeti-fejlesztes-2030-orszagos-fejlesztesi-es-terulet-fejlesztesi-koncepcio>

part of any relevant state's official nomenclature of spatial planning (as these reach beyond the limits of the administration concerned). So, this circumstance of "in-betweenness" does not contribute to the EGTCs' strategies to become instruments of legal force that can help the subsequent realisation of the planning strategies; for example, in the case of a country's spatial development concept or an urban development strategy. Obviously, the analysis of the planning documents performed in every case helps considerably the realisation of the EGTCs' strategies – and their compatibility with the nation-state driven planning system – as these point out the possible synergies and complementarities with the "official national systems". However, the planning documentation of the EGTCs still remains a "grey area" of strategic and spatial planning. To the extent that the nation-states would also recognise the potential role of the EGTCs in developments which should be carried out along their borders, the relevant planning policy would become more conscious and more formally integrated into national systems. For this, we would probably need to have an EGTC network, which would fill the available territory without gaps and without overlapping areas, according to a "container-based" perception of space, derived from a nation-state logic. However, this idea is not so realistic from the perspective of EGTCs, which are usually bottom-up driven organisations. So prospectively, the creation of and search for complementarities could remain the most effective intermediate solution for the validation of the planning and lead to a mutually more coordinated balance with national planning nomenclatures.

In addition, the strategies elaborated in order to formulate the common objectives of the bilateral member municipalities and institutions – taking into account the EGTCs' specific situation and supported by a state of play analysis adjusting its approaches to the speciality of these tasks – provide a fundamental contribution to increase awareness of these initiatives' activities, and therefore, to make them more successful and sustainable. Based on the experience gained so far, we can boldly say that the most valuable impact of these planning processes, carried out with steps reflecting novel approaches, is the catalysing effect on thinking and on the dissemination/consultation process performed through different methods. However, certain weaknesses persist. There is still no single system of requirements for EGTCs. Only the practices and tastes of the different EGTCs – along with the professionalism and due diligence of the people charged with the planning – determine how deeply and precisely these reconciliation processes are integrated into the system of common objectives developed.

It is partly due to the anomaly described above that another great deficiency of the EGTC-planning processes is the almost complete absence of any follow-up. The implementation of the EGTC planning documents does not require any clear monitoring and report system. The current EGTC managements are not obliged to follow the action plans included in the completed planning documents (beyond their

own decisions furthering the order for planning) and the envisaged objectives are not linked to deadlines for completion.

Certainly, it needs to be highlighted that this kind of irregularity offers at the same time a benefit and a possibility as well. In that kind of "spatial situation" which is much more uncertain and rapidly changing in respect to an initiative *within* the borders of a nation state, there are fewer opportunities for advance regulations for a cross-border initiative. Moreover, the lack of overregulation can mean in many respects an evolutionary advantage in these special cases: creating the background for the enforcement of more creative approaches, better adapted to local conditions, in a more flexible and decentralised way. Therefore the planning documents of the EGTCs can be regarded as a kind of "soft plans", the success of their implementation strongly dependent upon their capacity for integration with the local "hard plans." To this end, both the local stakeholders and the European Institutions need new, more place-based approaches in planning, development, governance and legal harmonisation.

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