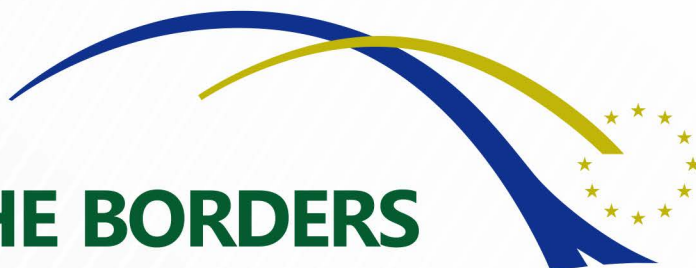


Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives
European Institute of Cross-Border Studies



CROSSING THE BORDERS

Studies on cross-border cooperation within the Danube Region

A comparison of regions cooperating
across borders in the Danube region
with a focus on best practices

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Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. The intensity of cooperation.....	3
2.1 Ethnic/linguistic ties.....	4
2.2 Historical unity/shared landscape	5
2.3 Economy/labour market.....	6
2.4 Level of institutionalisation	6
2.5 The length of cooperation	7
2.6 Number of countries involved	8
2.7 The size of CBRs	8
2.8 The fields of cooperation.....	9
3. Summary of best practices	10
3.1 Intensive cross-border cooperation	10
3.2 Intensive cross-border cooperation but limited to 1-2 specific fields	14
3.3 Mixed level of intensity	16
3.4 The least intensive cross-border cooperation initiatives	18
Conclusion	20
References.....	22

1. Introduction

This chapter aims to summarise and compare the 14 cross-border regions (CBRs) from the Danube region included in this volume. The CBRs are compared in two ways: in terms of the intensity of cooperation on the one hand and in terms of their best practices on the other. Such a comparison is never easy and the lack of data in studies of cross-border cooperation (CBC) has been emphasised as a challenge by many border scholars (Martinez 1994: 5, Weith & Gustedt 2012: 293, Knippschild & Wiechmann 2012). As a result, much research concentrates on deeper case studies to add something more general to the topic. In this project we had the „luxury“ to commission and receive a number of case studies of a comparable standard¹ from a relatively well-defined macro-region, enabling us to identify some more general patterns of what has been happening in the past twenty or so years in terms of CBC in the Danube region.

A number of challenges to CBC have been recognised in the case studies here and elsewhere (Tosun & al 2005, Loucky & Alper 2008). Thus these are now fairly well-known, including the lack of pre-financing (Kozak & Zillmer 2012) or financing in general; a lack of will, especially by national actors (Bures 2008); a lack of trust (Klein-Hitpaß 2006); a lack of continuity of institutions (Ludvig 2002: 11), projects and actors (Rogut & Welter 2012: 74); mismatching administrative structures (Grix & Houžvička 2002, Lundén & al 2009), just to name a few. While of course remaining critical, in this chapter we made an attempt to focus on and emphasise best practices, of which there are good examples. Whereas all projects and practices are to a certain extent context-specific, the aim is not just to show and try to explain different patterns, but indeed to present some good examples that may perhaps in one way or another be adopted by other partnerships, in or outside the Danube Region.

The chapter is structured in the following way. This introduction is followed by an analytical comparison of the intensity of cooperation. Subsequently, the largest section compares the best practices from each case. We finally round up with some conclusions.

¹ For details on commissioning and designing the case studies and their requirements, please consult Chapter 3 on methodology.

2. The intensity of cooperation

From the case studies it becomes clear that within the Danube Region, Central Europe is more actively engaged in CBC than South Eastern Europe. This is perhaps less surprising given that the Visegrad (or V4) States (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary) and Slovenia joined the European Union (EU) already in 2004. Romania and Bulgaria joined in 2007, Croatia in 2013. Serbia and Montenegro received candidate status a few years ago and Bosnia and Herzegovina is a potential candidate (Europa.eu 2015), but the opportunities of these countries remain far more limited: their limited access to external (EU) resources as well as co-financing on their own, coupled with a recent difficult history explains this overall state of affairs. Nevertheless, the closer we look at the picture the more complex it is. Table 1 summarises the position of the fourteen cross-border regions (CBRs) in terms of the overall intensity of cooperation. The authors of this chapter created the table's categorisation. It was primarily based on the 14 case studies, but the authors also double-checked information on the continuity of projects, maintenance of webpages, news portals, and so on. We also contacted several actors of CBRs as well as authors of the case studies for specifications etc.

Table 1: Overall intensity of cooperation in 14 CBRs of the Danube region

The most intensive CBRs	Intensive but limited to 1-2 specific fields	A mixed level of intensity	The least intensive CBRs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DKMT • Pons Danubii • Ister-Granum • EDA • Tritia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TZHZ • Prut (esp. RO-MD) • Órség-Goričko 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vidin-Zaječar • Pécs-Osijek (Pannon) • Šumava-BW/UI-M 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drina • Osijek-Subotica • EDDS

Source: authors' compilation

The compilation of Table 1 needs further explanation. As already mentioned, the project was mostly interested in best practices, which the authors of the case studies were requested to concentrate on. Such projects turned out to strongly vary in both quantity and quality, even if all 14 CBRs had made at least some achievements. Given that one of the main critiques of subsidised CBC has been that cooperation often tends to discontinue after sources dry out, we were particularly impressed by civilian engagements (*cf.* Scott & Laine 2012) and initiatives that carried on after (external) funding has ended. At the same time, a number of active projects and initiatives were found that never received any EU funds, a few even no external sources at all.

Which aspects are then among the most important behind the level of intensity in CBRs? We now turn to a number of different factors that may be relevant.

2.1 Ethnic/linguistic ties

It is clear from the case studies that a shared ethnicity and/or linguistic homogeneity tend to strengthen the intensity of cooperation. This is evidenced by the two cases along the Slovak-Hungarian border, where both sides have an ethnic Hungarian majority and contacts are intense with and without external support. Another case in point is the Prut river area, where deep cooperation has been achieved between Romanian and Moldovan researchers and decision-makers alike centred on the (environmental) management of the river. We can mention two cases where the languages used in the CBR are not identical but rather close, with the regional dialects being even more similar. One of them is the Tourism Zone Haloze-Zagorje (TZZ), where the local dialect on the Croatian side is more similar to the neighbouring Slovenian language than is standard Croatian. The other case is Třitva, where differences between standard Czech, Slovak, and Polish are mitigated by the local Silesian dialects of these same languages. Yet even here, cooperation between the Czech and Slovak sides (where the languages are even more similar) is more intensive² than with the Polish one.

Importantly, however, the above does not mean that the reverse is true – i.e. that a lack of a common ethnicity or language necessarily translates into weaker CBC. As the intensive cooperation in the Hungarian-Serbian-Romanian DKMT Euroregion and the Romanian-Bulgarian Euroregion Danubius Association (EDA) testify, a shared language or ethnicity is no prerequisite for successful CBC. At the same time, despite their very similar languages in the Western Balkans neither the Drina Euroregion nor the partnership between Subotica and Osijek is a case of an intensive CBR. Interestingly, the latter cooperation is explicitly based on maintaining contacts between the Croatian minority from Vojvodina and its Croatian “motherland” (see the relevant case study in this volume), but the low level of achievements can of course be attributed to other factors.

In sum, a common language and/or ethnicity appears to make CBC easier to achieve but is of course no sufficient explanatory factor on its own. Hence, we now turn to other aspects with a potential of explaining CBC intensity.

² Of course, this is most likely also related to the shared history of these two countries.

2.2 Historical unity/shared landscape

Given that a shared ethnicity and language proved to be important for the intensity of CBC, another and partly related aspect is to consider whether CBRs that were historically part of the same political entities have cooperated more intensively in the more recent past.

Most of the borders concerned in the case studies were drawn in the peace treaties following the First and/or the Second World War, and have been stable ever since. However, there are a few exceptions. Czechoslovakia broke up in 1992-1993 and Yugoslavia (gradually) between the years 1991-2006. CBC in the former case is rather intensive and smooth. This is less the case between the former Yugoslav republics, with the Serbian-Bosnian border even remaining questioned by parts of the local population that thus remains puzzled by the very concept of CBC, as the case study on the Drina euroregion reports. Arguably, locals here see formal cooperation as strengthening the status quo: after all CBC is presumed on the very existence of stable – i.e. uncontested – borders (O’Dowd & al 1995, Terlouw 2008: 106). Thus the nature of the break-up – i.e. whether the process was peaceful or not – seems to explain CBC intensity more than the actual age of the state border.

It is also worth considering whether a similar landscape or a geographical structure tends to motivate CBC. This point is raised by earlier observations that territorial imbalances tend to stimulate such contacts, such as between so-called divided cities (Stokłosa 2003) or regions where a larger city is bordering a sparsely populated space as in the case of Szczecin (Balogh 2014). There are some recognisable patterns in the cases from the Danube Region here dealt with.

Several among the most intensive border regions have their hypothetical – and increasingly empirical – central places (Christaller 1966) on the other side of the border: indeed, local inhabitants from the Ister-Granum, EDA, and the Prut regions have been developing more and more contacts with Esztergom, Budapest, Bucharest, and Iași, respectively. The Pons Danubii EGTC is not least based on the cooperation between the two sides of the divided city of Komárom.

On the other hand, most of the remaining and less intensive CBRs are areas with relatively few potential complementarities. In these cases the different sides tend to have a relatively similar geographical structure, i.e. each endowed with a medium-sized city (e.g. DKMT), sometimes even not very close to the border (e.g. Osijek-Subotica or Pécs-Osijek). Similarly, other cases consist of typical peripheral areas with a rural character with no central places that could function as a “natural” meeting point (e.g. Šumava-BW/UI-M or the Drina Euroregion). The two cases of the relatively intensively cooperating nature parks (TZHZ and Órség-Goričko) are exceptions here as these are exclusively targeted at the joint work of such areas. In sum, in terms of geographical structures it is differences rather than similarities that appear as a motivating factor for intensive CBC.

2.3 Economy/labour market

There has been some debate whether economic differences hinder (Grix & Houžvička 2002) or rather drive (Balogh 2014) CBC. Large inequalities may indeed be a barrier as both sides need at least some resources for cooperation. In the case of the EU and its direct vicinity this problem is significantly alleviated by the various funding channels on the community level. But especially in East Central Europe, the opportunity to use the latter occasionally remains challenged by the limited possibilities of self- or pre-financing by small, impoverished border municipalities and regions. Yet overall, very similar economies will motivate few people to cross the border.

In the Danube region, the level of economic development is rather similar between adjacent countries. Where this is less the case, we see the emergence of for instance the development of a bilateral vocational training of Czech craftspeople partly working in Bavaria (see the relevant case study in this volume). While Slovakia and Hungary have a very similar economic development, pressing unemployment in southern Slovakia combined with many locals' knowledge of Hungarian language push them to daily commute across the border for work. But overall, economic differences explain CBC intensity only in a few cases in the Danube Region (in fact, more borderlanders move or commute for work further west³).

2.4 Level of institutionalisation

It has earlier been suggested that the level of institutionalisation is an important factor for explaining the intensity of cross-border cooperation (Sohn & al 2009). Table 2 categorises the fourteen CBRs here dealt with in terms of what type of institution they are currently operating under. Despite its shortcomings, it is assumed that the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) represents the most advanced form of institutionalised CBC (Țoca & Popovici 2010), gradually followed by euroregions, cross-border nature parks/tourism zones, and twin-cities.

Table 2 shows a number of overlaps with Table 1, with three of the most intensive CBRs being EGTCs. One of the two twin-city collaborations is among the least intensive CBRs and the more intensive one has recently been forming an EGTC. There are exceptions, of course. While TZHZ for instance „only” has the status of a cross-border tourism zone, cooperation there appears to be far more intensive than in a number of euroregions, e.g. Drina or EDDS. Nevertheless, the above suggests that there is a considerable correlation between CBC intensity and the level of institutionalisation.

³ In southern Slovakia for instance, employees in health- and elderly care from as far as Tornal'a are weekly commuting by bus to work in Austria on an organised basis.

Table 2: The form of institutionalisation of the 14 CBRs

EGTC	Euroregion ⁴	Nature park /tourism zone	Twin-cities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ister-Granum • Pons Danubii, Tritia • Pécs-Osijek (Pannon5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DKMT • EDDS • Šumava-BW/UI-M • Vidin-Zaječar (2) • EDA • Prut (3) • Drina 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TZHZ • Órség-Goričko (project-based, no legal institutionalisation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Osijek-Subotica

Source: authors' compilation

2.5 The length of cooperation

It can be assumed that CBRs get more mature as they are gaining more experiences. Table 3 presents the fourteen CBRs based on their level of intensity (*cf.* Table 1), together with their year of establishment. Note that some CBRs were operating under a different – lower – level of institutionalisation in the past, which is indicated in these cases.

Table 3: The intensity of cooperation in CBRs and their year of establishment

Intensive	Intensive but specialised	Mixed level of intensity	Low intensity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DKMT 1997 • PD 2010 • Ister-Granum 2003 (as euroregion, since 2008 EGTC) • EDA 2002 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TZHZ 2003 • Siret-Prut-Nistru 2005 • Órség-Goričko 2008-2009 but project-based, no legal institutionalisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Šumava-BW/UI-M 1993-1994 • Vidin-Zaječar 2005 and 2006 • Pécs-Osijek 1973 twin towns (Pannon 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drina 2012 • EDDS 1998 • Subotica-Osijek 2004 (memorandum, new charter in 2010)

Source: authors' compilation

As Table 3 shows, the length of cooperation in the CBRs is not irrelevant. All except one intensive collaborations were formalised at least twelve years ago, while all except one less intensive CBRs are eight years old or younger. The number of cases (14) is of course too low to make general statements, but the pattern is still recognisable in the CBRs of the Danube

⁴ Where the CBR involves more than one collaboration the number of euroregions is indicated in parentheses.

⁵ The Croatian sections of this CBR could not be parts of this EGTC as Croatia can only use this legal tool as of June 2015 (i.e. after the case study came in). Since then, however, several settlements have joined Pannon EGTC through this tool.

region. Generally speaking, then, the length of cooperation appears to be a significant factor for CBC intensity.

2.6 Number of countries involved

Another factor that might be relevant is the number of states from which sub-national units are involved in CBC. The assumption can be made that the more countries are involved, the more difficult it gets to coordinate cooperation. Relatedly, where more than two countries are involved, a third or even a fourth country is invited to join as a sort of counterbalance to a potentially dominating side, as was initially the case in the Euroregion Pomerania (Balogh 2014: 30-31).

There are signs that also in the Danube Region, two sides can cooperate more intensely than three or four (although the reasons have not been elaborated upon as deeply as in the above-cited larger study on the Euroregion Pomerania). Three of the five *most intensive CBRs* are bilateral, and one of the two trilateral ones, Tritia, is as mentioned above dominated by two sides. There is only one exception here, with the trilateral DKMT Euroregion considered as a truly three-sided cooperation.

In the category of “*mixed level of intensity CBRs*” the Órség-Goričko nature park cooperation – which is sometimes trilateral and includes the Austrian side – is more active between the Slovenian and Hungarian parts. In the Prut region, the two trilateral CBRs are less intensive than the bilateral one. The Šumava-Bayerischer Wald/Unterer Inn-Mühlviertel euroregion appears to be particularly torn between the different interests of the three sides.

The *least intensive CBRs* then include the four-sided Drina euroregion and the trilateral EDDS cooperation. True, the bilateral collaboration of Osijek-Subotica and Pécs-Osijek also belong to the less intensive ones, but/even though these are restricted to cities. In sum, the number of „national“ partners rather clearly affects the intensity of CBC.

2.7 The size of CBRs

A related aspect to the number of countries involved is the territorial extent of the cooperating entities in question. On the one hand, it can be assumed that the larger the CBR's territory is the more challenging it gets to coordinate collaboration. On the other hand, a larger area involves more potentially active partners, thereby securing the maintenance – or even very existence – of the cooperation.

In the 14 cases of the Danube Region the pattern seems to strengthen the first assumption. Two of the three *least intensive* and two of the three *modestly intensive CBRs* have an outspokenly large territory where one or two sides – and even a few places within these – dominate the cooperation. As mentioned above, in some cases a third partner is involved for

a particular reason. Based on the Pécs-Osijek cooperation, the Pannon EGTC for instance included the Slovenian side to be able to form an EGTC, a legal form that the Croatian side until recently could not adopt (see footnote above). As a result, this EGTC includes half of Transdanubia i.e. western Hungary. While not included in the 14 cases here, another good example of an oversized CBR is the Carpathian Euroregion (parts of which now forming the Via Carpatia EGTC), stretching all the way from Szolnok in the west to Botoșani in the east. At the other end of the scale, four of the five *most intensive CBRs* are small or medium-sized. In sum, the territorial extent of the cooperating area matters.

2.8 The fields of cooperation

Finally, it is worth considering whether the nature of the targeted field of CBC is important for the intensity of cooperation. Are some fields of society or the economy apparently easier to bring about cooperation in? The case studies do not show any clear pattern. For instance, there appears no clear correlation between the intensity of cooperation and whether so-called 'hard' or 'soft' issues are dealt with.

Following this analysis of several levels of comparison between regions cooperating across borders, attention is turned to the issue of CBC best practices that can function as incentive and motivation for other regions and cross-border cooperation in general. Specifically, individual best practices are identified in the field of cross-border interaction and are briefly introduced.

3. Summary of best practices

The third part of the chapter attempts to summarise the best practices of the selected cross-border collaborations implemented in the Danube Region. The best practices are summarised within four categories (*cf.* Table 1). The first category contains those cross-border regions (CBRs) that are the most intensive, i.e. have implemented several successful projects and have a capacity to continue their crossing interaction across the borders. These are the following: the Ister-Granum EGTC, the Pons Danubii EGTC, the Euroregion Danube-Kris-Mureş-Tisza, CBC between Ruse and Giurgiu (EDA), and the Tritia EGTC. The second category involves those CBRs that implement cooperation within a limited area. In other words, their cooperation is intensive and deep in a limited and specific domain, e.g. the tourism zone between Haloze and Zagorje, CBC in the area of the Prut River, and cooperation between the natural parks of Órség and Goričko. The third category includes those cooperation initiatives which have demonstrated a mixed level of intensity, e.g. cross-border interaction between Vidín and Zaječar, cooperation between Pécs and Osijek, and the Euroregion Šumava–Bayerischer Wald/Unterer Inn–Mühlviertel. The final category describes the least intensive cooperation initiatives, namely, the cross-border cooperation between twinning cities of Subotica and Osijek, the Euroregion Danube-Drava-Sava, and the Euroregion Drina.

3.1 Intensive cross-border cooperation

The Ister-Granum EGTC is very intensive in performing cross-border interaction and it attempts to link numerous Slovakian and Hungarian settlements into one cross-border institutional and/or development frame. Given the fact that the Ister-Granum EGTCs' members are rather rural settlements with few urbanised cities, the grouping shows a rural and semi-urban orientation with an emphasis on rural development. It has established several successful cross-border projects between settlements in Hungary and Slovakia. Although, the most important/best practice cross-border project is rural in its orientation and it attempts to promote local products and producers. The basic idea is that the Ister-Granum region is rich in agricultural raw materials processed into products with a very high quality and the region is rich in craftsmen tradition and knowledge with unique crafts products. These products are usually outside of the traditional market chain, thus the route from the producer to the consumer is often non-existent and people are not even aware about local products which are produced and that skilful producers/craftsmen live in the region, thus consuming non-local and often imported products of a lower quality. Consequently, the Ister-Granum EGTC has initiated a project that attempted to search for these local producers/craftsmen with the aim to develop a web of local producers with "information infrastructure". Local producers and craftsman were identified across the border (Hungary and Slovakia) and they were individually visited. Afterwards, a database was created, where all the local producers of cheese, milk,

butter, yoghurt, honey, bread, sweets, wine, meat, vegetables, fruits, juice, wine, wafer, soap and many other products can be found. This database was printed in a brochure form and it was distributed among the member municipalities, thus locals have gained a processed information/database about local products/producers and received direct contacts, too. In other words, the Ister-Granum EGTC has performed a best practice cross-border cooperation activity in the realm of rural development and it demonstrated a future capacity to develop it further.

The next investigated cross-border region is the Pons Danubii EGTC, linking seven cities from Slovakia and Hungary. The Pons Danubii EGTC connects only urban entities, thus their attention is rather urban in its orientation. The grouping has implemented several successful projects and two best practice CBCs were identified here. The first best-practice project is called 'WORKMARKET', aimed to deal with the huge unemployment in the region. The project included training courses, surveys of investors/jobseekers, requalification of jobseekers, creation of website, job forums, etc. The project collected statistical data and established a database in order to provide help and information for the investors, employers and jobseekers. This project was an opportunity to initiate cross-border, interregional and transnational cooperation within the field of cross-border labour-market cooperation. The project attempted to follow a non-discrimination policy where the employees and the employers have equal opportunities on both sides. Results of the project were the following: communication with 400 businesses; informing the local residents; organization of 2 job forums and preparation of 2 studies (in Hungarian and Slovak languages) about the current labour market and its opportunities for future development. The second best practice CBC of the Pons Danubii EGTC was the 'Media Project'. This project linked the local TV channels into one harmonised TV channel network and it established cross-border cooperation between Hungarian and Slovakian local TV channels. This joint/cross-border platform reinforced information/news exchange between nine settlements that were involved in the project (seven Pons Danubii members and two non-Pons Danubii members from Slovakia, namely Nové Zámky and Svodín). The project produced bilingual video contents and the participants prepared approximately 5 700 minutes of video within the duration of 22 months. Moreover, a central server was established and every video was uploaded there. The PD TV (Pons Danubii television) produced 5 bilingual videos each week. The PD TV could be reached either through online or through Facebook. The project was combined with six cross-border workshops among the media workers/local TV channels where further media and technology knowledge was transferred to the local TV channels and workers. Besides, the PD TV represented itself at three roadshows in order to promote the channel to the wider public. After the termination of the project, the Pons Danubii attempts to maintain the server for further 5 years. In other words, the Pons Danubii EGTC has performed several successful urban driven projects and it has a clear potential also in the future performance of cross-border cooperation.

The following best practice CBC is the Danube-Kris-Mureş-Tisza Euroregion. The Euroregion has implemented several projects that can be identified as CBC best practices. One example is the 'Euroregio magazine'. It was a magazine that presented the achievements, results and progress of the cooperation in three languages, providing direct information to locals. Moreover, a cooperation protocol was signed between the chambers of commerce in 1998 and it organised exhibitions, economic missions and several other events under the label of DKMT. The achievements of this cooperation protocol were the “Euro-regional Partnership for Competitiveness” (2007) and the inauguration of the Regional Centre for Sustainable Development of Historical Banat Region (2009). Furthermore, the Euroregion has underlined the importance of social cohesion and its substantial improvement within its area, thus social cohesion has become the first strategic direction and it is identified as the general objective of the Euroregion. To be specific, tourism is seen as an appropriate cross-border strategy to enhance social cohesion in the region. Moreover, the basic aim is to identify the basic and fundamental elements/components of the Euroregional identity through the involvement of local people, the broadening of their common information horizon, the enhancement of their mutual understanding and the appreciation of the historical-cultural context, potential and cultural heritage. What is more, the Euroregion attempts to raise the awareness about local decisions in the region, the promotion of joint responsibility. This attempt is performed by one of the most important cultural events of the DKMT, namely the 'Euroregional Theatre Festival' with the aim to support a frequent cooperation between theatres of the region. Simply, this Theatre Festival functions as a big forum for those who are ready to cooperate and implement cross-border interaction and it generates a meeting place for various cultures of the region. Besides the Theatre Festival, another important cultural event is regularly organised by the DKMT, specifically, 'The Day of the DKMT Euroregion'. It is usually organised in May every year at the Triplex Confinium memorial at the Hungarian-Romanian-Serbian triplex border. During that day, there is a dual cross-border performance, which consists of a temporal border opening and a meeting of the DKMT General Assembly. Some other successful achievements of the Euroregion are the following: Protean Europe, a cultural festival of a multitude of artists; a series of economic development trade fairs and conferences organised for experts and entrepreneurs working in the field of agriculture, tourism, security policy, IT and healthcare; development of a four-language news portal, specifically, the Euroregional Information Centre (ERIC) which provides daily updates and it helps the inhabitants of the region to find relevant information; tourist routes which connect the cross-border culture of baths, folklore, secessionist architecture and industrial memorials; joint flood prevention and protection with a rescue team in case of danger and capacity to manage fast evacuation of the population; and the implementation of an international healthcare card aiming to establish international division of labour among the hospitals and healthcare service providers of the region.

The next best practice summarisation looks at the cross-border cooperation between Ruse (Bulgaria) and Giurgiu (Romania), managed by the Euroregion Danubius Association (EDA),

established in 2002. In 2004, it implemented a successful project, namely the cross-border tourist route of churches. Besides the religious tourist route, the CBR between Ruse and Giurgiu has implemented numerous successful projects. One of the most successful cross-border cooperation was the 'Integrated Opportunity Management through Master-Planning' (2011-2012). This cooperation implemented the development of a masterplan and an investment profile of the Ruse/Giurgiu Euroregion area. It was rather a plan than a real/physical performance. The overall objective of the project was to attract new investments and to contribute to the development of the business relations within the Euroregion. It was a unique strategic document with ten planned CBC projects, which was the result of discussions and cooperation between Ruse and Giurgiu. These plans included CBC projects with the aim to establish job-intensive economic growth in the area; a cross-border business incubator with the aim to increase competitiveness of the SMEs; the construction of a new Danube bridge; city train/tram development; the increase of energy efficiency; energy management; a new visitor centre; the establishment of recreation possibilities; and the refurbishment of city centres. Beyond the Masterplan, there are several huge and actual infrastructural and environmental projects within the CBC, like the project 'Rehabilitating and modernization of access infrastructure to the cross border area Giurgiu – Ruse' with almost 5 million Euros; the 'Improvement of Pan-European Transport Corridor No 9' with 6.7 million Euros, while the environmental cooperation includes big projects like 'Common Action for Prevention of Environmental Disasters' with 5.7 million Euros or 'Enhancing the operational technical capacities for emergency situations response in Giurgiu-Ruse Cross-border area' with 5.8 million Euros. What is essentially important to highlight is that this cross-border cooperation shows a profound rising tendency, because the latest cross-border projects represent the biggest financial input in the history of CBC between Ruse and Giurgiu.

The last investigated cross-border initiative within the intensive cooperation category is the Tritia EGTC and its best practice CBC. The cross-border interaction concentrates on four basic pillars, namely improvement of transport network; generation of an environment favourable for employment; innovation and entrepreneurship; tourism; and alternative energy sources. Establishment of the Tritia EGTC was the real impetus to improve the quality of relations between the Czech and Slovakian regions, having signed a cooperation agreement already in 2003. Remarkable successes of cross-border cooperation were achieved in the reconstruction of all roads offering cross-border connections between the Moravian-Silesian Region and the Žilina Self-Governing Region. That means nowadays all roads, leading through the saddles of Beskydy Mountains, are reconstructed within the CZ-SK CBC. What is more, future plans contain the reconstruction of other roads in the region, too. Thanks to the improvement of the cross-border road network, intensification in daily commuting is manifest. Besides the project, there are profound future plans of the cooperation, namely there are plans to develop cycling routes within Tritia, development of the Automotive TRITIA and/or concentrating on tourism, hiking, renewable sources of energy and trail. In other words, the Grouping is

intensive, the most intense cross-border cooperation is performed between the Czech and Slovakian part, and hence cooperation between these regions is more intense than the cooperation with the Polish side. However, the cross-border cooperation suffers from a lack of large projects, indeed most recent ones are rather small.

3.2 Intensive cross-border cooperation but limited to 1-2 specific fields

The second category summarises those intensive cross-border collaborations that are limited to one or two specific fields. It includes those cross-border collaborations that are implemented within a limited and/or a specific area, i.e. the cross-border interaction is rather deep in a specified domain. The first example of cross-border best practice within the second category was implemented by the Haloze (Slovenia) and Zagorje (Croatia) tourism zone. Before the establishment of the zone, a survey was conducted on both sides of the border where the local actors were asked about the future cross-border cooperation network, which highlighted a bottom-up involvement. One of the most important best practices in cross-border cooperation is the tourist license. These are granted for the visitors, subsequently, they can easily travel between the defined cross-border territories without undergoing more complex procedures. Moreover, two projects can be identified, one is the Entrepreneur zone Haloze–Zagorje, which was a direct follow-up of the Tourism zone Haloze-Zagorje, with the aim to prepare and implement project proposals conducted by the municipalities. Beyond these projects, the 'Wine Road Klampotic' was established and it was a bottom-up initiative, specifically for family farms in the region, with the aim to establish a tourist destination by integrating their local wine products. Establishment of the tourist zone has generated a significant development in the area and within the region. What is more, the tourism zone was also used as framework for other additional projects conducted by the municipalities in the area.

The next intensive, but limited cross-border cooperation activity was performed between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. This cross-border cooperation showed a huge success, nevertheless, it was categorised as 'limited' because of its narrow thematic scale, namely the Prut River biodiversity. The most extensive cross-border cooperation success was achieved in the project named 'Resources pilot centre for cross-border preservation of the aquatic biodiversity of Prut River'. Duration of the project was from 2007 to 2013. This case of cross-border cooperation can be explicitly identified as a best practice; experience and cross-border cooperation know-how could be applied in other countries, too. Object of this cross-border project was the Prut River, its qualitative and quantitative biological life, its molecular condition with impact on biological life and aquatic culture. The project carried out fish sampling, scientific investigation of heavy metals in the water, monitoring of chemical migration in the River, etc. Subjects of cooperation were five actors from Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The cross-border cooperation was a scientific and research teamwork

that monitored the Prut River and its biodiversity; it investigated possible improvements and restoration of the Prut aquatic resources. Moreover, the project prepared various emergency plans in case of massive anthropogenic and/or natural incidents. The findings of the scientific and academic cross-border cooperation were successfully disseminated and distributed, thus generating a significant public awareness around the topic of the Prut River and its aquatic life. To be specific, the project was advertised through TV channels and broadcast news. Furthermore, the project fruitfully cooperated with the press, too. The press was invited at every major project event like opening, conference, exhibition, roundtable and/or presentation of the findings. Furthermore, the cross-border scientific research resulted in 14 scientific publications, and public authorities also directly benefited from the scientific cross-border cooperation because all the findings, emergency plans and methodology for mitigating the harmful effects were directly distributed to them. One of the principal strengths of the Prut River cross-border cooperation is that it links people with very similar ethnic and linguistic traits, thus enabling cultural and other forms of cooperation. The scientific cross-border project was an open project that involved master and PhD students, too, and their scientific capacity, creativity, and young eager. The significant strength of the cooperation is that during the project a substantial dissemination and advertisement were achieved, which raised the awareness of public authorities and ordinary citizens about the Prut River and its aquatic biodiversity. What is more, the research information and experience is available and it makes further cooperation and/or research possible in the future. One of the main future plans is to continue the cross-border research, monitoring, risk analysis, simulation, molecular dynamic and cooperation in various other scientific research activities of the aquatic environment and life. In other words, the cross-border cooperation performed an intensive and deep interaction; however, its range was very limited.

A frequent interaction between Hungary and Slovenia and a less extensive interaction with Austria resulted in the trilateral natural park cooperation, which is the final cross-border cooperation and best practice within the 'limited' category. The area has been involved in many cross-border projects, either in wider trans-European cooperation, like 'Transeconet', which emphasised the protection of areas and biodiversity, the management of ecological networks and natural/cultural heritage; or 'Green Belt Initiative', where Goričko was the partner and it underlined the management of the former site of the Iron Curtain which has been converted into preserving unique wildlife and biodiversity since its fall. Beyond these projects, three other projects may be identified as best practices. First is the 'Landscape in Harmony'. The aim of this initiative was to support the sustainable use of nature, the spread of environmental friendly methods/techniques in agriculture, the protection and preservation of biological diversity, the monitoring of vegetation on 60 000 hectares and the monitoring of butterflies on 90 000 hectares. The monitoring resulted in a butterfly atlas and a geographic information system database was prepared. Simply, this cross-border cooperation was a reaction to several anthropogenic problems, like intensive agriculture, the use of fertilizers

and/or the contamination of drinking water. The most important output of the project was the model of sustainability, which reflected the sustainability of economic and societal possibilities of the cross-border region. The second cross-border project that may be described as best practice was 'Upkač', which ended in 2014. This project attempted to preserve/revitalise the old orchards, protect rare animals and herbs, promote local production, local processing of fruits and reintroduction of fruit biodiversity. Finally, the 'Craftsman Academy' can be considered as third best practice. This was a project that had a continuation, too. The cooperation wanted to preserve folk crafts since there are only few masters to carry on the craft knowledge. Consequently, a craftsman academy was established with the aim to preserve the old knowledge and to create an innovative form of training in the field of crafts.

3.3 Mixed level of intensity

This category involves those cross-border collaborations whose activity can be described as mixed in their level of intensity. The first case is the cooperation between Vidin (northwest Bulgaria) and Zaječar (eastern Serbia), which is a relatively recent phenomenon, based on people-to-people actions, starting in 2004. Two euroregions were established which manage cross-border cooperation between Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania. The strength of this cooperation is that it has performed many successful projects, contribution to tourism development, investment and modernization into water infrastructure and/or support of competitiveness of SMEs. Therefore, there are several cross-border projects that may be identified as best practice examples. To be specific, a project called, 'Beekeeping Without Borders' can be considered as best practice. The project aimed at joint workshops, building of public awareness, diffusion of sustainable, organic beekeeping and good beekeeping practices across the border. Importance and success of this project is the fact that this CBC had a continuation and the 'Beekeeping Without Borders II' was also implemented. Moreover, there are two other projects which can be attributed as 'best practices', namely 'Transdanube: sustainable Transport and Tourism along the Danube', and 'Stará Planina'. The former was a transnational/trans-European project in which 10 European states were involved, including the Regional Administration of Vidin Region and the Regional Agency for the development of Eastern Serbia. It concentrated on cross-border transport opportunities through sustainable means of cross-border transport, development of cross-border bicycle routes, promotion of environmentally sustainable tourism and creation of a catalogue about cross-border tourist destinations. To be specific for the Vidin – Zaječar area, the project involved two offers, the first was the cultural/historical tourism called "On the road of legends" and it involved three fortresses in Vidín, Kula, and Zaječar; the second was the transport offer for sustainable mobility in tourism at cross-border level. The second best practice CBC, 'Stará Planina', emphasised the establishment of a professional network database about infrastructure,

agriculture, environment and tourism. Moreover, a sub-database was collected about available experts and their expertise; about planning documents; and a database of research papers/studies concerning the region. This database is available to the wider public online.

The following cooperation within the third category is between Pécs (Hungary) and Osijek (Croatia). This cooperation is considered as limited because Croatia is the youngest EU member state and the harmonization of the EGTC standards are still in process, hence the cross-border legislation is limited. Nevertheless, there is an observable cooperation between the two cities and the EU structures have played an important financial instrument in this issue. What is more, a large number of potential future partners have already indicated their interest to be involved in cross-border cooperation and interaction. It is important to note that the cross-border cooperation is slightly based on cross-border institutional frame and the interaction is driven by occasional and/or long-term partnership of public and private bodies. One of the principal projects was the development of Pécs–Osijek–Antunovac–Ivanovac biking route. Another project was the networking of multimedia cultural centres in support of cross-border cooperation. Besides, the Pannon EGTC has also been established and it is seen as an important instrument and frame of the institutionalised cross-border cooperation in the future. The entry of Osijek and several other municipalities into the EGTC structure can improve the balance of the Grouping and Osijek can be capable of relieving Pécs from responsibility. In other words, cross-border cooperation between Pécs and Osijek has a potential capacity for future development.

The final case within 'mixed level of intensity' is the Euroregion Šumava-Bayerischer Wald/Unterer Inn–Mühlviertel. This cross-border formation implemented several projects that can be separated into large projects and smaller projects. The former includes the following projects: the Czech-German vocational education class for the field of machinery which emphasised a common dual cross-border education of young students under a joint training in order to achieve professional qualification; tourist infrastructure around Dragon Lake with regard to flood protection. Furthermore, a website of three regions was developed, namely the South Bohemian Region, Upper Austria and Lower Bavaria in two languages. This website offers useful information for the visitors about the touristic attractions and museums, moreover, this website includes a valuable categorization of museums according to specialization, and thus the visitors and tourists may easily choose a museum to visit. Beyond the large projects, numerous smaller projects were implemented, too. For example, 'Wild as an Animal III', a local project which tried to improve tourism through wild animals and through and appropriate marketing, hence there are events, programs and exhibitions based on wild animals; project of green buses with the aim to improve the regional public passenger transport, the elaboration of common bus schedule, the harmonization of ticket systems and the reduction of the number of cars. What is more, reinforcement of trilateral structure of fire departments was a project that attempted to manage the exchange of experience and joint training with the aim to improve coordination and communication between fire departments

in the case of cross-border catastrophes and operation. Finally, the project of exhibition on education and craft was implemented, which aimed to transfer knowledge, know-how, methods, and craft profession among high school students.

3.4 The least intensive cross-border cooperation initiatives

This part reflects best practices of those cross-border regions that perform rather weak or the least intensive cross-border interaction. Cross-border cooperation between Subotica and Osijek is the first reflected CBC in this category. Cooperation between these cities is driven by the Croatian ethnic element. Cross-border cooperation between Subotica and Osijek has not established any special institution which manages, directs and supervises the cross-border interaction of the sister towns. Nevertheless, they have performed several successful cross-border actions, for example, the cross-border peace route between several cities, and part of this project was the installation of straw bikes along the bike routes of Osijek and Subotica. Important to underline that the peace route is the third cross-border peace route in the world as a part of the cross-border cooperation and reconciliation project, with the aim to learn about indigenous culinary specialities and to promote long-term sustainable development of the Danube. The primary idea was to create a network of bicycle routes and connect the border regions of Croatia, Serbia, and Hungary. Moreover, other cross-border interactions were also initiated, like the cooperation in the field of waste, its management and recycling with the involved partners from Zagreb, Subotica, and Osijek; regional partnerships concentrated on intercultural exchange, consolidation of democracy and support of dialogue in the Western Balkans; the project of the Regional Centre for education, prevention and physical rehabilitation of persons affected by stroke and multiple sclerosis; or the project of promotion of European values and support of the EU enlargement in the Western Balkans under the title Balkans and Europe Together.

The following case of best practice is given by the Euroregion EDDS, established in 1998. The Euroregion has implemented several successful examples of development projects. The implemented projects aimed to improve the situation in the fields of environment, environmental protection, ecology; entrepreneurship and economy; cultural heritage and history; information infrastructure; tourism; and the protection against natural disasters. Moreover, a magazine was established in 2000 with the title 'Our Europe', however, the magazine was abandoned in 2002. Moreover, the Euroregion implemented numerous projects, like cross-border cooperation in management and protection against disasters with the aim to establish common information system and protection; sustainable development of small family farms with the idea to boost rural economy and development of the region; network of plants in order to initiate a cross-border cooperation and network between growers, harvesters and sellers of herbs, thus ensuring a functioning cross-border market for their products; digital history, i.e. boosting the competitiveness of the region, tourism and its

cultural heritage through use of modern technology; cooperation in cultural tourism and many others. However, these implemented projects profoundly differed in finance options, budget and scale. Most of the projects concentrated on information sharing and network creation and only few projects focused on physical investments and encounters/exchanges of citizens, which were among the basic goals. Although, the biggest implemented project was the formulation of a joint spatial development strategy of the Danube Region based on the Donaudatenkatalog. The basic aim was to strengthen the Danube as an important European corridor, to support competitiveness and growth in the regions and to develop comprehensive development strategies for the Danube area and regions. This cross-border project was selected as best practice because of its financial input of 2 million Euros.

The Drina Euroregion is the final best practice cross-border cooperation in the fourth category. It is the youngest representative of this specific type of cross-border cooperation in the Western Balkans and in this study. The principal best practice of the Drina Euroregion was a bottom-up initiative. Specifically, the confluence of the Drina River represents the largest unused hydro energy in Europe. Consequently, several foreign investors attempted to utilise and to exploit the river's hydropower capacity, nevertheless, the local residents disagreed and articulated a list of 12 demands in order to protect the Drina River, its tributaries and they underlined a need to start an organised management activities, harmonization of water management, creation of a spatial plan of the region and to protect the biological life of the River, especially the protection of predatory fish. In other words, the Drina Euroregion was a result of the resistance from the below, thus it gave a potential legitimate power to the Euroregion. However, this potential power from below was not appropriately applied and a domestic based utilisation of hydropower has not been implemented yet. The Euroregion implemented several projects, like 'Bridge over the Drina' which emphasized people to people interaction and cross-cultural activities; 'Home of Diversity' with importance on social cohesion and promotion of ethnic/cultural diversity in the border region; support of entrepreneurship and the young. Most of the implemented projects were performed on the Serbian-Bosnian border and a smaller number of projects were performed on the Montenegrin-Bosnian border, however, there were no identified cross-border projects on the borders between Serbia and Croatia and between Bosnia and Croatia. The unequal distribution of projects between members may be caused by historic bounds and ethnic ties. Simply, the Drina Euroregion and its activities are unevenly distributed and it demonstrates significant shortcomings within successful future cross-border cooperation, thus it was clearly branded within the weak cross-border cooperation category.

Conclusion

This chapter first categorised the 14 cross-border regions (CBRs) from the Danube region dealt with in this volume, which can be found in Table 1. It is shown that generally speaking, the Central European cases are more intensive in terms of cross-border cooperation (CBC) than the ones in the south-eastern parts of the macroregion.

The lion's share of this section made an attempt to explain this varying level of intensity based on different factors, briefly summarised below.

A shared *ethnicity and/or language* clearly appear to benefit the intensity of cross-border cooperation, which is in line with Brunet-Jailly (2005: 645). At the same time, this does not necessarily go both ways, as in the Danube region we have several active CBRs without such common traits.

A *historical unity* – i.e. a shared history of belonging together – of the different sides seems to matter relatively little for the intensity of CBC. More important, especially in the cases of recent break-ups (in the last appr. 25 years), is whether the dissolution was peaceful.

A similar *geographical structure* (i.e. landscape) is almost a “disadvantage”, as differences on the two sides drive CBC activities more than similarities. This means that for instance territories where a rural space borders a larger city tend to have more CBC and flows, as evidenced elsewhere (*cf.* Balogh 2014).

Given their similar *level of economic development*, this aspect helps little to explain varying CBC intensity in these cases studies of the Danube Region. Yet where differences between the two sides are relatively large, there are indeed signs of an emerging common labour market. But even these tendencies are partly overshadowed by commuting for work further away.

The *level of institutionalisation* then is more important, with more active CBRs forming more advanced forms of CBC, and/or vice-versa. This has been observed in the western parts of the continent, too (Sohn & al 2009).

Similarly, the *length of cooperation* is not at all irrelevant for CBC intensity. Several older collaborations have also upgraded their formal ties (to EGTCs or euroregions). Note that this volume focused on the relatively more intensive CBRs. There are of course examples of “dormant” collaborations even among EGTCs (Nagy 2014).

The *number of countries involved* as well as the *territorial size* of CBRs both matter. Some CBRs are either too large from the beginning or grow out of proportion to maintain sensible cooperation, at least for the majority of involved partners.

Finally, our cases do not reveal any pattern whether some *fields of cooperation*, i.e. the topical targets, make collaboration more intensive or easier to bring about.

The other main part of the chapter aimed to summarise the best practices of the 14 cross-border regions. The goal was to investigate cross-border interaction, evaluate the environment of CBC, and to select those collaborations which have had added value and which could have possible diffusive elements for other regions. The summarised best practices varied on a wide range; from rural development (like promotion of local food) through tourism, cultural cooperation, academic investigation of biological life, exploration of wildlife, infrastructural development, to urban initiatives. In the end, a number of these best practices can serve as good examples and useful incentives to other cross-border interactions.

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