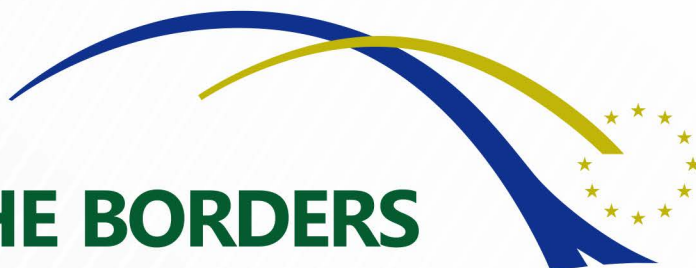


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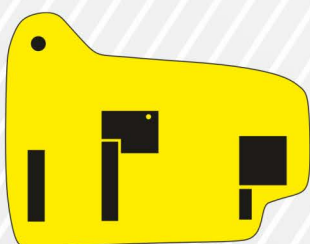
# CROSSING THE BORDERS

## Studies on cross-border cooperation within the Danube Region

**Case Study**  
Ister-Granum EGTC



Written by the  
**Institute of Spatial Planning  
(Slovakia)**



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The best example for cross-border cooperation

Almost two hundreds of cross-border cooperation was identified on the Slovak territory during the research phase of this study. These cross-border interactions are performed through different methodologies, like European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), Euroregions, twin cities, partner cities and regional partnerships. These forms of cooperation include all borders in Slovakia. The most widespread type of cross-border cooperation are twin cities, respectively, partner cities. They generate almost 50 % share from all types of cross-border cooperation. Nevertheless, the case study has not decided to investigate the partner city cooperation, but it searched for an institutionalized form of cooperation. Hence, the following cross-border cooperation was found as suitable candidates for case study research:

- Ister-Granum EGTC Ltd.,
- Pons Danubii EGTC,
- Arrabona EGTC Ltd.,
- Rába-Duna-Váh EGTC Ltd.,
- Euro-region Weinviertel – Jižní Morava – Záhorie,
- Novohrad-Nógrád EGTC.

Subsequently, the basic aim of this case study is to investigate the one specific institutionalized cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary, specifically Ister Granum EGTC. Together 16 EGTCs are located within the area of the Slovak republic. Thirteen of them (approx. 81 %) are operated between Hungarian and Slovak border area. Thus we decided to make a case study of the Ister-Granum EGTC, operated along Slovak-Hungary border, the oldest EGTC in central Europe (and the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest EGTC in European Union). Therefore we assumed that this organisation should have the most experiences on cross border projects and also we were sure that it has made a huge variety of activities for the development of settlements on both sides of the border. Another reason why we chose this EGTC for a case study is for its size. Ister-Granum includes more than 80 municipalities and operates on a large area. Hence we were curious about the possibility of management of such a huge organisation that can be functional and useful for so many municipalities.

The methodological approach of this case study involves desk research and personal interviews. The former included the identification of textual and visual materials relating to cross-border cooperation, i.e. investigation of cross-border cooperation, its history, ongoing and planned activities as well as published documents, manuals and other materials. The latter methodological approach was personal interview with the Director of the Ister-Granum EGTC, namely Péter Nagy.



Case study is separated into several sub-chapters, where each part describes certain aspect of cross-border cooperation. The readers may find sub-chapters like development of cross-border cooperation, geographical confines and determinants of the region, organisational structure of the EGTC, main activities, description of financing and budget issues, analysis through SWOT approach, future plans and finally an enumeration of unique features of this Grouping.

## 2. Development of the cross-border cooperation

### 2.1 History and the process of its establishment

Ister-Granum EGTC has its seat in Esztergom, Hungary. Its name refers to the European intellectual heritage as it uses Latin names: the Danube River is referred to as 'Ister', while the Hron/Garam River is referred to as 'Granum'. The cooperative framework of the Ister-Granum EGTC is generated through cooperation of two border towns, one on the Slovak side and one on the Hungarian side of the border, to be explicit, Štúrovo and Esztergom. The relationship between Esztergom and its twin town Štúrovo has a long tradition.

Esztergom and Štúrovo were connected by a bridge across the Danube River, nevertheless, the bridge was destroyed in the World Wars, which deeply limited and hampered the cross-border interaction along the Slovak/Hungarian borderline. Before the reconstruction of the bridge, the physical connection between the two cities was carried out by ferry across the Danube, but this connection was deeply ineffective. The origins of the real and vibrant cross-border cooperation date back to 2001 when the Mária Valéria Bridge was reconstructed and it was opened as a linking space between Štúrovo and Esztergom. This reconstruction generated possible municipal and business cooperation, intensified interaction between various civic associations, schools, libraries and other institutions. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the increased cross-border cooperation is not solely a direct result of cooperation between Štúrovo and Esztergom, but the cross-border cooperation encompasses the region and the surrounding villages too.

There are more than 100 towns and villages on both sides of the border and this prepared the ground for establishment of the first cross-border groupings of municipalities in the region. Firstly, the Ister-Granum Euroregion was established as a civil association, registered on both sides of the border, in accordance with national legislative requirements. Activities performed by the Euroregion were initially focused on smaller (soft) projects, like organizing various conferences, preparation of information materials (e.g. Catalogue of organizations) and first projects between Hungary-Slovakia (Operational Programme SK-HU). Hence, possibilities for implementation of joint projects (in the form of co-operation as civic associations) were limited.

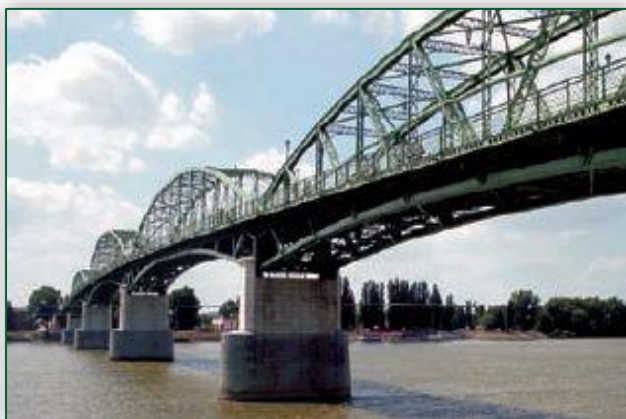
The Euroregion was organized as a non-legal (civil association) entity and it continued to exist until the year 2008. Due to practical issues, the President of the Ister-Granum Euroregion initiated the process of establishing an organization that would ensure legal personality for the Euroregion. The idea of establishing a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Ltd. was to ensure that the cross-border cooperation is in line with European legislation as well as the limitations of the Euroregion as a non-legal entity can be overcome. The most pressing shortcoming was that the cooperation faced several obstacles regarding the implementation of EU funded projects.

The idea of setting up cross-border groupings of local authorities (EGTC) was formulated at the meeting of the European Commission in 2008. It allowed the creation of new forms of cross-border cooperation, as well as new opportunities for the implementation of joint cross-border projects. And, on 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2008, the Ister-Granum EGTC was founded in the presence of Luc Van den Brande, the President of the Committee of the Regions. The registration process of the EGTC was finalised on 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2008 when the announcement was published in the Official Journal of the EU.

The Ister-Granum EGTC was the second European grouping of territorial cooperation in the EU and it was the first EGTC in Central Europe. Subsequently, vast majority of the Ister-Granum Euroregion members accepted the proposal and joined the newly created EGTC. The founding members of the organization were cities and municipalities in Hungary and Slovakia. Key actors within the initiative and establishment were the city of Esztergom (Hungary) and the city of Štúrovo (Slovakia). The Ister-Granum EGTC was registered in Hungary and Esztergom has become headquarter of cross-border cooperation, and Gyula Ocskay became its first Director.

Working language that all members understand and use in everyday communication is Hungarian. On the other hand all the documents, brochures and public materials are printed in three languages, namely Hungarian, Slovak and English. The website<sup>1</sup> is also formulated in these three languages. Positive factor of this type of cross-border cooperation is the fact that it has a highly functioning organization structure. Area covered by the Ister-Granum EGTC is quite large and contiguous what provides possibilities for implementation of numerous development projects. Despite of high number of members (86 municipalities) and despite of different political opinions that are presented by each city, town and municipality, the EGTC is capable of organising joint meetings and making common decisions.

A profoundly important aspect within the Ister-Granum cross-border cooperation is the Danube River and the Mária Valéria Bridge. Thus, it is highly important to give a short introduction about the Bridge which determines 'the life and death' of this cooperation.



*Figure 1: Mária Valéria Bridge*

*Source: Ister-Granum EGTC.*

*(2014). Introduction. [Online].*

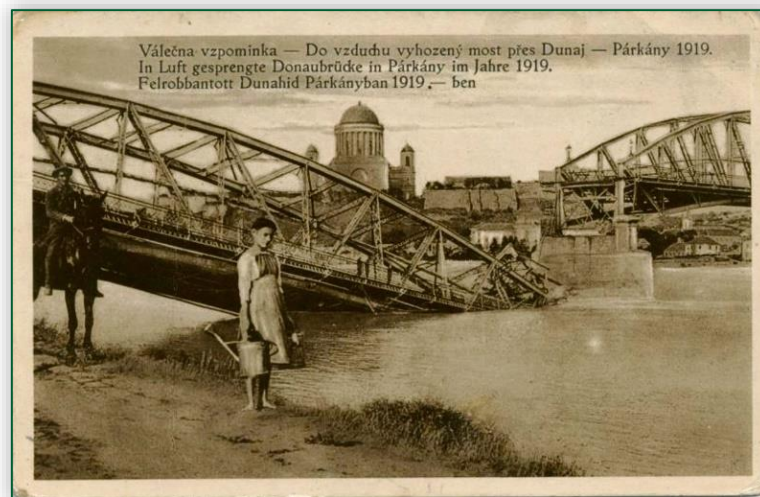
*Available from:*

*[http://www.istergranum.hu/be-mutatkozas\\_en.html](http://www.istergranum.hu/be-mutatkozas_en.html). [Accessed: 12th December 2014].*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.istergranum.eu>

The twin cities were connected by the Mária Valéria Bridge from 1895 which was destroyed twice, in 1919 and in 1944. The Bridge was rebuilt in 2001 as the last of the bridges that were demolished in the World War II. Vehicle traffic across the Bridge has grown 40 times and passenger traffic has grown 11 times. Consequently, the border crossing point of Štúrovo/Esztergom has become the most frequented one at the Hungarian-Slovak border.



*Figure 2: Mária Valéria Bridge destroyed during the First World War (1919)*

Source: Gukyás Zsuzsanna. (2012). Szomorú évforduló a párkányi híd történetében. Új Szó. [Online]. Available from: <http://uj szo.com/napilap/regio/2012/12/28/szomoru-evfordulo-a-parkanyi-hid-torteneteben>. [Accessed: 12th December 2014].



*Figure 3: Mária Valéria Bridge destroyed during the Second World War (1944)*

Source: Gukyás Zsuzsanna. (2012). Szomorú évforduló a párkányi híd történetében. Új Szó. [Online]. Available from: <http://uj szo.com/napilap/regio/2012/12/28/szomoru-evfordulo-a-parkanyi-hid-torteneteben>. [Accessed: 12th December 2014].



*Figure 4: Mária Valéria Bridge under reconstruction*

*Source: Ister-Granum EGTC. (2014). Introduction. [Online]. Available from: [http://www.istergranum.hu/bemutakozas\\_en.html](http://www.istergranum.hu/bemutakozas_en.html). [Accessed: 12th December 2014].*

Rebuilding of the Mária Valéria Bridge was a decisive moment after 45 years. It has been stimulating civil relationships, it has strengthened shopping tourism and it has helped to reduce unemployment on the Slovak side. The number of daily commuters was more than 6,000 people in 2008.



*Figure 5: Representatives of the members of the Ister-Granum EGTC*

*Source: Ister-Granum EGTC. (2014). Introduction. [Online]. Available from: [http://www.istergranum.hu/bemutakozas\\_en.html](http://www.istergranum.hu/bemutakozas_en.html). [Accessed: 12th December 2014].*



### 3. Determination of geographical confines

The Ister-Granum EGTC area is contiguous which includes 86 municipalities from both sides of the Slovak-Hungarian border. Population of the Grouping is close to 190 000. Two third of its population lives on the Hungarian side of the region. The development of the area is substantially determined by the influence of the Hungarian capital city which is situated 50 km from Esztergom.

#### 3.1 Natural Conditions

##### 3.1.1 Land use

This subpart is going to describe the natural conditions and land use of three counties where the member municipalities of the Ister-Granum EGTC can be found, namely Nitra Self-governing region (SK), Komárom-Esztergom County (HU) and Pest County (HU).

Nitra Self-governing region is one of the least developed region in Slovakia. Regarding the level of development, the region is differentiated to a more developed north and a laggard south. Development pole of the region is localized in triangle of towns Nitra, Zlaté Moravce and Levice. Typical feature of the south-eastern part of the region is a combination of agriculture with limited industrial activity and with low rate of diversification. The process of transformation in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century caused a significant decrease of the crucial industrial activity (food processing, ship construction, electrical engineering, production of synthetics, etc.). Some of the key industrial activities were renewed again, however, the previous employment rate has not been reached yet. Besides the economic problems, demographic depression is another negative feature of the southern, laggard part of the region.

In Komárom-Esztergom County, the percentage of agricultural land is relatively low (56,2 %), a major part of which is used as arable land (81 %). The share of grasslands that are found in distant patches in the area is 15 %. Vineyards cover 1,17% of the land, included mostly in Ászár-Neszmély wine sub-region whose total area is 1494 hectare and it is a part of the North Transdanubian wine region. Moreover, the town of Bábolna in Komárom-Esztergom County is home to a world-famous stud farm.

Pest County, which is located on the left side of the Danube River, has a lot in common with countries on the other side of the river in Transdanubia territory. This discovery is interesting despite the fact that agriculture has a much higher economic importance for Bács-Kiskun County than for Pest County. Unlike in counties of Transdanubia territory the quality of soil for agriculture is not appropriate for farming. The cause of this condition comes out from the location of Homokhátság which is mostly a sand territory (large parts of both examined counties are situated there). On the other hand Homokhátság also includes large areas of high natural values where natural friendly land use is encouraged. A key importance within agricultural

activities in this area is horticulture. For example Kesckeméts apricot alcoholic beverage is produced from local apricots. Also each wine sub-region has its own wine route association for promotion.

### 3.1.2 Air quality

Regions are characterised by different state of environmental burden, which are negative effects of anthropogenic activity and which limit the quality of life. Share of population living in damaged environment or in strongly damaged environment is approx. 57 %. In the Nitra County, share of population living in damaged environment or in strongly damaged environment is approx. 67 % (88 683).

The quality of air in the region is affected by long distance transmission of pollutants and by emission from major sources located in the region. Chemical industry (fertilizers production, rubber chemicals), food-processing industry, power industry and automobile transport are the main air quality polluters.

Komárom-Eszergom County is one of the most industrialized regions of Hungary and this has a significant mark on air quality. The region is situated in a mountain range rich in minerals and natural resources (bauxite, coal, kaolin, industrial sand, limestone, dolomite). These natural conditions and closeness of Budapest, as major consumer of industrial goods, and the Danube as transport corridor were the basis of the industrial image of the region.

The county, surrounding the capital city Budapest, is a relatively unindustrialized region that serves as the site for logistics, commerce and suburban homes – these have relatively low air pollutant emissions, thus the overall grade of air quality is good.

### 3.1.3 Water management

There are 54 water courses relevant for water management. The most important are lower reaches of the major Slovak rivers (Váh, Hron, Ipel') with its inflows and number of water canals. The whole southern border of Nitra Self-governing region is influenced by the Danube River.

According to the data of the Slovak hydro meteorological institute, the average quantity of natural sources of ground water in the region is 146 700 l/s and the usable quantity of ground water is 76198,4 l/s. The highest quantity of usable ground water is located in counties of Komárno and Šaľa.

The most important sources of ground water are located within alluvial sediments of the rivers like the Danube, Váh, Nitra, Žitava and Hron. Many of the resources were polluted by agriculture and by inappropriate management of sewage. Pollution caused that the resources are not usable as potable water resources.

## 3.2 Settlement Structure, Human Resources and Economy

### 3.2.1 Human resources and demographic situation

Significant changes have been remarked in the evolution of demographic structure which deeply influence either economic or social situation of the region. The long term tendencies are: deceleration of the population reproduction and decrease of natural increase of population. The process of population ageing is continuing, thus the average age in the region was 39,04 and the ageing index was 148,33 in 2006.

The number of population in Komárom-Esztergom was 315 036 in 2008, this is the second smallest county in population in the Hungarian Danube region. From 2001 to 2008, the demographic structure of population changed by -0,7 %. This loss was such a strong that immigration could not compensate the natural loss.

The population of Pest County was 1 176 550 in 2008. The natural growth from 1990 to 2008 was -1,73 %, a slight decrease. The change of population from 2001 was +8,0 %, this means that there was a serious growth in population.

### 3.2.2 Educational structure

Educational structure of the adult population of Nitra Self-governing region is average (in terms of Slovakia) with significant share of inhabitants with only elementary education or without education degree (31 %). The share of inhabitants with university degree is 8 %. In comparison with average figures of the Slovak Republic, the region is worse mainly in share of inhabitants with secondary school and university education.

Komárom-Esztergom County has higher educational indicators than the average values of among Hungarian Danube regions. Thus its economy is based on well-educated labour force. Pest County has average values of educational structure among Hungarian Danube regions. The reason for this is the fact that Budapest, the educational centre of the nation is close, its economy is based on educated labour force, and the Budapest schools are accessible for most of the people, but institutes of higher education are missing in the region itself.

### 3.2.3 Development trends

Current state of settlement structure is a result of the effects of natural as well as civilization conditions. The settlements are spread across the lowland and modest upland with dominant agriculture. The particular settlements are distributed evenly around core settlement centres. This character of the settlement structure is disrupted only by linear settlement structure along the rivers. The basic conditions for settlement structure development are determined by natural conditions, mainly agriculture, development of transport infrastructure (roads and railways) and industrialization.

Development of the county was originally based on the primer resources (coal, bauxite). Nowadays the key factor of development is the location and position of the region. A successful industrial transformation took place in the region's capital city of Tatabánya, and generally cities and sites lying next to highway M1 are developing dynamically. From human point of view, the region is in good position, but the urban areas in the mountainous areas of Vértes hills experience negative changes in the employment structure of the area.

Pest County surrounds the capital of the Budapest; therefore it became the area of massive suburbanisation in the past 20 years. The population shows a dynamic growth, but the local infrastructure cannot be developed in the same pace. This means that the human resources are in a good state, the growing population is young and well qualified, but possibilities of commuting are getting worse. One of the most important objectives of settlements of Pest County is to create local workplaces. Development trends show that the Western, especially North-Western and in some ways North-Eastern small regions are developing faster than those of the North, East and South of Pest County.

### 3.2.4 Agglomeration axis

The first stage development axis connects the first group settlement centres with the first level settlement core areas in the country and comparable centres outside state borders. It includes at least one road communication link and one speed railway communication link. The second stage development axis connects the second group settlement centres and second level settlement core areas with the first group settlement centres and the first level settlement core areas, including at least one road communication link and one railway communication link of supra-regional importance, or one highway. The third stage development axis connects mid-sized centres with the third level settlement core areas and other evaluated settlement centres with other second group settlement centres.

In geographical point of view, one of the unique agglomerations of Hungary developed in the Northern region of Komárom-Esztergom County, where the cities of Komárom-Almásfüzitő-Dunaalmás-Neszmély and Süttő-Lábatlan-Nyergesújfalu practically grew into one city.

Development axes are determined by physical geographical facilities of the region: first and the most important development axis links Budapest and Győr and crosses the region 70 km long. The second development axis escapes Budapest and runs between Komárom and Esztergom on the North. The third and less important development axis runs along Komárom and Székesfehérvár and crosses the rural countryside of the county.

Pest County itself is practically the agglomeration area of Budapest. The area of commuters is naturally bigger than Pest County, but the official agglomeration is smaller with 82 settlements of the NUTS 3 region. The satellite cities are weak in their functions, most of them are only bedroom suburbs. Development axes are connected to transportation corridors that are the highways of the region.

### 3.2.5 Economy

Regional Gross Domestic Product in purchasing power parity showed a positive significant increase by 60,7 % (2008/2001). Economic active population is important potential and value-creating factor of economic development of the area. During the period between 2001 and 2008, number of economic active population slightly increased.

In 2008, several counties and their employment structure were monitored. The monitoring demonstrated that a significant part of the population worked in the tertiary sector, either in Nitra County (56 %), or in Komárom-Esztergom Country (44,49 %) or in Pest County (63,9 %). During the monitoring, significant increase of employment was identified within the public administration, defence, building industry and financial businesses. Increase of employment in sectors like public administration and defence was caused by establishment of the self-governing regions and by devolution of certain competencies from state administration to self-governing municipalities. A slight decrease was recorded in the building industry in 2008 due to economic crisis. Furthermore, Regional Gross Domestic Product in purchasing power parity in Pest County showed a significant increase by 36,6 % (2008/2001). Economic active population is important potential and value-creating factor of economic development of the area. During the period between 2001 and 2008, the rate of economic active population showed a slight increase. Another positive factor for further economic development of the region is the slight increase of the employed people.

*Table 1: Chosen indicators of CDR Štúrovo - Esztergom - Visegrád*

Name	1996	2001	2005	2008
Regional GDP per capita in PPS as a share of EU 27(25) average (%)	42,7	50	60,57	59,97
Labour force participation rate (%)	56,81	55,73	58,1	58,63
Unemployment rate in region (%)	12,1	10,73	10,4	6,37
Number of employed in tertiary branch (%)	52,48	53,07	54,61	55,87
Share of college and secondary school educated inhabitants (%)	NA	50,7	NA <sup>2</sup>	51,77
Tourism - average guest nights	3,3	2,8	2,56	2,43
Tourism - foreign visitors per 1000 inhabitants	110,48	96,72	108,44	123,26

*Source: Project Donauregionen+. (2012). D+ web server. [Online]. Available from: <http://gis.donauregionen.net/dplus>. [Accessed: 12th December 2014].*

<sup>2</sup> Data on the indicator "Share of college and secondary school educated inhabitants for 1996 and 2005" were not available.

### 3.3 Population difference

Territory of the Ister-Granum EGTC is relatively evenly distributed on both sides of the border. However, there are certain differences. To be specific, only two towns over 5,000 inhabitants can be found on the Slovak territory, while there are 4 towns over 5,000 inhabitants on the Hungarian side of the border. That means there is an unbalanced structure of population between the Hungarian and the Slovakian part of the EGTC, subsequently, this unbalanced structure is reflected in the total coverage of the EGTC. More than two-thirds of the EGTC population is situated on the Hungarian side of the border, while the Slovak side represents only less than a third of the population. However, the number of municipalities that are members of the EGTC is relatively balanced, i.e. 46 municipalities on the Hungarian side and 40 municipalities on the Slovak side of the border. Population of the Slovak part of the EGTC is more fragmented than the Hungarian and the municipalities have a relatively small population (up to 500 inhabitants). In order to understand the population difference better, we added a table (no. 2) which reflects the top five cities/towns.

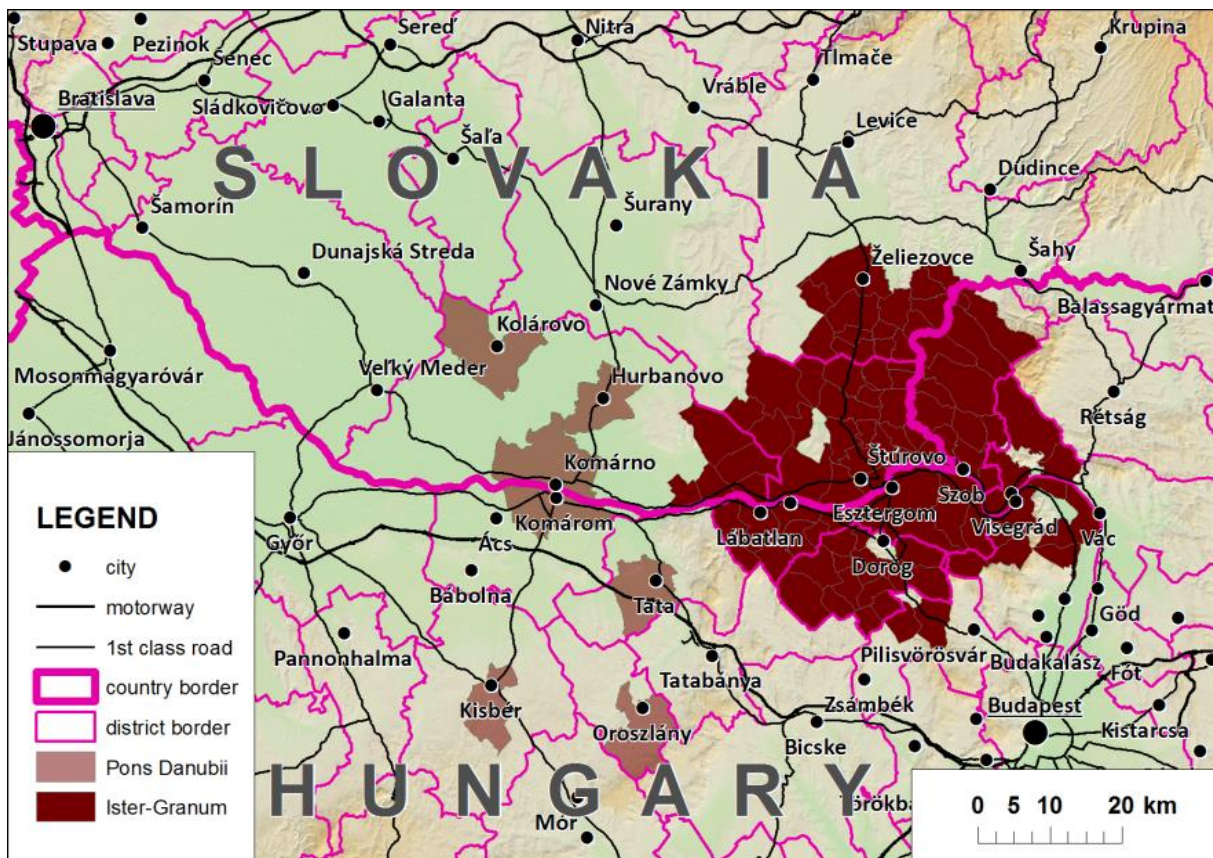


Figure 6: Territory of the Ister-Granum EGTC  
 Source: Institute of Spatial Planning. (2014). Own elaboration.

Table 2: Population of top 5 cities and towns on the Slovak and Hungarian territory of the Ister-Granum EGTC

Members of the Ister-Granum EGTC	Number of inhabitants
Bátorkeszi/Bátorové Kosihy	3 427
Köbölkút/Gbelce	2 229
Párkány/Štúrovo	10 666
Szőgyén/Svodín	2 533
Zselíz/Želiezovce	7 115
<b>Slovak part</b>	<b>25 970</b>
Esztergom	28 412
Lábatlan	4 934
Nyergesújfalu	7 469
Tahitótfalu	5 486
Tát	5 337
<b>Hungary part</b>	<b>126 480</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>179 751</b>

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. (2014). Database Datacube [Online]. Available from: <https://www.statistics.sk>. [Accessed: 12th December 2014] and Hungarian Central Statistical Office. (2014). Population and vital events Theme [Online]. Available from: <https://www.ksh.hu>. [Accessed: 12th December 2014].

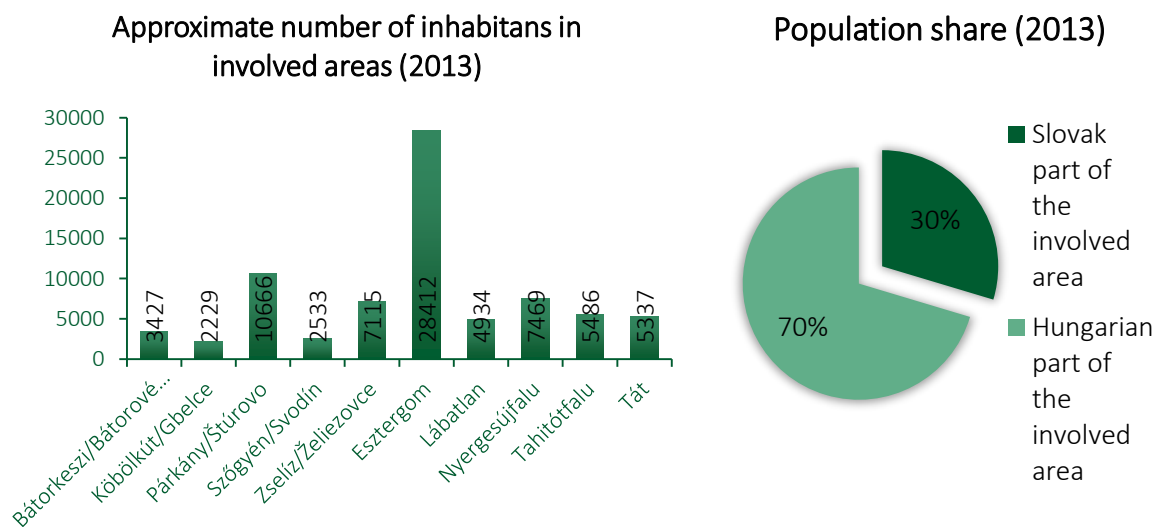


Figure 7: Overview of population (top 5 cities and towns on the Slovak and Hungarian territory of the Ister-Granum EGTC)

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. (2014). Database Datacube [Online]. Available from: <https://www.statistics.sk>. [Accessed: 12th December 2014] and Hungarian Central Statistical Office. (2014). Population and vital events Theme [Online]. Available from: <https://www.ksh.hu>. [Accessed: 12th December 2014].

## 4. Organisational and institutional structure, operation

### 4.1 Structure and description of organizational units

The organizational structure is defined within the Statutes of the Ister-Granum European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation Ltd. Actual organisational model of the EGTC was defined during the process of establishment in 2008.

For successful and useful operations of the Ister-Granum EGTC, the organisation structure consists of: political level (function of decision making), executive level (executive function and management) and administrative & technical level. The Professional committees are responsible for expert advisory and coordinative support.

Organisation structure<sup>3</sup> is divided into following units:

- The General Assembly,
- Executive Chair,
- Deputy Chair,
- Senate,
- Director,
- Committees:
  - External Relations Committee,
  - Human Resource Policy Committee,
  - Economic and Asset Management Committee,
  - Environment Protection Committee,
  - Industrial and Transport Committee,
  - Cultural and Tourism Committee,
  - Supervisory Committee,
- Work organisation.

In following paragraphs each organisational unit of the Grouping is briefly described. All information about competences of each organs of the Ister-Granum EGTC is taken from its Statues. The Statues are available on its website and a direct link to it can be found among references.

**The General Assembly** of Ister-Granum EGTC consists of all member municipalities. It possesses many important competences which are described in following lines. First of all, among essential competences belongs the activity that it adopts the Convention and the Statues of the Grouping. These are the most important documents for the EGTC because they represent approved terms and conditions of operation of the EGTC by all members. Furthermore the general assembly adopts the annual budget and approves the level of membership fees; it

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Statutes of the Ister-Granum European Grouping for Territorial Co-operation Ltd



decides on the admission of new members and expulsion of a member; it elects, appoints and removes the Director; it elects the members of the Senate, special committees and the Supervisory Committee; it approves the conclusion of contracts that are made by the Group with one of its members, its Director, the members of the Senate and the Supervisory Committee, it enforces claims against the Director, the members of the Senate and the Supervisory Committee; it decides on resolution on the revocation of the EGTC without a registered legal successor; it approves organisational and operational regulations and any other questions that are classified in the Statutes or by the applicable legislation.

**The Executive Chair** prepares and leads the meetings of the General Assembly and between the meetings it directs the activity of the Senate. In addition it can make recommendations for a new member to the General Assembly; it represents the general assembly on the internal meetings as well as in front of external organisations; it directs the work of the professional committees and makes recommendations to the chair of the committee. Moreover it concludes contracts and exercises the contractual rights on behalf of the general assembly.

**The Deputy Chair** collaborates with the Executive Chair of the General Assembly in directing the general activity of the general assembly and substitutes the Executive Chair in case of its absence. It also communicates and exchange information with the professional committees, it initiates and maintains contact with different organisations and institutes and it initiates tender project to the Director.

**The Senate** comments on works of the other organisational units of the EGTC. Elaborated opinions deliver to the professional committees, to the General Assembly and to the Director. Another important senate's competence rests in organising and convening the general assembly.

**The Director** represents a full legal, contractual, ethical, financial and administrative management unit of the EGTC. It can individually conclude contracts which amount are less than 5 million HUF or the equivalent in EUR. The director also coordinates the implementation of the approved tasks and objectives of the EGTC and provides information to the Senate, the General Assembly, the Professional Committees and the Work Organisation. Other competences are classified in Ister-Granum's Statues.

**The Professional Committees** assists to the General Assembly with their qualified expertise. They maintain contact with professional and scientific organisations. They also initiate and make preparations for conferences and workshops. Head of one professional committee is **The Chair of the Committee**. The chair of the committee leads committees meetings, signs its decisions and submits those decisions to the involved organisations.

Organisation structure is stable and no changes have been done in structure units.

## 5. Composition of the working organ

The highest decision making body of the EGTC is the General Assembly of Mayors, which meets twice a year. The General Assembly, as the supreme authority, is responsible for political decisions as adopting the Convention and statutes, amending or supplementing the Statutes, adopting the annual budget and reports, admission of new members, election of the Director and members of the Senate, approval of the organisational and operational regulations and others. According to the current statutes of the EGTC, the General Assembly elects two chairs for the period of two years.

Preparation of the decisions is the task of the Senate which is composed of eight members, and this body decides on far-reaching matters between the meetings of the General Assembly. Members of the Senate are the Executive Chair and Deputy Chair, and 6 further Mayors (3 from Hungary and 3 from Slovakia) elected by General Assembly for two years.

Operational work is carried out by the Director. Director is elected for two years by the General Assembly, and it is either the Mayor of Esztergom, or the Mayor of Štúrovo. The Director coordinates the implementation of the tasks in accordance with the objective of the Grouping, moreover, the Director performs legal, contractual, ethical, financial and administrative management of the Grouping, provides information to the Senate, to the General Assembly, to the Professional Committees and to the Work Organisation, and finally the Director represents the Grouping toward the two member states, toward the European Union and toward the institutions of a third country, etc. Furthermore, a supervisory board is also elected by the General Assembly. The role of the board is to perform a controlling and supervisory function of the EGTC.

## 6. Main activity areas/profile

### 6.1 Current projects and associated areas

Prior to 1989, cross-border cooperation at the local level practically did not exist. Such cooperation was possible only at national level, but it missed any local/regional character. However, the situation around the closure of the borders began to gradually change and the administrative boundaries between countries started to fade away which generated a hopeful prospect for future cross-border cooperation at the local level after 1989.

'Evaporation' of state borders was achieved when both countries entered into the EU structures in 2004, but the entrance into the Schengen Area was the real 'borderless' breakthrough in 2007. Therefore, the only physical barrier in the region of the Ister-Granum EGTC represents a natural "border", namely the Danube River.

The primary reason for establishment of the Ister-Granum EGTC was to enhance regional importance and overall position of the cross-border area between Slovakia and Hungary. The background of this establishment was the successful implementation of common projects on both sides of the border and the enhancement of cross-border cooperation.

The Ister-Granum EGTCs is active in various types of projects that are created on the basis of members' needs and possibilities to gain financial contributions or funding schemes. The main focus of the EGTC was based on promotion of cultural heritage, local traditions and attractions in involved area.

*Table 3: Overview of the projects implemented and source of the funding is listed below.*

Subject of the project	Call
Strengthening of the regional civil sphere (2002/2003)	MATRA-KAP (Kingdom of the Netherlands in Budapest and in Bratislava)
Regional Economic Portal (2004/2005)	Széchenyi Plan, Ministry of Economy, Budapest
Information map signs of Esztergom and the euroregion (2003/2004)	Regional Operation Program (Central Transdanubian Regional Development Council)
Operating the euroregional institution system (2004)	Ministry of Construction and Regional Development, Bratislava
Ister-Granum Enterprise-Logistics Belt, New Danube Bridge: feasibility studies (2005)	Phare CBC Fund
The development of the Civil Portal of the Euroregion (2005/2006)	National Civil Fund
Examination of the connections of civil organisations of the Euroregion (2005/2006)	National Civil Fund

Subject of the project	Call
Designing of the bridges over the River Ipoly (2006/2007)	INTERREG IIIA
Fish ladders on the river Ipoly (2005)	INTERREG IIIA
KOMP- Cultural, educational, multi-ethnic programme (2006-2008)	INTERREG IIIA
Without Borders (2008-2009): Development of a service providing system for the NGO's of the euroregion	NGO Fund of the EEA/Norwegian Financial Mechanism, Hungary
Expertising Governance for Transfrontier Conurbations (2009-2010)	URBACT II

*Source: Ister-Granum EGTC. (2014). Introduction. [Online]. Available from: [http://www.istergranum.hu/bemutakozas\\_en.html](http://www.istergranum.hu/bemutakozas_en.html). [Accessed: 12th December 2014].*

The Ister-Granum EGTC applies for funding of developmental projects through various EU programmes, but mainly they focus on Hungary-Slovakia Cross-border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013. Since the establishment of the EGTC and in compliance with its goals of cooperation, the EGTC members have actively participated in its work and they have substantially participated in definition of the project proposals. That means the process requires close cooperation of all members and exchange/communication of project ideas.

There are many examples of successful developmental projects, jointly implemented by the Ister-Granum EGTC. Very successful project is the endeavour to support and promote local products of the region and to make people aware about these healthy, local products. This project can be immediately and explicitly identify as best practice CBC performance. The basic idea of the project is that the urban and rural sphere is separated from each other. However, there is a substantial point which interdependently link them to each other. To be specific, the rural space generates local food and local products as a 'market offer', while the urban space has a huge 'market demand' for local food and products, hence they supplement each other. The real task of the project is to interlink those spaces and to distribute information among them. Subsequently, a database was collected among the rural producers and a brochure was printed out about local products/food and local producers, and it was distributed within the space of the Ister-Granum EGTC. This is a project which terminates 2015. Moreover, the Ister-Granum EGTC is also active in the field of tourism, infrastructure, economy and entrepreneurship.

One of the very successful and long-term achievements is the Ister-Granum Order of Knights of Wine, which was initiated in 2004. This order unites wine-makers from Hungary and Slovakia and it establishes a network among them. What is more, the main purpose is to create a cross-border wine route which is based on local people and their local wine.



*Figure 8: Presentation of activities implemented on the EGTC territory*

*Source: Ister-Granum EGTC. 2014. Introduction. [Online]. Available from: [http://www.istergranum.hu/bemutakozas\\_en.html](http://www.istergranum.hu/bemutakozas_en.html). [Accessed: 12th December 2014].*

The Ister-Granum EGTC helped to trigger various cultural events, e.g. festival of the amateur theatre groups started in 2002 and folk festival was organised from 2002 till 2008 which was the annual showcase of the various ethnic, cultural performers and craftsmen of the region. Furthermore, more and more events took up the name ‘Ister-Granum’, like soccer cup, aviators’ day and the competition of drawings. From 2006 The bilingual “Civil Newsletter” was published quarterly, started in 2006 and ended in 2010, which was sent to the 1,100 civil organisations located in the euroregion. Furthermore, many tourist publications were published and lot of studies were made about the border area and cross-border issues. Unfortunately, several events were cancelled.

Another cross-border cooperation project was “**Enterprise – Logistic Zone**”. The project was aimed on developing relations between industries and logistics on both sites of the border. The Ister-Granum EGTC in 2013 has established a working group which task was to create an integrated investment plan for the area. The plan should represent a tool with objectives and steps for improving the spatial development in both border areas.

Among actual cross-border cooperation projects, on which The Ister-Granum EGTC is currently working on, is a project called **The Local Product**. The aim of the project is to focus on networking of local farmer markets and to create and promote a local product brand – “Ister-Granum”.

Another recent project relates to renewable energy. The aim is to establish **The Centre of Economical Energy** that would provide information for citizens about possibilities of economical and efficient use of energy. In addition the centre should also provide information about the possibility of insulation and many other energy efficient useful tips.

Besides, the organisation also focuses on building **infrastructure for cyclists**. As an example of a cycling type project, there exists an intention to build a high-quality cycling route around “Kováčovské kopce”.

## 7. Management, budget (incomes/expenses)

### 7.1 The cross-border cooperation's economy

According to the Statutes, the cooperation is a legal person under the law of the EGTC. It can acquire rights, assume obligation, acquire movable and immovable property and be a party to proceedings before courts and other authorities. Therefore, the cooperation has its own budget and own budget plan.

The revenues of EGTC budget are based on the following pillars:

- Membership fees of each municipality in the sum of 20 HUF (about 0.07 Euros) per capita;
- Funds from the budget of the Ministry of Interior of Hungary - this is dedicated for all EGTCs located in Hungary and the given fund is divided equally between them (revenue from this source represents approximately 30 000 EUR for the Ister-Granum EGTC).

Members of the Grouping shall contribute to the running costs of the Grouping. Subsequently, members pay a membership fee by 31<sup>st</sup> March of each year. The start-up capital of the Grouping is the total amount of the membership fees paid in cash following the start of the operation. Establishing the amount of the membership fee shall fall within the competence of the General Assembly. To conclude, the annual budget of the Ister-Granum EGTC is around 70 000 Euros.

## 8. SWOT-analysis

This chapter of the case study attempts to summarize the research and investigation about the Ister-Granum EGTC through SWOT analysis. That means its functionality is analysed through four layers, namely, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

### Strengths (S)

- Good cooperation within the EGTC. The Ister-Granum EGTC is active in several areas of interests what is reflected in developed and future projects;
- Flexibility in additional employment in use of managers and experts on individual projects;
- Historical relations in involved cities, towns and municipalities;
- Long term experiences in cross-border cooperation (since 2000 as Euroregion).
- Good perception of the Ister-Granum EGTC by the local citizens;
- Multisource funding provides financial stability;
- High educational level of the employees with long-term experiences;
- No language barriers;
- High potential for close cross-border cooperation in the field of tourism, economy, health services, marketing of local products, etc.;
- Coordinating management of integrated projects in the region;
- Easier administration by EU funded projects.

### Weaknesses (W)

- Different conditions and opportunities in individual cities;
- Political influence on the performance of the organization;
- Pre-financing of projects may cause difficulties for the Ister-Granum EGTC;
- Difficult decision making process (relatively high number of member involved).

### Opportunities (O)

- New project calls for EU funds for the period 2014-2020. New investment period will bring new possibilities for new development projects;
- The possibility to apply for subsidies from the regional development agencies in Slovakia;
- The EGTC involves lot of members, it covers large area and this generates a substantial potential for implementation of development projects, nevertheless, the same issue, namely lot of members can cause difficulties too;
- Know-how exchange among members.

## Threats (T)

- Different approaches of state administration in Slovakia and Hungary. Local cross-border cooperation can be influenced by national level approach;
- Strong dependence on external financial sources (financing of the Ister-Granum EGTC is formally diversified, but in reality there is a huge dependence on one specific source)
- Competition created by a large number of similar cross-border groupings in the region which can reduce the success of project calls;
- Future negative economic situation of members can limit the amount of money for organisation's functionality, i.e. endurance of world economic crisis and negative demographic trends may deeply alter the amount of membership fees;
- The EGTC involves lot of members and those members have different ideas and imaginations about future tasks and roles, hence the too huge diversity may cause disagreement on meta level, and it may decrease the flexibility of decision making process;



## 9. Future plans and goals of the cooperation

The EGTC has an ambition to create joint institutions to support development activities inside the Grouping's territory. Following paragraphs provide a brief overview of Ister-Granum's intentions. More information can be found in the EGTC's official website and a direct link to it can be found in references.

The purpose of **Regional tourist destination management organisation** is to promote and create joint marketing activities for the whole EGTC's territory as an independent, unified tourist destination. The aim of the Grouping is to create more pleasant and tourist friendly destinations that would attract more visitors to its area. The project obtains several activities such as starting joint public relations or creating joint tourist packages.

The main intention of the EGTC in a project called **Common Energy Agency** is to establish own energy agency with two offices on both sides of the border. The task of these offices lays in consulting and convincing municipalities and organisations in the EGTC's area to frame their energy consumption on renewable energy resources.

The activity of **Cross-border service providing system to the NGOs** started in the euroregion in 2008. Currently the network consists of 6 offices which objective is to help to local NGOs in matters of legal and financial possibilities.

**Integrated Health Systems** is a project, which history is dated to 2005 when the hospital of Esztergom started to receive patients from Slovakia in accordance to an agreement with a Slovak insurance company. The intention for future development of this project is to advance it and provide to citizens from both sides of the border a more rational outpatient care system.

The aim of the project called **Ister-Granum EXOP. Business Support System** is to create an office that will provide information, support and will network small and medium enterprises which operates inside the EGTC's territory with organizations that operates beyond the territory. In addition another objective of this project is to establish two exhibition sites.

The intention of project "**Integration of public transport**" is to create an integrated cross border public transportation system which will provide transport services for citizens from both sides of the border. The project includes coordination of the timetables of existing transport providers and establishment of new lines.

Project **Ister-Granum news agency** presents a joint news agency for municipalities from both sides of the border will provide information about the EGTC and Europe without borders to citizens in bilingual languages through radio transmission, television and weekly newspaper.

**Regional solidarity-development fund** is a new tool of joint development that the Ister-Granum EGTC is trying to create. The reason of establishing a fund is in Ister-Granum's ability to gain additional financial sources for supporting small projects inside the Grouping's territory.



Contributors to this fund should be member municipalities and bigger companies located in the region.

EGTC promotes road infrastructure and the importance of connecting Northern and Southern Europe (**Infrastructure Helsinki corridor**) through Esztergom. This would increase the quality of infrastructure, as well as intensity of economic flows.

## 10. Unique, regionally specific features of the cooperation

Unique feature of this grouping can be found in the common history of the whole area. This aspect is reflected in common culture, traditions, language, shared values and mutual understanding. Moreover, long term cooperation and lot of members, involved in the Grouping, can benefit from the exchange of experiences and know-how. EGTC also supports information process of funding opportunities and provides administrative support in preparation of EU project and cross-border projects applications.

Uniqueness of this EGTC is in several characteristics. Firstly, it is in its size. The Ister-Granum EGTC includes 86 municipalities, with approximately 190 000 inhabitants. The ability of coordination and achieving a compromise between so many members is stunning. Secondly this Grouping was established in 2008 which makes it the oldest EGTC in Central Europe and the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest EGTC in the whole European Union. Therefore it was one of the first that was ever established without a possibility to “imitate” the pattern of establishment and a possibility to know or avoid newcomer’s obstacles.

Specific feature of this cooperation is also in its history. Founding cities of the Grouping, Esztergom and Štúrovo, belonged at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century under the Administration of Esztergom County. This historical relation between these cities and the surrounding municipalities has also influenced the language between citizens. The strong relation between these cities has been shown in the ability of reconstruction the Mária Valéria Bridge after its destruction in the First World War and also after the Second World War. Therefore the Mária Valéria Bridge has become a symbol of these cities and presented a key factor in creating the Ister-Granum Euroregion in 2003, the predecessor of the Ister-Granum EGTC.

Afterward, the Euroregion prepared in 2005 a development program which became one of the most important documents of the organisation and created the starting platform for deeper cooperation in the form of EGTC as well.

Member municipalities can exchange experiences and know-how between themselves. That knowledge is specific for this particular area, because several members were or still are members of other microregional associations, or they are partners for regional development agencies, or in other associations. That gives to the EGTC additional sources of contacts, information channels and potential funding sources.

## 11. Summary

Main aim of this case study was the investigation of cross-border cooperation performed by the Ister-Granum European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation Ltd. It integrates large number of settlements on the both sides of the borders.

Organization structure consists of the following units: the General Assembly, Executive Chair, Deputy Chair, Senate, Director, Committees (External Relations Committee, Human Resource Policy Committee, Economic and Asset Management Committee, Environment Protection Committee, Industrial and Transport Committee, Cultural and Tourism Committee), Supervisory Committee and Work organisation.

Members of the Ister-Granum EGTC are active in the field developmental projects and in the process of application for funding through various existing EU programmes. But mainly it focuses on Hungary-Slovakia Cross-border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013. Since the establishment of the EGTC and in compliance with its goals of cooperation, the EGTC members actively participate in the process where they clearly define and identify proposals and ideas. This requires close cooperation of all members and exchange of project ideas.

There are many examples of successful development projects jointly implemented by the Ister-Granum EGTC. The project, which focuses on local products, is very successful and it supports the local producers, local markets, it tries to build up an awareness and attractiveness of local products among the local citizens, thus supporting either the local economy, or the local cohesion of the region, or the health condition of the local citizens. What is more, the Ister-Granum EGTS aims to support other fields too, like the field of tourism, infrastructure and economy and entrepreneurship.

To conclude, the EGTC is active in various types of projects that are created on the basis of needs and possibilities in order to gain financial contributions or funding schemes. The main focus of the Ister-Granum EGTC is based on promotion of cultural heritage, local traditions (festivals) and attractions in involved area.

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## 13. Annex

### 13.1 List of associate settlements

Table 4: Overview of the members of the Ister-Granum EGTC

Members of the Ister-Granum EGTC	Number of inhabitants (Dec. 2013)	Country
Annayölgy	918	Hungary
Bajna	1937	Hungary
Bajót	1599	Hungary
Csolnok	3152	Hungary
Dág	949	Hungary
Dömös	1162	Hungary
Epöl	638	Hungary
Esztergom	28412	Hungary
Ipolydamásd	347	Hungary
Ipolytölgyes	418	Hungary
Kemence	963	Hungary
Kesztölc	2559	Hungary
Kisoroszi	949	Hungary
Kóspallag	765	Hungary
Lábatlan	4934	Hungary
Leányfalu	3472	Hungary
Leányvár	1730	Hungary
Letkés	1116	Hungary
Máriahalom	613	Hungary
Márianosztra	859	Hungary
Mogyorósbánya	830	Hungary
Nagybörzsöny	722	Hungary
Nagymaros	4709	Hungary
Nagysáp	1506	Hungary
Nyergesújfalu	7469	Hungary
Perőcsény	282	Hungary
Piliscsaba	7982	Hungary
Piliscsév	2344	Hungary
Pilismarót	1984	Hungary
Pilisszentkereszt	2167	Hungary
Pilisszentlászló	1183	Hungary
Sárisáp	2712	Hungary
Süttő	2047	Hungary
Szob	2798	Hungary
Szokolya	1799	Hungary

Members of the Ister-Granum EGTC	Number of inhabitants (Dec. 2013)	Country
Tahitótfalu	5486	Hungary
Tát	5337	Hungary
Tésa	81	Hungary
Tinnye	1640	Hungary
Tokod	4099	Hungary
Tokodaltáró	2872	Hungary
Úny	668	Hungary
Vámosmikola	1622	Hungary
Verőce	3660	Hungary
Visegrád	1783	Hungary
Zebegény	1206	Hungary
Bajta/Bajtava	410	Slovakia
Bart/Bruty	606	Slovakia
Bátorkeszi/Bátorové Kosihy	3427	Slovakia
Bény/Bíňa	1465	Slovakia
Búcs/Búč	1160	Slovakia
Csata/Čata	1034	Slovakia
Dunamocs/Moča	1141	Slovakia
Dunaradvány/Radvaň nad Dunajom	712	Slovakia
Ebed/Obid	1167	Slovakia
Érsekéty/Keť	647	Slovakia
Garamkövesd/Kamenica nad/Hronom	1357	Slovakia
Garampáld/Pavlová	236	Slovakia
Garamsalló/Šalov	383	Slovakia
Helemba/Chľaba	722	Slovakia
Ipolybél/Bielovce	224	Slovakia
Ipolykiskeszi/Malé Kosihy	395	Slovakia
Ipolyasztó/Pastovce	503	Slovakia
Ipolyszakállos/Ipeľský Sokolec	843	Slovakia
Ipolyszalka/Salka	1021	Slovakia
Karva/Kravany nad/Dunajom	737	Slovakia
Kéménd/Kamenín	1500	Slovakia
Kicsind/Malá nad/Hronom	386	Slovakia
Kisgyarmat/Sikenička	442	Slovakia
Kisölvéd/Malé Ludince	176	Slovakia
Kisújfalu/Nová Vieska	719	Slovakia
Köbölkút/Gbelce	2229	Slovakia
Kőhídgyarmat/Kamenný Most	1047	Slovakia
Lekér/Hronovce	1466	Slovakia
Leléd/Leľá	342	Slovakia
Lontó/Lontov	684	Slovakia
Muzsla/Mužla	1913	Slovakia

Members of the Ister-Granum EGTC	Number of inhabitants (Dec. 2013)	Country
Nána/Nána	1175	Slovakia
Nyírágó/Nýrovce	533	Slovakia
Oroszka/Pohronský Ruskov	1300	Slovakia
Párkány/Štúrovo	10666	Slovakia
Sárkányfalva/Šarkan	378	Slovakia
Szete/Kubáňovo	290	Slovakia
Szőgyén/Svodín	2533	Slovakia
Zalaba/Zalaba	187	Slovakia
Zselíz/Želiezovce	7115	Slovakia

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. (2014). Database Datacube [Online]. Available from: <https://www.statistics.sk>. [Accessed: 12th December 2014] and Hungarian Central Statistical Office. (2014). Population and vital events Theme [Online]. Available from: <https://www.ksh.hu>. [Accessed: 12th December 2014].



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