REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CROSS-BORDER PARTNERSHIPS

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Abstract

The unique originality of the tourist exchange is that it is not the product but the tourists who consume it that are subject to relocation from their place of permanent residence to the tourist destination. The tourist as consumer moves to the tourist "product" to take advantage of its integrated components - natural (landscapes, climate), material (services and equipment) and human (societies and civilizations, historical and socio-cultural landmarks). With the development of this process, complex relationships emerge between tourists and local community with reflections on economic and social life. And they require management in an organizational and functional way. The awareness in this regard is in fact, very important for the competitiveness of the tourist offer and has a significant effect on regional sustainability. It is in this direction that the present study aims to explore one of the aspects of the impact that is being discovered in connection with the implementation of cross-border projects funded under the EU Cross-Border Cooperation Program - Interreg A with regional orientation to the Romania-Bulgaria border area. The focus is on identifying the manifestations of sustainability as a consequence of indirect investment in tourism and on outlining and taking concrete action as a result of the implemented projects. It is also defined by the presumption, that effects on regional economies and social characteristics should be high while respecting the sustainability of project results.

Keywords: sustainability, tourism, cross-border collaboration and projects, regional effects.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the process of tourist exchange, the tourist destination becomes the aim of the tourist trip, a desirable "purpose" for travel, provided fully available to visiting together with all belonging to its cultural and natural values. It is associated with the formation of two levels relationship: on the one hand, on the occasion and in connection with the tourist movements, and on the other - in the contacts that tourists make with the local community, expressed through the complex guest-host relationship. On the basis of these relations, attention should be focused on the problem of areal localization of the tourist destination. In most cases, only international or only domestic destinations are analysed in the specialized literature as well as in practical researches (Yaneva, 2019). However, there are correlation between them, observed both in the movement of tourist flows, as well as in their market positioning and image characteristics.

These dependencies can also be represented through a geographical approach, exploring tourists' preferences or the location of the tourist destination. However, they may also be related in connection with the implementation of specific projects, as is the case with those implemented under the EU cross-border collaboration program. The research focuses on the cross-border area of Bulgaria-Romania and focuses on establishing regional sustainability as a consequence of identifying and taking specific actions in relation to tourism at the destination level.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Providing theoretical study, considering the main purpose, requires exploration of specifics of the tourist destinations in one hand, and on the other, the financing of the program, as an instrument of the EU for assisting regions and as a major aim of its cohesion policy.

Because of the limited size of the publication, it is difficult to consider in details the study area, but it can be clarified by defining it by area.

Regarding the tourist destination as a localization unit could be conditionally considered as an object that needs certain conditions in order to function effectively. It possesses certain capacity to satisfy the interests of the territorial unit on which it is or is expected to be located in terms of job creation, supply of tourism products, consumption of local resources, creation of development conditions , accompanying activities and conservation of environment and cultural heritage.

In fact, in the totality and diversity of the issues under consideration, theoretical knowledge of the tourist destination contributes to its adequate existence on the tourist market. In this direction, the influence created by and on them should be understood. While some authors are adopting an increasingly critical approach to analysis, in numerous cases there is a lack of a clear idea why certain measures and techniques are being used and what exactly they are measuring. Therefore, a starting point is needed, that localization could be.

The term "localization" essentially means restrictions on actions or phenomena in a particular place (Milev, Bratkov & Nikolov, 1978). Considering the fact that in its literal translation from Latin the term creates ambiguity of meaning, it is appropriate for the needs of the particular development to accept its semantic content, set by Tonkova (2002). She suggests that the term localization should be used to characterize the process of deployment of production facilities, accompanying activities, social and infrastructural sites in a specific territory. Her studies may also refer to the terminological refinement of the present study, especially since Tonkova systematizes and summarizes studies by multiple authors with reflections on regional sustainability. In this way, her definition can also be related to the tourist destination as a

localization object (Tonkova, 2020), being enriched by outlining regional specifics and development opportunities in the context of sustainability.

When analyzing localization issues for a tourist destination in the context of areal development, different main groups of factors (Pearce, 1992) can be used, for example, related to accommodation, tourist movements and the impact of tourism on the economy. Combined studies describing different variables according to the specific forms of tourism to which they relate are also described. They should be handled selectively, that requires validity and reliability of the data to be carefully checked and the limitations explicitly noted.

Tourism theory and practice are familiar with a number of international spatial studies (Rajotte, 1977; Weaver, 1992), including the one by Klaric (1992), who propose three basic models of areal organization of tourism: in tourist regions corresponding to administrative units (regions, provinces, etc.). n.); in tourist areas selected and defined as more special regions than others; in tourist regions that may cover the whole country but whose borders do not coincide with the actual administrative organization. Often (in tourism), social and cultural constructions of space and location are often marked through the concept of border (Krasteva & Kiryakova-Dineva, 2018).

World practice shows that tourist centers or regions usually match with or are a combination of existing administrative regions. One of the reasons is that most tourist organizations at the destination level are actually supported by the public sector and with their activities they reflect on the territories of local and regional government (Pearce, 1992). At the same time, joining the smallest administrative units to tourist regions, instead of using larger administrative regions, is one way of identifying and maintaining areal variation in this sector. As a result, the collection of tourist data makes it easier to relate to other statistics produced on the same areal basis, such as population or employment graphs, e.g. The possibility of combining tourist data with other data is of great importance when using relative instead of absolute measuring instruments. In particular absolute figures provide useful information about how important tourism is in a certain country or region as a whole, but do not always show the importance of tourism in specific places. For this reason, more and more attention being given to the relative measurements of tourist intensity, multilaterally determined by linking tourism indicators with other features of the researched places. The choice of relative or absolute measures depends to a great extent by the problem under discussion, but the most successful and effective one is a combination of both.

Accommodation allocation is the most common way of measuring areal development in the tourism industry. Accommodation statistics are usually used to indicate areal variations in tourism or to identify regions or different types of tourism activities. Some studies include elements of both as a way of

measuring the importance of the tourism industry. The use of accommodation in the analyses is logical, since staying out of the house is one of the defining characteristics of tourism, except for the cases where there is interest in day trips. Then the number of accommodations gives a false idea of the true tourist demand.

To determine areal variations, tourist flows are also explored. In their essence, they represent a type of permanent migration of the population. These migrations are characterized not only by spatial mobility but also by great inventiveness and variability, influenced by the individual and group preferences of tourist demand. Unlike other migration movements, in tourism, the end point (s) of the trip is the choice of the tourist. The selectivity to the facilities and services offered is driven by a large number of dynamically changing economic, biological, social, demographic and other factors. Last but not least is the role of psychological factors, including recreational and tourist modern trends.

Economic parameters (examined in their role as a fourth factor) are determined in direct relation to the group of tourist movements or flows. It is a fact that tourist flows are one of the most intense exchanges between countries and regions in the world. For example, worldwide arrivals of foreign nationals increased from 165 million to 842 million in the period 1970 - 2006. Tourism revenue increased 41-fold over the same period, from about $ 18 billion for 1970 they became $ 735 billion in 2006 UNWTO (2012). The faster the rates of tourism development are the faster economic stability and sustainable development achieved in individual regions. At the end of 2012 (December 13), the number of tourists in the world exceeded 1 billion (https://money.bg/archive/turistite-v-sveta-za-parvi-pat-nadhvarliha-1-miliard-dushi.html). The growth of tourism, despite global economic instability, amounts to 9% of world GDP and up to 45% of exports of underdeveloped countries, providing every 19th job on the planet. In 2019, after a tough seven years for the industry in terms of security and challenges, the results aggregated for the previous 2018 by the World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC) are more than indicative: the sector generated 10.4% of global GDP and created 319 million jobs, thus providing 10% of total employment; 122 891 000 jobs created directly in tourist sites in 2018 (3.8% of total employment) and a growth of 2.2% in 2019 with a total of 125 595 000 jobs created. Estimates for 2029 broaden the horizon, creating 154,060,000 jobs. In fact, the number of tourists in the world is growing, exceeding 1,400 million people in 2019. The estimates for 2029 are for a tourist flow of 2 196 090 000 travellers generating costs of $ 2 483.9 billion (Economic Impact Report, 2019).

The information about arrivals and overnight stays usually come from one or two main sources - accommodation reports or visitor surveys. In many European countries, for example, owners of different accommodations are required to provide statistics for their guests for accounting, police, and other purposes. In some countries, such information is restricted to only one sector, mainly the hotel sector. In

Bulgaria, the Law on Tourism states that the accounting of the accomplished overnights is made by the owners of tourist places in the respective services to the municipalities, on the territory of which they are located (Bulgarian Tourism Act).

EU economic policy also has an impact on economic and social parameters. Especialy, regarding the European integration as a process of political, legal, economic, social and cultural interaction of the countries in Europe (Pencheva, 2013). In particular, the effects are achieved through the Interreg programs, thus realizing a fundamental objective of the Union's cohesion policy, aimed at promoting the harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the EU as a whole. Interreg has been built around three directions of cooperation: cross-border (INTERREG A), transnational (INTERREG B) and interregional (INTERREG C) and funded mainly by the European Union (European Regional Development Fund, ERDF), as well as having national participation (INTERREG EUROPE Programme 2014-2020, https://www.mrrb.bg/bg/infrastruktura-i-programi/programi-za-teritorialno-sutrudnichestvo-2014-2020/interreg-evropa-2014-2020/).

Interreg A, or European cross-border cooperation, maintains cooperation between NUTS III regions from at least two different member countries, located directly at or near the borders. It aims to address the common challenges identified in border regions and to take advantage of untapped growth potential in border regions while improving the process of cooperation for the purpose of EU harmonious development (Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria, 2020a). Social and cultural constructions of space and location are often marked through the concept of border.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approaches of scientific knowledge are extremely diverse, which, however, makes it difficult to be precise in selecting the appropriate set of methods, according to the specifics of the research case. In this study, in an attempt to overcome this contradiction, the aim is approached through a comparison method. Mainly because the comparison is inherent in all science (Lor, 2011), and because in the social sphere, where tourism is also related, it deals with what Ragin (1987) refers to as "large macrosocial units". In particular, Ragin refers to countries, nations and other major political formations that defined by property and area. Considering these arguments, the comparison as a method is very appropriate to be applied in the study of the impact on tourism sustainability of cross-border projects funded under the EU Cross-border Co-operation Program Interreg A in the Romania-Bulgaria border zone. Above all, spatially defined connections (according to Pennings, Keman, & Kleinnijenhuis, 1999) are searched in tourist destinations on both sides of the cross-border territory.

The Common Methodological Framework is based on a literature review related to the topic and also includes induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis, search and review of sources of documentaries and statistics, as well as the use of inductance. The overall logical construction is based on the view that each study follows to a series of conclusions that lead to new knowledge. It is placed in a clearly identified timeframe (Lor, 2011), set in the diachronic perspective of generations resulting from the results of projects implemented, as well as in the spatial perspective of events that occurred within the scope of the territory under study.

Another key point in planning the comparison is considered, namely - the level of analysis is determined (Lor, 2011). Taking into account the refinements of Novak (1977), Landman (2008), Kennett (2001) and Hantrais (2009), three levels are distinguished, at the macro or national level, the other sub-national or meso level, and the third - micro level. Again, according to their comments, the macro-level study is change-oriented, and the lower levels are oriented towards the specifics of the cases identified.

In this sense, the study focuses on the areal orientation of the Interreg A, Romania-Bulgaria program, which seeks to develop the border area between the two countries by financing common projects. As well as realizing the ERDF objective of enhancing economic and social cohesion in the EU by correcting regional imbalances by focusing investment in several key priority areas known as "thematic concentration: innovation and research, the digital agenda, support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), low carbon economy (European Regional Development Fund, (2020). The eligible area includes 7 districts from Romania: Mehedinţi, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Calarasi and Constanta. In Bulgaria there are 8 districts: Vidin, Montana, Vratsa, Pleven, Vel iko Turnovo, Rousse, Silistra, Dobrich (Financing opportunities offered by the Romania-Bulgaria Interreg V-A Program) (Figure 1), which covers 19.8% of the area of the two countries (69,285 km²), 57.75% belonging to Romania and 43.25% of Bulgaria (INTERREG EUROPE Programe Bulgaria-Romania 2014-2020).

So far, after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU, two programming periods have been implemented: 2007-2013 and 2014-2020. The funds allocated under the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-border Cooperation Program 2007-2013 amount to EUR 262 million. ERDF funding represents 83% of the budget allocated to the program, amounting to EUR 217.8 million, the rest of the over 17% or EUR 44.2 million being national contributions (from country budgets and from the own sources of the partners involved in the projects) (Romania - Bulgaria Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013).

FIGURE 1 - MAPPING POSITION OF TRANSBORDER ROMANIA-BULGARIA REGION
Source: INTERREG EUROPE Programe Bulgaria-Romania 2014-2020

For the period 2014-2020, the total budget of the program is EUR 258,504,126 (of which EUR 215,745,513 from the ERDF). Projects funded: 85% of ERDF, 13% national co-financing (Romania and Bulgaria) and 2% own contribution (Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria, 2020a).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the European Union, the tourism industry generates more than 5% of GDP, with around 1.8 million businesses employing nearly 5.2% of the total workforce (approximately 9.7 million jobs). Taking into account also the tourism related sectors, its contribution to GDP is much higher - the indirect share of tourism is more than 10% of the GDP of the European Union (EU) and provides employment to about 12% of the workforce (Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, 2020). For a period of no more than fifty years - from 1950 to 2003, the number of international arrivals in Europe has increased from 25 million to 414 million and tourist visits expected to exceed 700 million by 2020 (UNWTO, 2016). In 2017, according to Eurostat (2017), more than 40% of tourist arrivals are made in EU countries. According to the World Economic Forum, the most popular and most competitive tourist destinations are European Spain, France, Germany (The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report, 2019). In 2015, one out of ten European enterprises in non-financial sector enterprises are in the tourism sector. Their number is 2.4 million enterprises, which provide employment to 12.7 million people. Enterprises in tourism-related sectors and activities generate 9.2% of employment in the EU non-financial sector and 21.5% of employment in the services sector. In total, EU residents spent € 467 billion for tourism in 2017, with 44% of their spending related to travel in their country of residence and 56% for travel abroad. The average cost per night amounted to 75 euros (58 euros per night for internal tourism and 97 euros per night for international tourism) (Bulgarians spent an average of 153 euros per trip in 2017, (2019).

In Bulgaria, the tourism sector is also considered particularly important for economic development at national, regional, and local level. In 2019, according to the Ministry of Tourism (Statistics about international tourism in Bulgaria, 2019), the total number of tourist visits of foreigners in Bulgaria is 9 311 681 with an increase of 0.4% compared to 2018 (Figure 2).
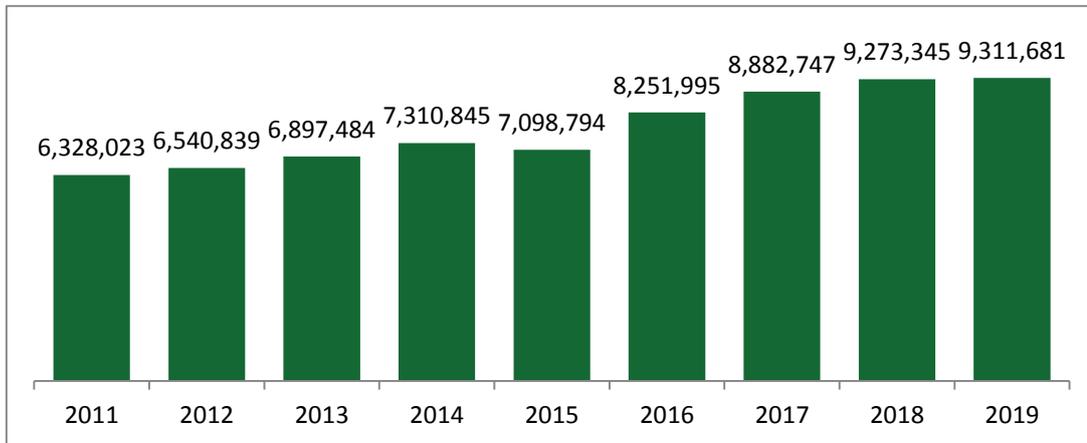

FIGURE 2 - TOURIST VISITS OF FOREIGNERS TO BULGARIA IN THE PERIOD 2011 – 2019
Source: Bulgarian National Statistical Institute. (2020)

The number of arrivals to the destination for holiday and vacation is increasing, which for 2019 is 5 860 447 visits at a growth of 1%. That forms 62.9% of all tourist visits. The other visits are as follows: visits for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives are 625 355, which is a decrease of -6,7%. Business tourism visits totalled 1,761,190, an increase of 1.9%. The number of visits with other tourist purposes is 1 064 689. According to the data of the Bulgarian National Bank, in the period January - November 2019 the incoming tourism revenues amounted to over EUR 3.6 billion, which is an increase of 0.02% compared to the same period in the previous year. 2018 (Figure 3).
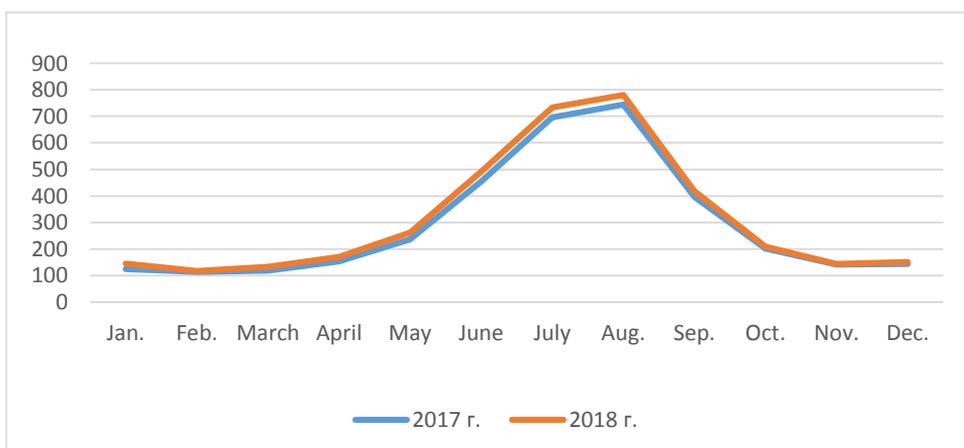

FIGURE 3 - REVENUES FROM INTERNATIONAL TOURISM (EUR MILLION) - ANNUAL DATA FOR DECEMBER 2018
Source: Bulgarian National Statistical Institute. (2020)

Certainly, in terms of revenues from international tourism for the destination Bulgaria, there is an upward trend. For the period 2011 - 2018, revenues in the US $ increased from 4 297 billion to 5 072 billion (Figure 4). However, the dynamics are obvious: after the strong 2014 and revenues of 4 518 billion, the next 2015 is 25% weaker. Meanwhile, despite international tensions, mainly as a result of the increased terrorist threat, Bulgarian tourism is seeing a steady increase in revenue over the next three years, leading to 2018 results. Unfortunately, 2019 figures show weaker results, and expectations for 2020 are negative.

Figure 4 - International tourism, receipts (current US$) - Bulgaria
Source: UNWTO, Yearbook of Tourism Statistics, Compendium of Tourism Statistics, and data files.

On the other hand, Romania, as the largest country in South-eastern Europe and the 12th largest in Europe, has significant tourism potential. However, as a tourist destination, the country has for a long time failed to generate significant tourist flows to its territory. Of course, observing the specificity of data for the period 2011 -2019, the positive trend of development, which marks an increase of almost 50% in the number of foreign visitors, is inevitably impressed (Figure 5).
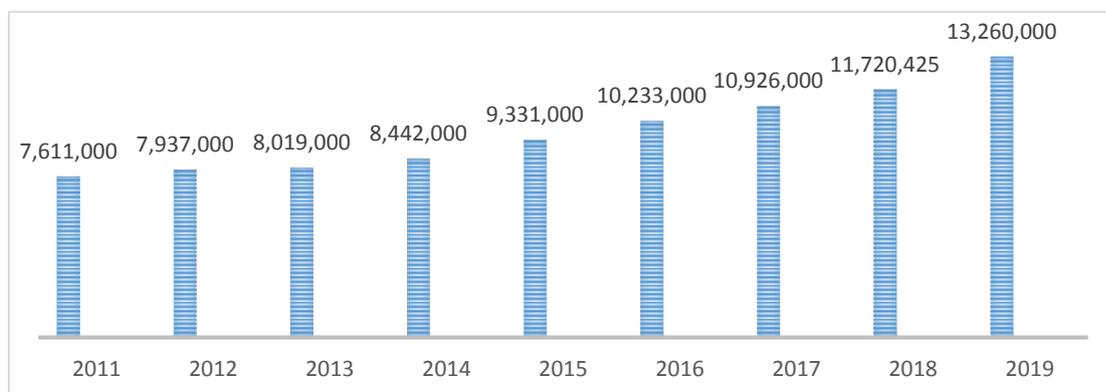

FIGURE 5 - TOURIST VISITS OF FOREIGNERS TO ROMANIA IN THE PERIOD 2011 – 2019
Source: Worldbank. (2019a).

Romania's revenue for the period 2011-2018 is also positive. As it is shown in Figure 6, international tourism revenue increased from $ 2 016 billion in 2011 to $ 3 261 billion in 2018.

FIGURE 6 - INTERNATIONAL TOURISM, RECEIPTS (CURRENT US$) - ROMANIA
Source: Worldbank. (2019b).

When comparing the data for the two destinations under consideration: Bulgaria and Romania undoubtedly make the impression that, although the destination Bulgaria generates smaller tourist flows, it actually manages to achieve higher volumes of international tourism revenue. The difference in digital value amounts to nearly $ 2 billion in favour of Bulgaria and approximately 4 million people as international tourists, mainly for Romania. The logical conclusion is that the economic development of tourism for these two destinations is unsustainable. A closer examination of the other two elements of the concept of sustainable development - socio-cultural and environmental (alongside economic) - is likely to show the same trend. Meanwhile, the success of tourism activities and the satisfaction of tourist needs are largely related to the balancing of the three elements, in terms of their spatial location in the territory of the tourist destination.

Reporting the existing correlational links in the flow of tourists, a successful approach to overcoming non-sustainability in the cross-border area Bulgaria-Romania could be conceptualized by identifying specific actions in the regional aspect regarding tourism at the destination level. It is within the framework of sustainability that they can justify the achievements of the cross-border co-operation programs in Romania - Bulgaria in relation to the accomplish tourist projects.

In the first identified period of action 2007-2013, 100 projects (INTERREG EUROPE Programme 2014-2020) were implemented under the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-border Cooperation Program (Figure 7).
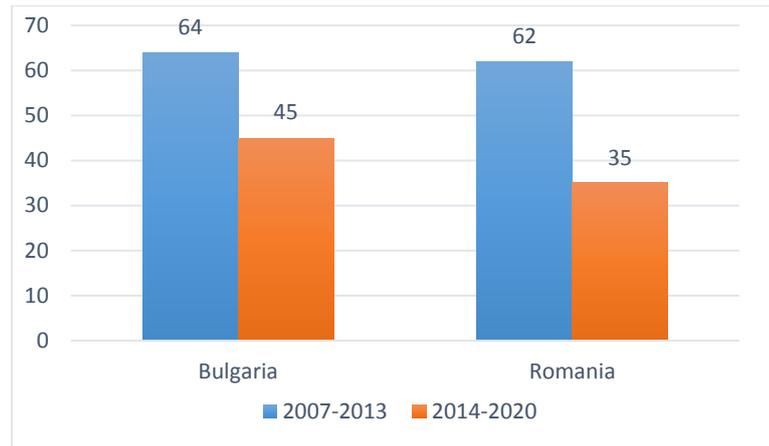
FIGURE 7 - FINANCED AND IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS 2007-2013
Source: INTERREG EUROPE Programme Bulgaria-Romania 2014-2020, (2020b).

50 from them all are projects in the tourism sector with 64 partners from Bulgaria and 62 from Romania, financed with EUR 57,836,842.92 (2007 - 2013 Romania - Bulgaria (RO-BG, (2015) For the second period 2014-2020, 33 completed projects with 45 partners from Bulgaria and 35 from Romania worth EUR 18.579.516,36 have been reported so far in the field of tourism. The total amount allocated for the financing of approved projects is EUR 60,382,044.02 (INTERREG EUROPE Programme Bulgaria-Romania 2014-2020 (2020b). (Figure 8).
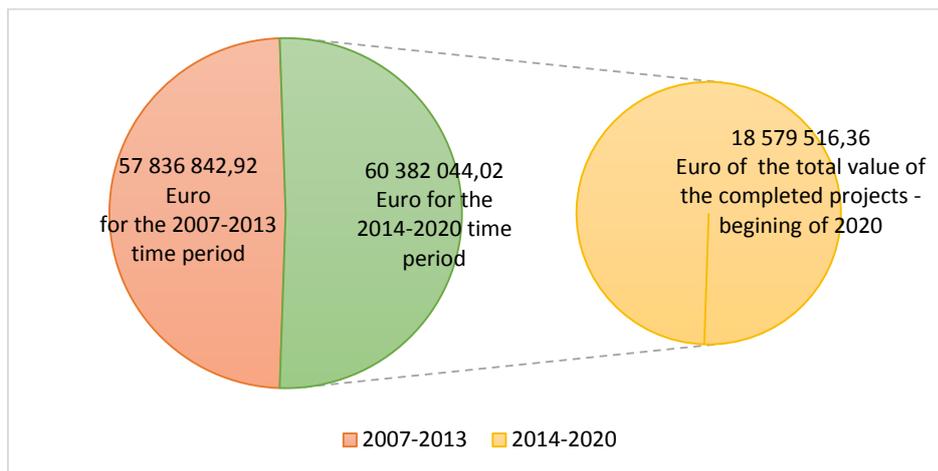

FIGURE 8 - FINANCIAL VALUE OF THE IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS
Sources: 2007 - 2013 Romania - Bulgaria (RO-BG, (2015), INTERREG EUROPE Program Bulgaria-Romania 2014-2020 (2020b).

The available data show a significant financial resource that should activate the tourism potential of the cross-border territory for the appearance and welcome of tourists. The spatial distribution of this resource can also be considered acceptable as it covers the territorial scope of the program (Figs. 9 - 10), although more than 5 projects in the cities of Montana, Vidin, Pleven, Rousse and Dobrich (Bulgaria) and Giurgiu, Calafat and Constanta (Romania) are observed for the period 2007-2013.
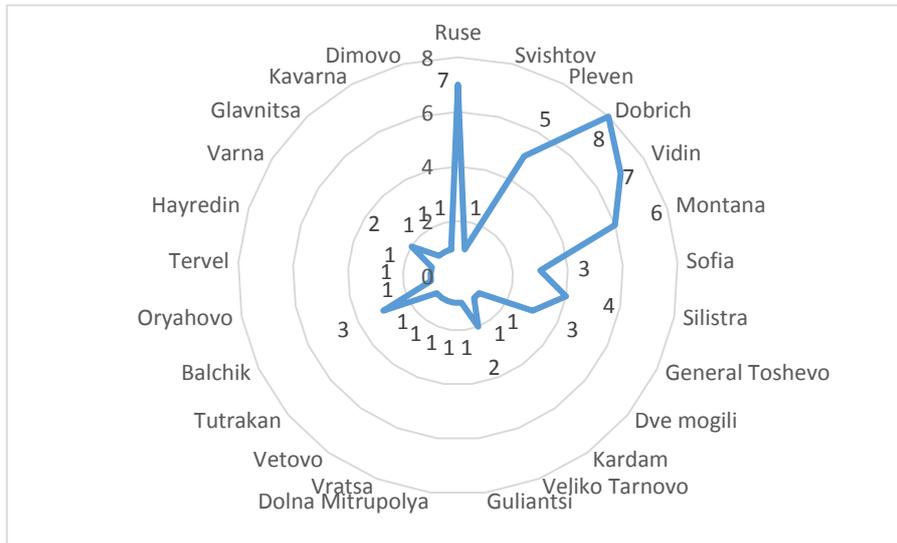

FIGURE 9 - AREAL DISTRIBUTION BY CITIES OF THE FINALIZED PROJECTS IN THE PERIOD 2007-2013 IN BULGARIA
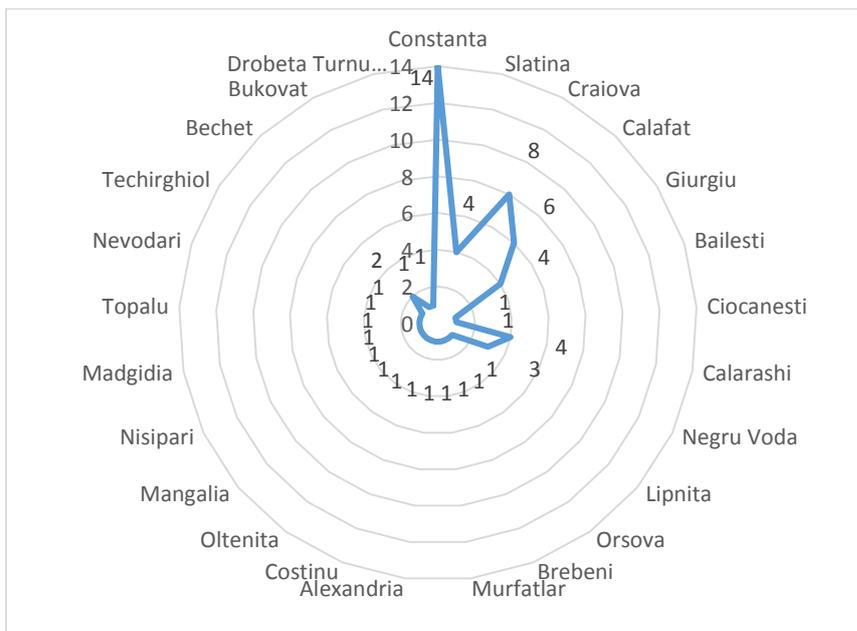Source: 2007 - 2013 Romania - Bulgaria (RO-BG, (2015),

FIGURE 10 - AREAL DISTRIBUTION BY CITY OF THE FINALIZED PROJECTS IN THE PERIOD 2007-2013 IN ROMANIA
Source: 2007 - 2013 Romania - Bulgaria (RO-BG, (2015)

In the second period, the tourism projects implemented up to the beginning of 2020 have the areal distribution shown in Figs. 11 and 12. The impression left is that there is an imbalance across the program area.
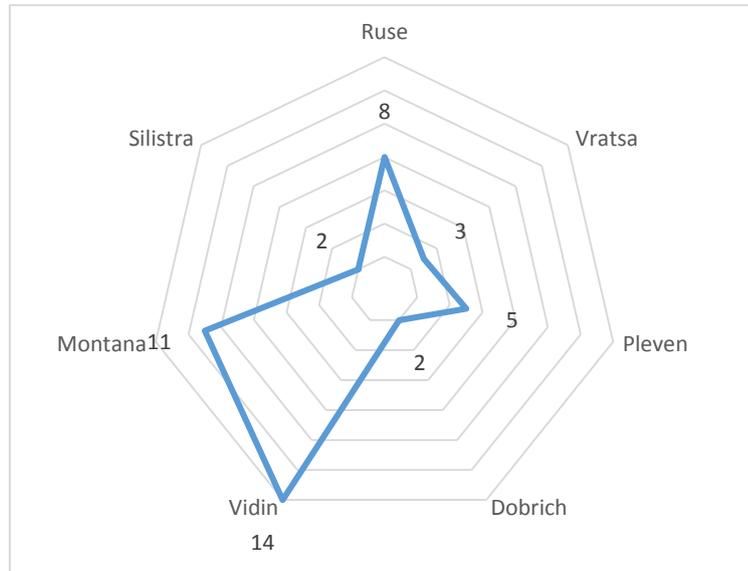

FIGURE 11 - AREAL DISTRIBUTION BY CITIES OF THE FINALIZED PROJECTS IN THE PERIOD 2014-2020 IN BULGARIA
Source: Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria. (2020b)

From Bulgarian side, there is a concentration of realized tourist projects in the cities of Vidin (14), Montana (11) and Rousse (8). The number of places in which the organizations involved in the implementation of these projects are located are less than in the previous programming period. A similar trend was observed in the Romanian territory, where in the Dolj district, 19 projects related to tourism were won and implemented.
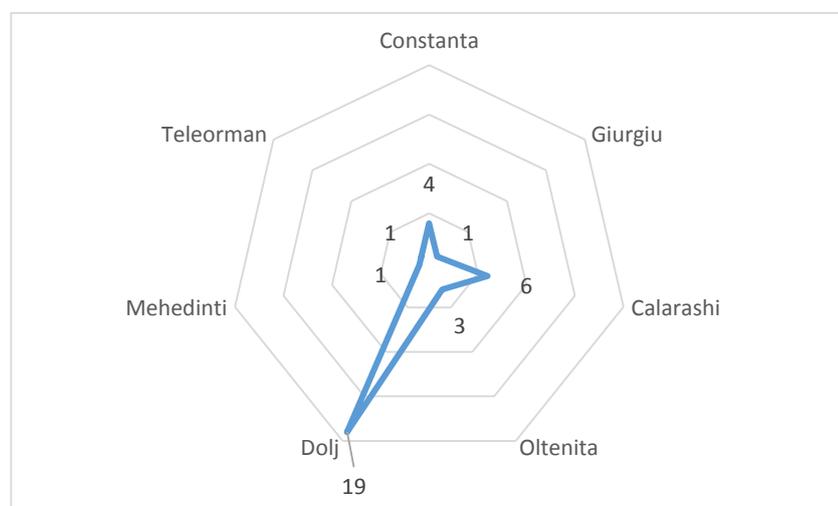

FIGURE 12 - AREAL DISTRIBUTION BY CITIES OF THE FINALIZED PROJECTS FOR THE PERIOD 2014-2020 IN ROMANIA
Source: Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria. (2020b).

The results that are achieved in the implementation of tourism projects in the cross-border region over the two programming periods covered more than 15 different areas of development (Figure 13). In this case, among the significant number of thematic projects on tourism development (26 in number), those supporting cultural tourism (43 in number), sustainable tourism and eco-tourism (16 in number) can be identified as key oriented ones. Certainly, such a distinction between these three areas is conditional, so that the three main criteria is the sustainability of the tourism supply and consumption (Stankova, 2016).
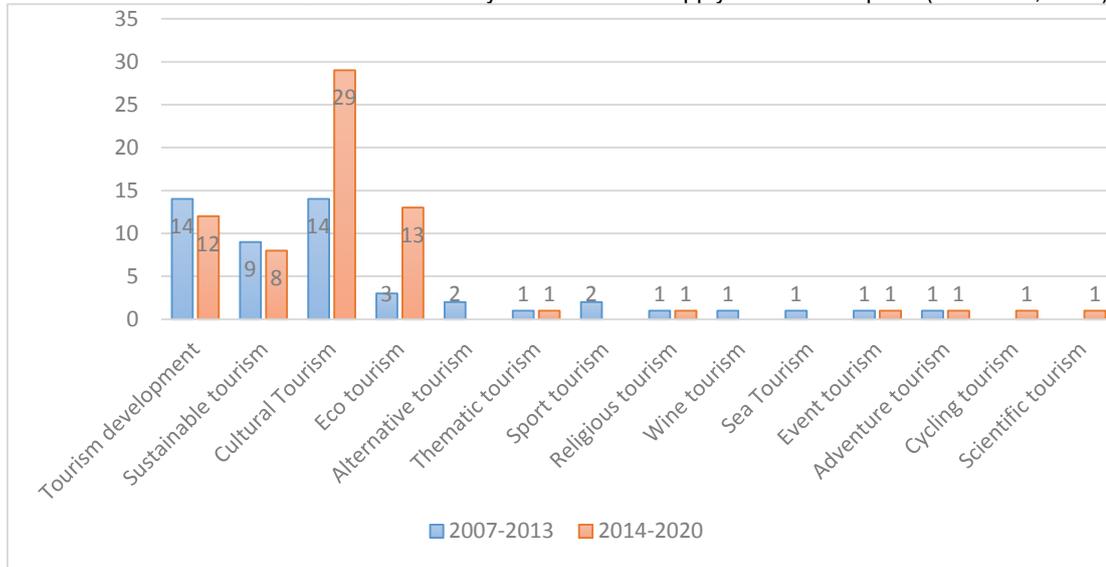

FIGURE 13 - THEMATIC FOCUS OF THE FINALIZED TOURISM PROJECTS FOR THE STUDIED PROGRAMMING PERIODS 2007/2013 - 2014/2020 (ROMANIA - BULGARIA)
Source: Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria. (2020b), 2007 - 2013 Romania - Bulgaria (RO-BG, (2015)

The insured over € 100 million of financial resources for the period 2007-2020 should be considered as a multiplier tool for stimulating activity in the tourism sector. In this situation new and updated tourist offers should be established in the cross-border region, the tourist interest should also be increased, so as respectively the number of tourists and the employment in and in a connection with the tourism. However, if for the supply in tourism an information could be found as a result of the financial projects, according to the other two aspects it is very difficult to find specific evidences.

For example, because of the reports generated in the NSI – Bulgaria, for certain years (Figure 14), a trend can be observed regarding the overnight stays in individual cities in the region.

It is clear that in the period 2008 - 2019 (with data available), there is a steady increase in the number of overnights in places for accommodation. The highest results were achieved in the cities of Varna, Dobrich, Veliko Tarnovo and Vidin. In fact, Vidin and Dobrich are among the cities with the largest number of implemented projects - a total of 21 for Vidin for the two programming periods and 10 for Dobrich. Therefore, it can be assumed that part of the increased number of nights is a projection of the promotion of cities as tourist destinations and the providing of new tourist products. In the other two cities, Varna and Veliko Tarnovo, the growth in overnight stays could be explained in a greater extent as a result of

their own popularity as a sea capital of Bulgaria (for Varna) and as one of the centers of cultural tourism in the country (for Veliko Tarnovo).
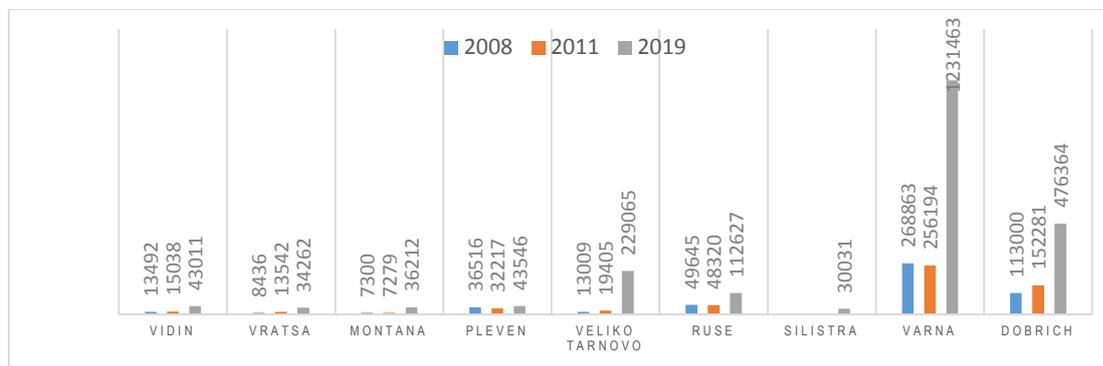

FIGURE 14 - NUMBER OF TOURISTS OVERNIGHT STAYS IN ACCOMMODATION PLACES - TOTAL FOR CERTAIN YEARS 2008-2019 IN PARTICULAR CITIES IN BULGARIA IN THE CROSS-BORDER REGION OF THE PROGRAM IN THOUSANDS
Source: Bulgarian National Statistical Institute, (2020)

Providing the data needed for the analysis for the Romanian country is equally problematic. A study of the information sources shows that in Romania the information on the overnight stays is provided at the county level by the relevant departments of the Romanian statistics. According to the inquiries, it was found that for the seven districts within the territorial scope of the program is missing complete and reliable information for the number of overnights. The available data is displayed by 2018, while maintaining a baseline in 2008. Data for 2019 is not detected (Figure 15). No data is available for Giurgiu because of unavailable (as of April 8, 2020) access for systemic reasons (Regional Statistical Office site not working); For Dolj, Olt, Constanta and Tulcea there are no data for individual years, as the figure shows. As a result, the lack of sufficient data makes it difficult to see a clear trend. From the available ones, it can be concluded that only in Mehedinţi County there is a certain increase in the number of overnight stays for the period 2008-2018.
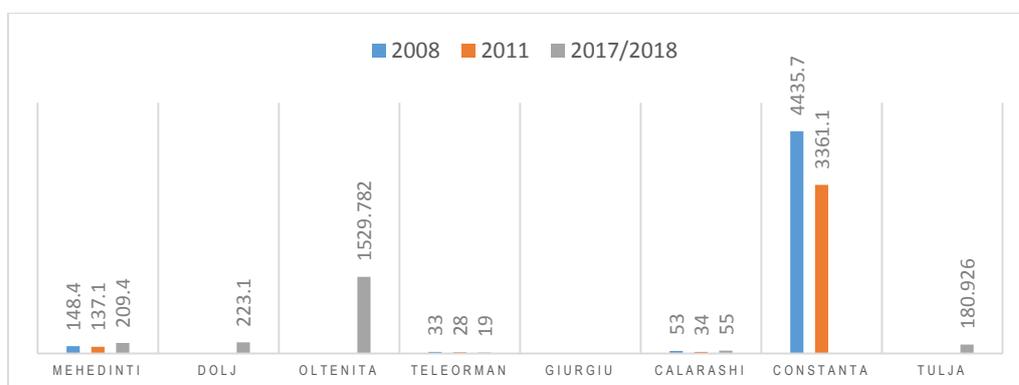

FIGURE 15 - NUMBER OF TOURISTS OVERNIGHT STAYS IN ACCOMMODATION PLACES - TOTAL FOR SELECTED YEARS 2008-2011 BY COUNTY IN ROMANIA IN THE CROSS-BORDER REGION OF THE PROGRAM IN THOUSANDS
Source: National Institute for Statistics. (2019)

Meanwhile, however, for both countries in the cross-border region, there are no data at all on tourist arrivals (for tourists who do not spend the night) in cities or districts, thus violating the objectivity of the analysis. The same applies to tourism employment data in the cross-border region. In addition, the analysis is compromised due to the inability to account in an objective way (currently according to official data) the already significant impact that tourism suffers from dynamically changing economic, biological, social, demographic, and other factors. This is an important limiting factor to consider when planning and designing tourism strategies in the future.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Focusing the present study on sustainability as a category and a consequence of indirect investment in tourism in the territory of the "Interreg A" Romania - Bulgaria program, the main idea was on the effects identified by the regional economy and social environment. However, it turned out that an in-depth analysis based on publicly collected and available data could not be done. The reasons for this are mainly in the way of collecting information, where the available one diverges in some extent with the needs of the research purposes. Considering this finding, the first conclusion is precisely to emphasize the need to strengthen partnerships between scientific and research institutes, the public sector and tourism and related business at regional level. It can become a management support tool as well as facilitate the effective spatial localization of the tourist potential of the destinations. Other, important key priorities for future development and sustainability in the cross-border region under study are related to the formulation of an integrated regional tourism brand and proposal, provided by the cooperation of all engaged in tourism development. In this sense, among the priorities in the context of the sustainability of the economic and social environment are measures to stimulate interest in tourism projects that are already developed under the implemented projects or to organize common "mirror" events to promote established regional brands by the already mentioned participants already mentioned. Another similar idea is to use already created tourist events such as festivals and fairs in the cross-border region as an accelerator for internal regional tourism.

As Ivanov (2017) points, regardless that Bulgaria promotes a variety of tourism products, its main tourist product is mass tourism, with the attraction of the sun in the summer and snow in winter. In fact, the formulation of an integrated tourism development policy in view of the areal variations around the locations of tourist destinations is fully corresponds with the tendencies to rethink the importance of spatial development. The lack of engagement between tourism in areal terms and statistical indicators, in fact, breaks the objectivity and balance of strategic planning and future management. And this should be taken in mind in the light of the forthcoming EU programming period (2021-2027), which is outlined as a key

one in terms of areal development. Building on the undisputed results and good practices of the already implemented project proposals under the first two (for Romania and Bulgaria) programming periods, the principles of integrated tourism policy can be successfully developed and implemented, by ensuring the interaction between the economic and socio-ecological parameters in connection with using the tourism potential of the region to ensure sustainability in development.

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