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PHD THESIS

SUMMARY

**Local Public Administration and Romanian-
Hungarian Cross-Border Cooperation after EU
Accession. Case Study: Bihor County**

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The idea from which i started and which I drew during the research is the following: in the conditions of the processes of incomplete decentralization during the accession period / the phenomenon of recentralization in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-accession period, local public administration can and is credited by the ones it governs, to be the most important player in the implementation of European cross-border cooperation programs, being a strong European-level bottom-up factor.

From the essence of the central (general) objective there are also the two secondary objectives of the paper, from which i analyzed:

a) the local public administration in our country has the potential to adapt to the current evolution of the relations between the central and the sub-national authorities, which tend to be re-centralized, and to ensure a government that is not only a "transmission belt" but an active and applied to local peculiarities government.

b) governed (citizens) expect the local public administration to be visionary, flexible and geared to local needs and, in this sense, it is credibly accredited to use all possible resources for development, in our case the cross-border cooperation programs.

In our research we started from the fact that defining the objectives and efforts of the county and local actors in accordance with the current national legislation, but especially with the needs of the communities they manage, will contribute to the amplification of the involvement of other actors in attracting European funds, including through cross-border cooperation programs, as in the case of Bihor County, the Romania-Hungary Program. This state of affairs also gave us the definition of the *first working hypothesis*.

Thus, starting from the fact that the majority of authors who stop on the phenomenon of regionalization consider that only by decentralization can regionalization be made, as an expression of europeanization, and obviously of local autonomy, I would like to advance the hypothesis that through the process of centralization can reach a certain level of regionalisation and local autonomy, provided actors in the public administration do

not expect development solutions from central level but seek to exploit the funding opportunities that the EU offers, such as the cross-border cooperation. Our research may be part of these *top-down* europeanization approaches, but we want to see what is the future trend in the relation between local public administration and cross-border cooperation in the context of a regional re-centralization reality in Central and Eastern Europe¹, where we have *top-down* re-nationalization demarches. Is it possible to stand by the promotion of *bottom-up* europeanisation in public administration through cross-border cooperation, or do we just have to speculate on opportunities? In favor of my hypothesis there are a number of arguments that I will enumerate in a synthetic form in the first chapter and I will consolidate them through the case study in the last chapter.

Despite the fact that the size of cross-border cooperation implies rather private actors than public actors, and even less the public administration which is deeply hierarchically linked to the central authority, *the second hypothesis* starts from the idea that the county and local public administration in the entities administrative territorial at the borders of Romania can be involved in the development of cross-border cooperation, in attracting European funds through cross-border cooperation programs. These issues will be followed through the second chapter and in the last chapter dedicated to the case study.

The third hypothesis is related to the role of Euroregions as facilitators for the development of cross-border cooperation, which are becoming more and more discussed by recent research². The fact that public administrations, whether they have a passive attitude in the activity of Euroregions or even give up and officially withdraw, denotes, on the one hand, a perception of inefficiency in relation to expectations and, on the other hand, shows that public administrations have become more pragmatic and do not agree with yet more regulation; they seek to directly apply projects with their cross-border partners, with whom they share the same common space and have the same needs. I will check this hypothesis especially in the second chapter, where I will talk about the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion and in the third chapter where we want to see the perception of the officials in the administration vis-à-vis euroregions in general.

Of course the achievement of the objectives proposed in the paper can be done from multiple perspectives. But in my approach I start from Huen-Tsyh Chen's *theory-*

¹ I. Horga, *op.cit.*, p. 67-69

² *Xxx Manual on removing obstacles to CBC*, Institut of International Sociology Gorizia, 2013

*driven evaluation*³ with three types of assessment: normative assessment, causal assessment and composite assessment. Of the three types of evaluation, I will use composite evaluation for the most part of my research, considering that during the research I aim to combine the theoretical aspects with the practical aspects and with the empirical studies, that are specific aspects in the evaluation of the public policies⁴. I will therefore seek to provide a clear image, a logical succession and continuity, reaching this by clarifying the terms of cross-border cooperation in the field of public administration.

I will partly use the normative assessment, especially when I will discuss cross-border cooperation in the field of public administration⁵. The normative evaluation has three components: the normative evaluation of the results; the normative evaluation of documents; the normative assessment of the environment in which a program is implemented⁶. Of the three components, we will focus mainly on the normative evaluation of documents, the component which, according to the normative theory of document analysis⁷, aims, in the present case, to look at how the documents related to cross-border cooperation in the field of public administration in general have been implemented.

As mentioned above, the basic research fund will be based on composite evaluation, providing me, from the perspective of the available sources I had, the best way to evaluate the other two pillars of cross-border cooperation research in the field of public administration, focusing on the case of Bihor County.

Regarding the evaluation methods that I will use in the composite assessment, I will focus on the global approach to the issue of cross-border cooperation in the field of public administration, as it is the most important way to draw up an effective program⁸. Once the evaluation program has been drawn up, we will be able to assess the different levels of approach to the issue⁹, so that to assess their relative effectiveness¹⁰. To illustrate this point, I will use the theoretical analysis of the documents governing cross-border

³ Huey – Tsyh Chen, *Theory – Driven Evaluations*, Sage Publications, 1990, 87-141 apud Alin Ciprian Gherman, „Evaluarea cooperării politienesti transfrontaliere in domeniul transporturilor rutiere” in Horga Ioan, Țoca Constantin-Vasile, Chirodea Florentina, *Evaluarea cooperării transfrontaliere la frontierele României*, Oradea, Primus, 2013, pp. 87-89.

⁴ Cerchez, Mirela, *Politicile Publice, Success sau eșec, Un ghid al modelelor de evaluare*, Iași, Institutul European, 2012, p. 14-16

⁵ Alin Ciprian Gherman, *op.cit.*, , pp. 87-88.

⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷ John W. Finney, Rudolph H. Moos, “Four Types of Theory That can guide Traitement Evaluation” , in Huey – Tsyh Chen and Peter H. Rossi, *Using to Improve Program and Policy Evaluations*, Greenwood Press, New York, Westport, Connecticut, London, 1992, pp. 15- 28.

⁸ Huey – Tsyh Chen, *op.cit.*, p. 259.

⁹ Evert Vedung, *Public Policy and Program Evaluation*, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 2009, p. 23-28

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

cooperation in general and then I will look at how it effectively acts at the level of cooperation in public administration.

After the global approach I will turn to the components approach, here I will focus on the simultaneous combination of the components of the program and the opinions of the specialists about them. For example, I will talk about cross-border cooperation in public administration in the field of institutional cooperation, in the field of decentralized institutions, etc. Each of these components will be illustrated with the views of the components on two levels of discussion. On the one hand, it is about analyzing the interaction of the components and, on the other, about their independence. Here I will pay attention to the particularities of the specialized works in the field of cross-border cooperation, the component of cooperation in public administration.

During the research, I will then proceed to address the variables that appeared under the ROHU program (2014-2020) compared to those in the HURO (2007-2013) program and, then, of the latter to Phare CBC (2000-2006) variables and how the components program respond to these variables. Therefore, discussing the impact of the evaluation on the program, we will have to be careful that addressing the variables will solve the problems that have arisen during the implementation of the research program and which could not be predicted from the beginning.

In order to understand the relationship between the environment of my research implementation and the content of the research program, it is important that the impact assessment in the practice of public administration co-operation at the EU's internal borders be integrated into the assessment of the regulatory implementation environment, thus making a composite assessment. To go through this evaluation path, I will pay attention to the participants (actors) to the cross-border cooperation program in the field of public administration.

From the point of view of the theoretical framework, I will emphasize some theories from the international relations and the field of European integration. From the perspective of the theories of international relations, I will focus on the theory of constructivism¹¹. From the point of view of integration theories, I will deal with the problem from the perspective of the theory of intergovernmentalism¹².

¹¹ Alexander Wendt, *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge: University Press, 1999

¹² Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe. Social Purpose & State Power from Messina to Maastricht*, Routledge, London & New York, 1999.

The methodology of the research was oriented, on the one hand, to the qualitative method: the method of document analysis, comparison and case study - Bihor County. On the other hand, I referred to the quantitative method in two ways. First of all, we collected data on the situation of cross-border projects managed in Bihor County both within Phare CBC (2001-2006) and HURO (2007-2013), as well as a selection of CBC projects in the Bihor County Development Strategy (2014-2020). Second, we applied a questionnaire over 200 respondents on the perception of public administration involvement in supporting cross-border cooperation. We have processed the collected data that we used during the thesis as graphics to support some observations, but also for argumentation when the situation asked for it.

We have approached a more elaborate questionnaire in which we can see the opinions of the representatives of the county, local and decentralized public administration on the ansamblu of cross-border cooperation. According to the specialists in collecting information using the questionnaire method, it should help the public administration actors to measure the effects of the policy results; to motivate civil servants to focus on results; to help us have the opportunity to provide accurate data on the evolution, results and effects of our actions to our subordinate institutions and our collaborators in our meetings, correcting where necessary; to help us develop strategic plans; to continuously improve the quality of governance services¹³.

The questionnaire was sent online to 3 representatives of the public administration in 54 communes of Bihor County, all of them in the Romanian-Hungarian border area or who were partners in cross-border projects, from the 7 towns of Bihor county (Alesd, Beius, Marghita, Nucet, Stei, Salonta, Valea lui Mihai), from Oradea and to decentralized institutions from the Bihor county. More than 500 emails have been sent. 212 people participated in the survey, indicating a participation rate of 40.35%.

The questionnaire was centered on 25 questions and is presented in full in Appendix 4. The processing of the questionnaire was done with SPS system, which greatly enhances the degree of accuracy of centralization and greatly facilitates interpretation.

Regarding the structure of the content of the questionnaire i used, in addition to the knowledge gained from the use in the first two chapters of the primary and secondary sources, the experience gained as a prefect of Bihor County for five years and as member of the Chamber of Deputies during a mandate. Thus, I sought through this questionnaire to

¹³ Harry P. Hatry, « Tracking the Quality of Services » , in James L Perry, Robert K, Christiansen, *Handbuck of Public Administration*, ed. III-a, Wiley, 2015, pp. 328-329

ensure content validity - by the representativeness of the content of the questionnaire in accordance with the subject under investigation. I have sought to see the degree to which a public opinion tendency towards the issue of cross-border cooperation can be measured against what I wanted to investigate¹⁴. I also sought to achieve construct validity, namely the validation of hypotheses and the way in which results fit into a wider construction¹⁵.

Taking into account the specificity, amplitude and features of the research project¹⁶ in the achievement of the paper, we pursued the combination of qualitative research with quantitative research. If the qualitative method allowed me, on the one hand, to obtain the information, to contextualize this information to the situation of the Romanian public administration, then to that of Bihor county, the quantitative research allowed me to extract the essential aspects highlighted by qualitative methods, with direct reference to the role that local and county public administration can play in stimulating or blocking development using the tools provided by cross-border cooperation programs. In this respect we have implemented **Annexes 1-3** which contain a synthesis of the projects carried out by the public administrations in Bihor county between 2004-2013 and those that are intended to be implemented.

The qualitative method allowed me, on the other hand, to interpret the results obtained from the data collection.

The paper is structured in three chapters that were conceived in the next equation. Considering that through the objective of the research we wanted to see if the local public administration can and if it answers to those it governs not only as an essential actor in local development, using all the levers of the European programs, including the cross-border cooperation, but at the same time to be a factor of assimilation of European values and practices from the bottom up, the first two chapters answer to the first two working hypotheses: given the phenomenon of recent regionalization (re-nationalization) of regional policies, the local public administration may paradoxically contribute to further decentralization; one of the levers of this process is the involvement in the development of cross-border cooperation. Finally, the third chapter, based on the processing of the opinions of respondents from the local public administration, provides an image not only

¹⁴ Traian Rotariu, Petre Ilut, *Ancheta sociologica si sondajul de opinie. Teorie si practica*, Iasi, Ed. Polirom, 1997, p. 97; 100-101;

¹⁵ Alina Carmen Brihan, *Romania in Uniunea Europeana. Mecanisme si niveluri de influentare a procesului decizional European*, Bucuresti, Ed. Tritonic, 2017, p. 34

¹⁶ Septimiu Chelcea, *Metodologia cercetării sociologice. Metode cantitative și calitative*, ediția a treia, Editura Economică, București, 2007.

about the structure of such a process, but also defines the mechanisms that must put it into action.

Chapter I, *Public Administration from regionalization through decentralization to regionalization through recentralization in Romania*. The theoretical analysis begins with a brief incursion into the local government system in France, a model that we find in almost all local governments in Central and Eastern Europe, including Romania.

I then followed the way in which decentralization took place in Central and Eastern Europe, and in particular in Romania, recalling in many cases that regionalization was attempted to be made in parallel to advancing in the negotiation process with the European Union.

The sub-chapter The administrative constraints developed during the economic crisis lead to a change of the paradigm in the process of regionalization passes in the first part the examples of some countries in Central and Eastern Europe, especially Hungary, Poland, but also Romania where during 2008-2013 visible actions to refine regional policies are observed. However, according to our idea formulated in the general objective of the research, that the paradigm change in the regionalization process does not stop decentralization, but it reformulates it, in the continuation of this subchapter we present five elements that we have observed that go in this direction: in the practice of the regionalization policy it is noticed that the principle of subsidiarity and the mechanism of multilevel governance tend to intertwine, consisting of a reduction of external pressure to produce effects in the implementation of European policies, but there is a bottom-up emergence to work in the spirit of these policies; the true democracy of regional policy must remain not only a process led by elites, but must involve all levels of society; it is necessary to return to the good intentions of the EU institutions and commitments of the states when the chapters of the regional policy were negotiated; given that the new Cohesion Policy 2014- 2020 program pays special attention to the areas of energy and innovation instead of territorial issues, access to European funds appears to local or county communities and to individual actors as very difficult because even states or regional authorities can no longer submit eligible applications without entering into supranational or cross-border networks, there is a need for another approach to the dimensions of decentralization and then regionalization.

The sub-chapter *The design of the “new paradigm of regionalization” through the centralization process occurs in the context of the application of the conditionality principle in the pre-admission period* starts from the finding that the impetus for

regionalization and decentralization has reached all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the pre-accession process, at least in procedural terms. Speaking from the perspective of *functional regionalism and decentralization*, both the findings of the European Commission and those of the various specialists show that until the time of accession, no state has a normal functioning of the regional structures. Or this dependence on the past of an administration with profoundly centralizing reminders could not be blurred within 8-12 years from the date of association at the date of accession, but they adapted, tingling once with the overlapping post-accession period and the effects of the crisis economic in which states have found that they have to solve many of the problems they had hoped for the EU will be present after accession.

The sub-chapter *Sub-national actors seek to adapt to the regional re-centralization process* is looking to show some examples of this evolution. Thus, even in the practice of civil servant, I found, on the one hand, changes in the direction of greater involvement of local and county public authorities in the development of the respective communities, in the project proposal, in formulating the development strategies of the respective area and not in the last in attracting investment. The appeal to the structural funds is increasingly used by public administrations in our country, not only producing a public debate, but also an institutional remodeling activity. This adaptation of the sub-national actors to the re-centralization process can best be seen in the exploitation of opportunities by the local public administrations in Romania's border counties for accessing funds from the cross-border cooperation programs especially during the economic crisis.

On the other hand, I have witnessed some situations where both the central and the county and local authorities in Romania have been in the co-equipment position for the last 5-6 years in trying to give local responses to the challenges of a global and competitive economies in which we live.

The sub-chapter *Re-regionalization as a result of recentralization and redistribution of competencies* attempts to answer the questions resulting from the analysis made in the previous subchapters: is it possible to re-regionalize in the context of recentralization and redistribution of competences between the state and the the sub-national actors? We consider that re-regionalization is possible through a clearer delimitation of the central authorities competences, as privileged competences, and those of the sub-national actors, whose competencies are “in discussion”.

Another question that we put in this subchapter was: what are the effects of re-regionalization. We consider that could be the following: institutional effects materialized

in the creation of functional institutions; economic effects, which can be random and uncertain; the indirect effects that institutional and economic effects may have on local and county collectivities.

Chapter II *The evolution of the Romanian-Hungarian cross-border cooperation and the involvement of the local public administration* attempts to support the idea that although the local and county public administration are deeply hierarchically linked to the central authority, a fact specific to the unitary states, this administration and especially the administration in the communities located at the Romanian frontiers can be actively involved in the development of cross-border cooperation and in attracting European funds through cross-border cooperation programs.

Subchapter *What is being sought through cross-border cooperation and what is the place of public administration?* brings in discussion the general aspects that are considered in the cross-border cooperation process, but also the particular aspects, resulting from the specificity of each cross-border region, as is the case with Bihor County.

Subchapter *Some considerations on the evolution of cross-border cooperation* make a brief history of the main documents and moments marking the history of cross-border cooperation, starting with the *Madrid Convention* (1980); the launch of the INTERREG Community Initiative (1990); including the Phare CBC Program in the Interreg II Community Initiative (1994), the inclusion of the Cross-Border Cooperation Instrument in the Cohesion Policy; after 2000 including the cross-border cooperation instrument in the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) sub-program, alongside transnational and interregional cooperation, starting with the financial cycle 2007-2013; Interreg V-A Program (2014-2020).

In the sub-chapter *The cooperation structures - drivers of cross-border cooperation*, the following are considered: European districts, Euroregions, local territorial cooperation groups (GCTL), European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC);

Subchapter *Romania's participation in cross-border cooperation*, following a brief presentation of the legislation regulating cross-border cooperation, goes directly into the essence of research, the Romanian-Hungarian cross-border co-operation programs with the Phare CBC Program (2004-2006), Hungary-Romania Cross-Border Cooperation Program (2007-2013) and the Interreg V-A Program (2014-2020) Romania-Hungary.

The analysis of these programs is linked to the general objective of research and to the second hypothesis, which aims public administration involvement in cross-border cooperation. We have extracted from all the projects submitted under these programs, the

projects implemented by the local public administration in Bihor County (for the first two programs) and the project packages and the main projects that intend to be proposed by 2020 (for the last program). It will be noticed that the local public administration in Bihor was very active, exploiting the funding opportunities offered by these programs.

Subchapter *Euroregion Bihor - Hajdu-Bihar an inert actor!* points out that, although in Bihor County the Bihor-Hajdu Bihar Euroregion has been one of the most important European levers in the development of cross-border cooperation since 2002, it has not been sufficiently exploited as a structure for the promotion and implementation of large-scale projects, but it also did not come to the public administration with such proposals. In addition, this structure, like many others in Central and Eastern Europe, tends to become increasingly passive and obviously ignored and bypassed by local governments. In this regard, we wanted to show that if there are visible achievements in cross-border cooperation at the Bihor County level, they are due to other public and private actors, especially the efforts of the public administration.

If in the first two chapters I have appealed, in particular, to a literature already published (especially in the first chapter), to a published literature and to official documents (Chapter II) and which I have pigmented with aspects resulting from my own administrative practice (especially in the first chapter) and with own analyzes as were the projects of public administration in Bihor between 2004-2020, the third chapter is different.

Chapter III, titled *Current Evolutions in Central and Eastern Europe, make the local public administration the most important actor of cross-border cooperation - Case Study: Bihor County* is built on the platform created during the first two chapters, but it includes most of my research effort, not only because of its size, almost ½ of the extent of the written part of the paper, but, above all, due to the realization, application and processing of the questionnaire¹⁷. The results obtained from the questionnaire (more than 200 representatives of the public administration answered) brought a multitude of arguments that made me choose from all the possible titles of this chapter the current one.

The content of this chapter has been structured around the answers to the three major questions in the questionnaire, which are distinct subchapters: what is the place of regional and local public involvement in stimulating cross-border cooperation? Which would be the most effective management forms of cross-border cooperation in your

¹⁷ Thanks in this way to colleagues at the University of Oradea, especially to Constantin Țoca and Claudia Timofte, who helped me in the design and application of the questionnaire.

region? how do you assess the level of information promoted by state and county authorities in cross-border cooperation?

Subchapter *Involvement of regional and local public administration in stimulating cross-border cooperation* brings to the forefront the most important entities to be involved in cross-border cooperation (Prefecture, county, municipal and local councils with over 65% of options). Among the actions that local government has to undertake to stimulate cross-border cooperation, over 40% believe it should be *the development and implementation of a joint strategy with Hungarian / Romanian entities to develop cross-border cooperation*. This is combined with the fact that over 70% of the respondents believe that the functions that the local public administration should have in developing cooperation are planning, coordination and information, we are faced with an additional argument that public administration is seen as a pivot of cross-border cooperation. But when it comes to evaluating the work of the various institutions for their involvement in the public administration, it is credited as one third of the efficiency with other actors - BRECO, Bihor - Hajdu-Bihar Euroregion.

At the question about the factors that hinder the development of cross-border cooperation, most respondents converge to the lack of sufficient funding, and they may refer to difficulties in mobilizing co-financing and to the instability of the public administration system (elections, change of authority, lack of accountability, etc.).

The subchapter *Effective forms of cross-border cooperation* confirms that the respondents place the county and local public administrations on the first places of the institutions that have to manage the cross-border cooperation. The Bihar Hajdu-Bihar Euroregion and BRECO are located in an advantageous position. The fact that public administration is a clear option for respondents is reinforced by the choice of the most appropriate forms of cross-border cooperation management (2/3 of the options go to partnerships between the Romanian-Hungarian local and county public authorities, such as twinning projects).

Of course, the respondents do not forget to be critical when it comes to the causes of the poor development of innovative cross-border cooperation structures. Over 70% consider that there are causes that are mainly related to the functions and involvement of public administration. This fact proves once again that there is a high degree of expectation from the county and local public authorities to get involved in cross-border cooperation.

Even if it dilutes on overall the role of public administration in cross-border cooperation, subchapter *Evaluating the level of information promoted by state and county authorities in cross-border cooperation* attaches importance to cross-border cooperation.

Asked how they qualify the level of information promoted by the state and county public authorities, 44% responded as good, 39% satisfactory and 3% very good. These options, in conjunction with the list of the three most important institutions that should promote and inform about cross-border cooperation programs, where over 2/3 assigns this role to public authorities, add another argument that there is a high waiting level in this area too.

To the question of what the authorities should do specifically, more than 82% of respondents have argued that a comprehensive online database is needed that include information on projects that are under competition, but not implemented; information on projects under implementation; information on implemented projects; information on the impact of implemented projects. Also, more than 80% of respondents are for setting up a center to manage this database.

Speaking about the organizations that should be part of this center, respondents to the questionnaire have options that surprisingly place on the first place the Bihar-Hajdu Bihar Euroregion with 38.2% of the options, followed by the administrative authorities with 34.9%. Going on the idea of who should collect this data for the database, the respondents again went to the administration, in this case Statistical County Directorates and the local authorities.

As a general conclusion of the paper it can be said that the respondents who submitted the questionnaire strengthen the idea that the public administration has to be very involved in the process of cross-border cooperation. They stated, on the one hand, a fact that became apparent in the context in which the Hungarian-Romanian Cross-Border Cooperation Program (HURO) 2007-2013 did not bring the expected benefits and the foreseen impact as a whole, due to the fact that the projects that were financed had little coherence between them, and some were not implemented. On the other hand, it is stated that within the framework of the Interreg VA Program (ROHU) 2014-2020 there is a coherence not only between the projects in this program but with the projects on other operational programs, that their efficiency and impact be as close as possible to the optimum.

The sources of documentation presented in this paper combined both the multitude of primary sources (official EU sources, central government sources, sources of the local

public administration in Bihor County, of the Bihor-Hajdu Bihar Euroregion) and secondary sources (books, magazine articles - Eurolimes, *The Annals of the University of Oradea, RISE series*, electronic sources).

As far as primary sources are concerned, I have made a selection of them to be as appropriate as possible to the research theme I have chosen. For example, among the European official sources, I have stopped at the most relevant to understanding the involvement of regional and local public administrations in cross-border cooperation: *European Outline Convention on Transfrontalier Cooperation between Territorial Authorities, Madrid, 21 May 1980*; *Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)*.

From the same European official sources, i also selected those issued by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg that highlight the functioning of cross-border cooperation between decentralized territorial administrative structures: *the Additional Protocol to the European Framework Convention on Cross-border Cooperation of Communities and Territorial Authorities* of September 1995, *The Practical Guide to Cross-border Cooperation* of the Council of Europe in 2006, *The Council of Europe Reference Framework for Regional Democracy* in 2009; Report of the European Council of Municipalities and Regions, entitled *Descentralisation at crossroads. Teritorial reforms in Europe in times of crisis*¹⁸.

I also selected some sources from the Committee of the Regions that are relevant to the first chapter where we are discussing decentralization: *the Committee of the Regions` White Paper on multilevel governance*.

As far as the national sources are concerned, given the specificity of our research theme, they refer to two subjects. On the one hand, i have also used the *Government Emergency Ordinance (OUG) no. 120/1998* on the application in our country of the *European Outline Convention on Transfrontalier Cooperation between Territorial Authorities*; *Emergency Ordinance 127/2007* on the *European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation* and the amendments made to them by OUG 9/2015.

On the other hand, i have used some laws that refer to decentralization and the place of local public administration in this process: *Law 199/1997* of the *European*

¹⁸ Raportul Consiliului European al Municipalitatilor si Regiunilor, intitulat *Descentralisation at crossroads. Teritorial reforms in Europe in times of crisis*, october 2013, accesed on 18 Noveber 2014, http://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CCRE_broch_EN_complete_low.pdf

Charter of Local Self-Government; Law no. 215 of 23 April 2001 on Local Government, republished, Romanian Official Gazette, Part I, no. 123 of 20 February 2007; Law 315 of 23.06.2004 on regional development in Romania; Law no. 286/2006 amending and completing the Law no. 215/2001 on local public administration, published in the Official Gazette no. 621 of July 18, 2006; Law no. 340/2004 on prefect and prefect institution, republished in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 225 of 24 March 2008 and the Framework Law no. 195/22 May 2006. Also, the *Report of the Presidential Commission for Analysis of the Political and Constitutional System in Romania* from 2009 was also useful.

I then used working papers, such as: *Hungary-Romania Phare CBC Program (2004-2006)*; *Hungarian-Romanian Cross-Border Cooperation Program, 2007-2013*; *Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary (ROHU) Program, 2014-2020*.

As for the local documents used in this project, they are: *Bihor`s Sustainable Development Strategy (2014-2020)*; *Integrated Urban Development Strategy of Oradea (2014-2020)*; *Integrated Cross-Border Strategy of Business Environment in Bihor County and Hajdu Bihar (2014-2020)*; *Report on the Evaluation of Results of the Bihor County Prefect Institution for 2016*, *Report on the Evaluation of the results of the Bihor County Prefect Institution for the year 2015*¹⁹.

As a real benefit were the studies that appeared in various magazines, most of them found in the library of the Institute of Euro-Regional Studies in Oradea. The 22 volumes of EuroTimes have provided me with the richest bibliography on issues related to frontiers, cross-border cooperation and, in particular, the Romanian-Hungarian one. I then consulted the collections *Annals of the University of Oradea*, International Relations and European Studies Series, Geography Series, Economy Series; the *Acta Geografica Hungarica* collection in Debrecen, the collection of the *Romanian Journal of Political Geography*, which appears in Oradea, the *Europolity* collection edited at SNSPA, some recent numbers from the *Transylvanian Review* in Cluj-Napoca; some numbers in *Europe Asia Studies* that appears in Glasgow and some numbers from the *Regional Studies* magazine in London.

We are aware that our research has limits. A first limit of our research is that we did not have time to apply this questionnaire to other socio-economic environments, to see how public administration is perceived in relation to the issue of cross-border cooperation.

¹⁹ www.prefecturabihor.ro/pdf/raportact2015ip.pdf

A second limit is the lack of a mirror activity, in the sense of having information in the neighboring county of Hungary, to see how public administration is perceived there in relation to cross-border cooperation.

The two limits may also represent the premises for continuing research into these environments to validate what we said in our case study analysis and find other directions of investigation.

Research conclusions

We believe that through our research we have succeeded to show that although the European Union has created cross-border cooperation structures such as *Euroregions* or *European Border Cooperation Groups (EGTCs)*, which have to be the vectors of the implementation of cross-border cooperation policies, **local and county government remain the most important player in the process of Europeanization using the levers of cross-border cooperation.** Recent studies from countries with a similar or (like) pattern to us show the importance of public actors in driving the development of cross-border projects.

Also, we consider that we have shown with sufficient arguments that, on the one hand, the local and county public administration in the border areas has in cross-border cooperation and in financial instruments, that accompanies it, levers to adapt to the tendencies of re-centralization and to develop an active and applied governance to local particularities, thus potentiating the mechanisms of decentralization, reduced much in the context of the economic and financial crisis and in the years that followed. On the other hand, the applied questionnaire shows that there is a high degree of expectation for the public administration to be visionary, flexible and oriented towards the local needs, capable of using all possible resources for development. Meeting these two goals (our research objectives), the local and county public administration becomes implicit also a vector of the continuation of post-accession Europeanization towards decentralization, but but this time with a clearer evolution from *bottom-up*.

Of course our assessment has shown that the local public administration in the border area, at least in the financial cycle 2007-2013, has the potential to take on the attributions of what European public policies have proposed to be the most important vector of decentralization, but as can be seen from the answers of the questioned ones, there are several aspects that could be adjusted and reinforced for a better quality of governance.

First of all, not all the implemented projects have been successful because they lacked, in many cases, consistency between them or the projects on other operational programs, so that their efficiency and impact be as close as possible to the optimum.

Secondly, the fact that respondents give non-governmental actors - cross-border associations and partnerships, the business environment - an important role in the implementation of cross-border projects, shows that a new culture needs to be developed in

the process of general management in cross-border cooperation managerial, much involved in network governance and horizontal communication, attracting other actors who, although in the answers of the questioned do not appear too often, but in fact they are very active, I refer to the university environment and pre-university education.

Thirdly, the results obtained in cross-border cooperation, where local government has been active, are encouraging these authorities to be active in implementing the directives and opportunities of European regional and cohesion policy in general and the border area in particular.

Fourthly, our analysis reveals that most respondents consider that there are important qualitative mutations in the evolution of local and county public administration following EU accession in general and involvement in cross-border cooperation. It is precisely this achievement must be developed by building mutual trust between governors and governed that together they can reach the levels of development they want. It is encouraging that during the period between the two financial cycles (2007-2013 and 2014-2020), the citizens of Bihor County and, in particular, those in Oradea understood that development must continue with their own forces until the arrival of European money, accepting much civic sense and confidence in governors increases taxes and charges between 20-25% annually.

Finally, our assessment is not just an end in itself but, as the essence of the evaluation is, it is intended to be valued in political decisions for the completion of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme (2014-2020) and the implementation of the Interreg VI-A Hungary-Romania (2021-2026). I also made some recommendations:

1. Increasing the capacity to design and implement public policies at the level of county and local public administrations and decentralized institutions, both by developing a code of procedures and norms that clearly support the competences of local public authorities in cross-border cooperation.

2. Increasing the quality of human resources working in the local public administration in order to know the functions of other subordinate or on the same hierarchical level institutions that are potential beneficiaries of cross-border cooperation projects, to be integrated into the current strategies of Bihor county; and of localities and to prepare future strategies for 2021-2026.

3. Increasing the capacity of human resources in the local and county public administration and developing the collaboration culture for the implementation of cross-border cooperation projects.

4. Increasing the quality of human resources working in the local public administration in the border counties towards the knowledge and design of development policies in which the opportunities offered by different operational programs with the cross-border component are interconnected.

5. Development in the local and county public administration of the culture of the need for ongoing evaluation of the implementation of cross-border cooperation projects and programs, involving institutions that can provide this expertise, especially universities.

6. The investment of the *Institute of Euroregional Studies (ISER)* of the University of Oradea by the county and local public administration with the attributions of being an evaluation center, on the one hand, of the preparation of the local and county development strategies and the way in which the projects in the county and local development programs are implemented and, on the other hand, given its main research status in cross-border cooperation, ISER be the expert vector for the county and local public administration in terms of cross-border cooperation and how it interferes with public administrations in the neighboring county of Hungary.

7. Supporting the University of Oradea to create a database on the aspects of cross-border cooperation: potential actors, potential Hungarian partners, funding opportunities, implemented projects, results, malfunctions, etc.

8. Introduce once a year, on the agenda of prefectural colleges' meetings, an analysis of the state of implementation of cross-border cooperation programs based on ISER assessments and information from the public administrations concerned.

9. Use of experience BRECO has accumulated in managing cross-border cooperation programs with Hungary to be known to civil servants in order to eliminate malfunctions in the management of this program within Bihor County.

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