

**CROSS BORDER NATURAL PARKS,
SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT.
CASE STUDY OF THE NORTHERN
AND WESTERN ROMANIAN BORDER**

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Abstract: The cultural and physical-geographical elements, at individual or associated level, participate to organization of the specific territorial sub-systems located on both sides of the border; through associations these elements can make up cross border territorial systems, represented by the protected natural areas component; for example: natural parks, geoparks, transnational parks-that operate in transboundary regime. One country border line does not limit a natural protected area, because the functioning principles of a functional natural territorial system do not overlap with the political-administrative structures. An opportunity for the transboundary regions is represented by tourism development and promotion, also turning the transboundary areas in tourist destinations. The states governments created national parks (e.g. Romania and Serbia, Romania and Ukraine etc) in order to protect this area and to preserve the natural and antropic heritage. This transnational park area offers huge potential for regional sustainable development which is indicated by protection and improvement of environment, transnational synergies for sustainable growth and sustainable tourism development. The protected natural areas financing programs use common measures for the neighbouring countries local authorities, in order to ensure a sustainable socio-economic cross border development, quantified by both basic indicators connected to increasing of

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the cross border flows, unemployment rate, development of the business and investment sectors and protection of environment and pollution; and target indicators (at the end of project implementation).

Key words: regional development, cross border cooperation, transnational parks, natural heritage

1. INTRODUCTION

The cultural and physical-geographical elements, at individual or associated level, participate to organization of the specific territorial sub-systems located on both sides of the border; through associations these elements can make up cross border territorial systems (Ianoş, I., 2000), represented by the protected natural areas component; for example: natural parks, geoparks, transnational parks-that operate in transboundary regime.

The political-territorial European dynamic space, and particularly the EU one, causes major changes of natural structure, mostly in the areas where the external EU border line was (re)set out.

The paper is focused on natural heritage conservation issues, especially to the ways of the Hungarian-Romanian, Romanian-Ukrainian, Romanian-Hungarian-Ukrainian, Romanian-Serbian cross border cooperation, for natural protected areas (ex: Natural Parks, Geoparks, Cross Border Parks) that could be extended and managed in an optimum manner by the two or three countries.

We will try to identify the premises and the support elements derived from the political, administrative and legal frame, and especially the solution that could be applied in an extremely complex area, from the territorial systems functionality and natural patrimony conservation point of view (Ilieş, Dorina & all, 2008).

An opportunity for the present transboundary regions is represented by tourism development and promotion, even turning the transboundary areas in tourist destinations.

The existing tourist attraction would be improved or new ones established; the promotional and marketing activity could lead to a cross border identity promotion. In natural parks management and development, an important focused could be offered to exploiting the eco-tourist, cultural tourism, curative tourism potential etc.

2. OBJECTIVES

From the functional point of view a cross border natural park/geopark etc can include in its area both border categories, determined being in this way the elements that its establishment are based on, and also the involvement of administrative and functional structures in both border sectors, on the base of real partnership principle by analyzing and efficient monitoring methods for natural patrimony conservation in transboundary regime and sustainable development.

The paper intends to analyze the functional legislative and administrative frame and the harmonization attempts and also the main national and international financing cross border programs objectives (ex. measures that aims the impact over the cross border environment).

The authors considers an opportunity for the present border regions the tourism promotion and development and turning the cross border areas into tourist destinations.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this paper (fig. 1) is based on calitative analyze and establishment of a data base for development of some conceptual models for the cross border protected areas complex systems.

Based on bibliography and field analyze there were individualized the protected natural areas for each country (Hungarian-Romanian, Romanian-Ukrainian, Romanian-Hungarian-Ukrainian, Romanian-Serbian) from the investigated transboundary regions. The dynamic data base was established (characteristics and attributes), concerning each individualized entity, stressing the most important elements in each case. Attempts for inventory and analyze of several elements were done - such as the psysical-geographical and cultural characteristics etc at individual or associated level that compose the territorial subsystem and for elements interconnection, on both sides of the border; which through associations can establish cross border transboundary systems (Ilieș, Al., 2003).

Also the legal cross border cooperation frame was determined and its harmonization at international level for optimum operation of the both border sides protected areas and the programs that financed the projects applied to the above mentioned items.

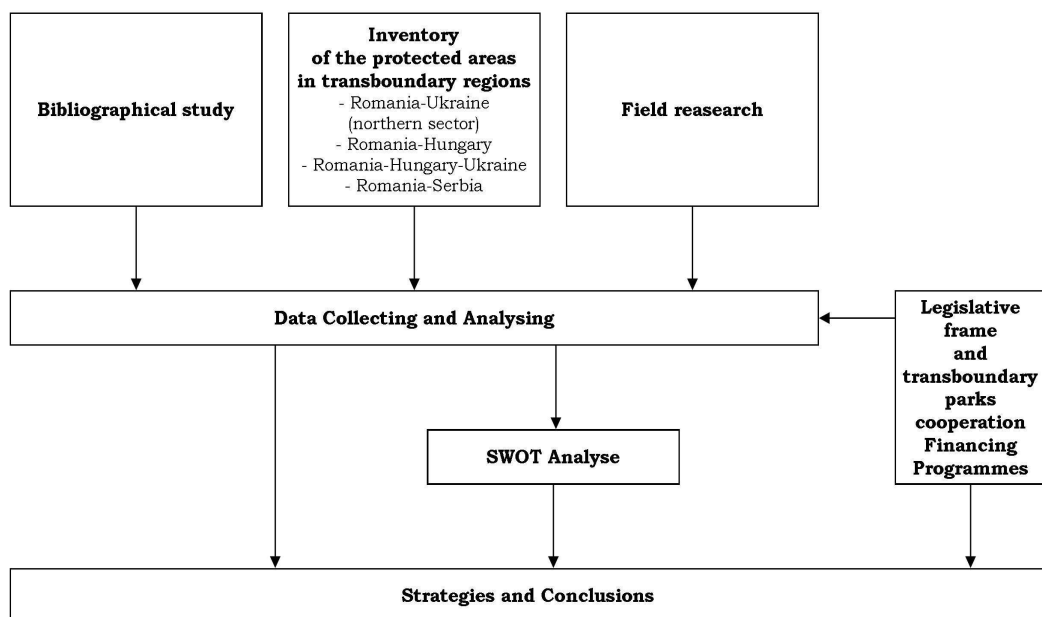


Fig. 1. The methodological scheme investigation of the cross border natural protected areas

4. THE FRAMEWORK FOR CROSS BORDER COOPERATION IN THE NORTHERN AND EASTERN ROMANIAN BORDER SECTOR

Cross-Border Cooperation Strategy Paper 2007-2013 (The European Neighbourhood & Partnership Instrument (source: www.ec.europa.eu) provides the strategic framework for EC support for cross-border cooperation on the external borders of the European Union, for the period 2007-2013. The crossborder cooperation projects are financed through various programs, approved by the European Comission that aims to promote the economic and social development and cohesion in the border areas.

The 2003 PHARE External Border Initiative Programme for Romania and the Neighbourhood Programme Romania-Republic of Serbia 2004-2006 (www.romania-serbia.net) (e.g.: “*Speleotourism in the green belt of Europe*”, “*Eco and ethno-cross border interferences*”) and the Neighbourhood Programme Romania-Ukraine 2004-2006 (e.g.: “*ECOTUR – Tourism in the Transcarpathian region*” etc) laid down the foundation for the new integrated cross-border instruments to be implemented at EU external borders as of 2007.

The *Cross-Border Programme between Romania and Serbia for the period 2007-2013* is the frame for using European funds under the cross border component of the IPA Regulation, to support cross-border cooperation on the Romanian-Serbian border. For the Romanian-Ukrainien border line (the Western half of the Northern border sector) the most important financing program is the *Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013* (www.huskroua-cbc.net) that supports, for the analyzed region, the social and economic cooperation between regions of southern Ukraine and northern Romania.

Romanian-Hungary Cross Border Cooperation Frame – Past and Present. The Romanian-Hungarian cross border cooperation started in 1996 when for the first time in history the European Commission extended the *PHARE CBC Programme* to a border region between two candidate countries (the period 1996-2003). The PHARE CBC programmes have succeeded in paving the trans-boundary cooperation and improving the basic conditions of long-term co-operation. The next phase of co-operation has been represented by the implementation of the *Hungary-Romania Cross-border Co-operation Programme 2004-2006* (e.g.: “*Developing cross border rural tourism*” and “*Protection and promotion of the Meadows of Mureș River*”). As different procedures have been followed in Romania (PHARE CBC) and in Hungary (INTERREG) serious difficulties and delays in implementation were experienced – in order to be efficient the same procedures should be applied. *The Hungary-Romania Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013* is supposed to meet the challenges and opportunities of the border area, based on previous cross border cooperation experience and also to integrate the region at European and global level through increasing competitiveness and ensuring sustainable development (e.g.: “*Development and promotion of ecological tourism (rural tourism, ecotourism) in the Hungarian North Eastern Plain and Apuseni Mountains & Habitat and ecosystem goods and services evaluation in the Mureș/Maros and Crișul Alb/Körös River valleys*”).

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Romania-Ukraine

In the Romanian-Ukrainian area case (the Northern Sector) the border was lined in the Carpathian Mountains natural area (fig. 2). The relief morphology determines the support for the border line (altitudes of over 1800 m in the Maramureșului Mountains), the morphologic particularities of the river beds (the Tisa River etc), their transverse and longitudinal profiles, the scenery varieties, the demographical and economic aspects (Ilieș, Al., 2004) etc.

The park was established in 2004 following the Government Decree 2151, regarding setting up protected areas regime for new regions. The aims of establishing of this park was “maintaining the harmonious interaction between man and nature by protecting the habitat and landscape diversity, by promoting the traditional land use, encouraging and strengthening of activities, practices

and traditional culture of the local population. Also, it offers to the wide public recreation possibilities and tourism, in the same time the scientific activities being encouraged” (Informative Report no. 1, 2005).



Fig. 2. The Romanian-Ukrainian border line, under the Pop Ivan Peak
(photo: Ilieș M., 2005)

In the Natural Park Maramureșului Mountains (N.P.M.M.) there are protected and preserved unique mountains sceneries, with diverse flora and fauna, some of them being found in the European Red Book. On the Ukrainian mountain area border side it was established. The Carpathic Reservation Biosphera, Ukraine (Karpatskyi biosfernyi zapovidnyk, or CBR), with altitudes of 180-2,061 m, in the Center and Eastern Charpatian Mountains from the Ukrianian Transcarpatian region. With an area of 53,630 hectares, CBR is composed by six different mountain complex – Chornohora, Svydovets, Maramureș, Kuzyi-Trybushany, Uholca-Shyrokyi Luh & Narcissi Valley & Botanical reservations: Chorna Hora and Yulivska Hora. Since 1992, CBR became part of the UNESCO Biosphere Reservations World Network (fig. 3). It was declared protected areas since 1992, having the purpose of protecting the mountains scenery, the flora and fauna (64 flora species and 72 fauna species can be found on the UN endangered species Red List). In 1998 it became the first Ukrainian protected area that was issued by the European Council the European Diploma for Protected Areas.

Having the same purpose and objectives, the C.B.R. from Ukraine is in the same category with N.P.M.M., Romania. This thing presses the idea of a joint cross border park development. For meeting the second phase – the establishment of the cross border park, the steps began in february 2007 when the first meeting of the two sides took place must be continued.

On December 10th 2009, at Vișeu de Sus, the managers of the Carpathic Reservation Biosphera, Ukraine and Maramureșului Mountains Natural Park signed the Collaboration Agreement regarding establishment of the Romanian-Ukrainian Cross Border Biosphere Reservation – the “Maramureșului Mountains”.

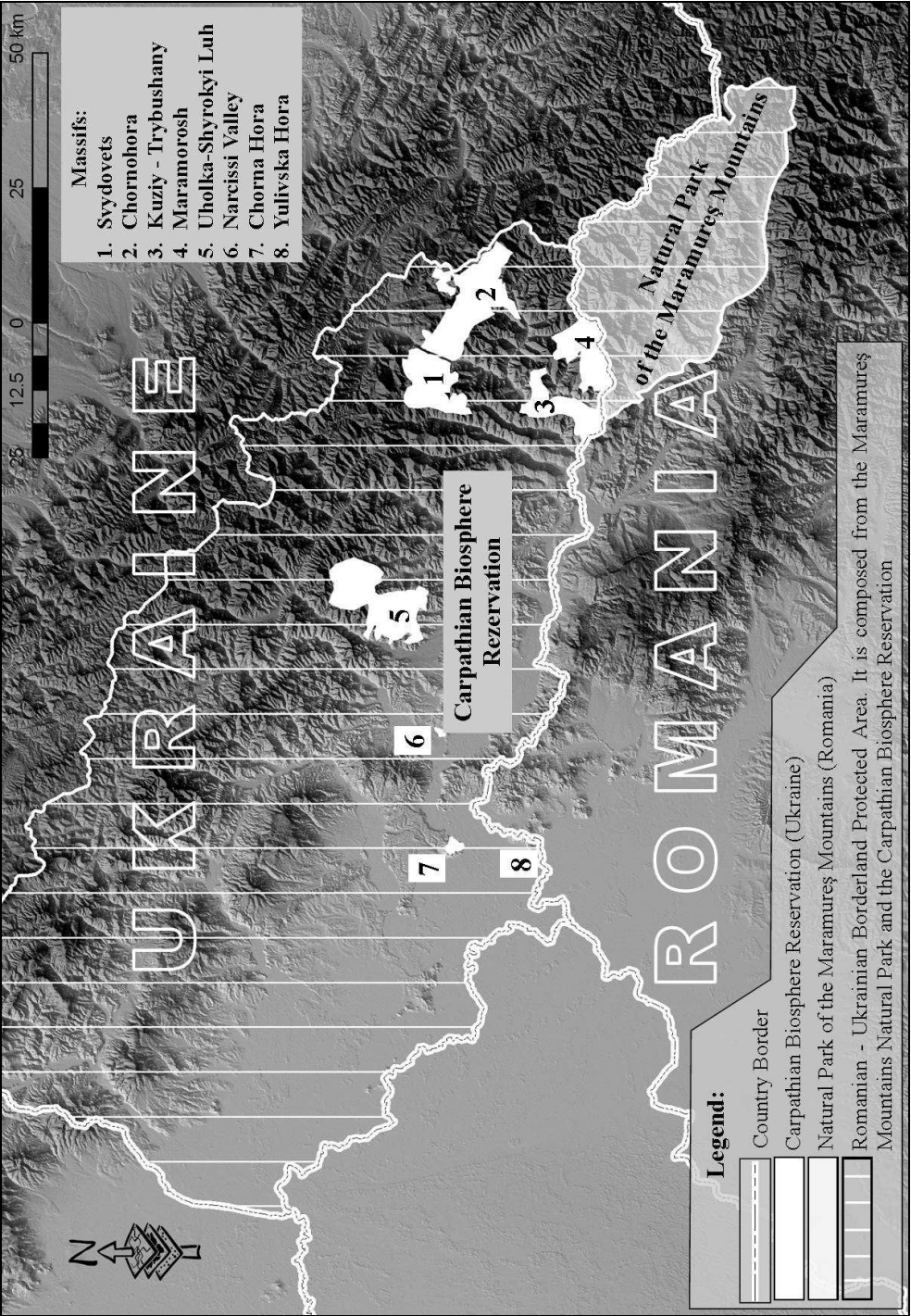


Fig. 3. Natural Park of the Maramureș Mountains (Romania) and the Carpathian Biosphere Reservation (Ukraine) as possible Cross border Natural Park (after Digital Model Elevations si www.muntimaramuresului.ro, <http://cbr.nature.org.ua/main.htm>)

In this way, a very important phase for establishment of this biosphere reservation in the Maramureșului Mountains was accomplished, also an important phase for nature conservation and local communities sustainable development at regional level. The Maramureșului Mountains cross border reservation would be the largest protected natural area in Europe (over 200,000 ha). The cross border reservation would have three functions, according to the Sevilla Strategy (1995, source www.portal.unesco.org): the sceneries, ecosystems, species and genetic conservation, also sustainable development of the local communities from the socio-cultural and ecologic point of view and to offer the logistic support for demonstrative projects development, of the educational and training activities, of research and monitoring according with the local, regional, national and global conservation and sustainable development objectives.

5.2. Romania-Hungary Border Cooperation

The border connects a corner located in the Historic region of Banat, 15 km south-east from the Hungarian town Szeged, to a corner located on the Tur River, 16 km far away the Romanian City Satu-Mare. Geographically, the border area belongs to the Western Carpathian Mountains and Carpathian Basin; the Hungarian side is part of the Great Hungarian Plain, while the Romanian side includes all forms of relief: the Romanian Western Plain and Hills and a small part of the Western Carpathians Mountains. The total length of the Romanian-Hungarian border is 448 Km, out of which 415.8 km is terrestrial, and 32.2 km is fluvial border (on the Mureș, Criș, Someș Rivers). The Hungary-Romanian border area consists of four neighbouring counties in Hungary (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar, Békés and Csongrád) and also four counties in Romania: Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timiș.

Natural resouces in the border area. The interconnected European network for preserving biodiversity by protecting various types of natural habitats as well as the species of wild flora and fauna of Community interest, the NATURE 2000 Network, covers a significant part of the border area. Presently, national parks and the landscape protection areas (LPA) on Hungarian side account for nearly 9% of the total border area. There are three national parks: the Hortobágyi National Park (which is also part of the World Heritage), Szatmár-Bereg and Körös-Maros National Parks; and five landscape protection areas, including the Bihari-Sík LPA, the Hajdúsági LPA, the Közép-Tisza LPA, the Mártélyi LPA and the Pusztaszeri LPA. In Romania, in the border area, there are parts of Natural Park Apuseni (Bihor county), the Natural Park of the Low Meadow of Mures (Arad county) and more than 40 small areas indentified under the Natura 2000 Programme (Special Protected Areas and Sites of Communnity Interest). There are also many other smaller natural protected zones, according to the national legislation.

Cross border cooperation projects-results. One of the most relevant cross border cooperation projects is the “*Romanian-Hungarian corridor for the biodiversity conservation*” (source: www.parcapuseni.ro) (financed through PHARE CBC Program, funds 2,600,000 Euro). This corridor for biodiversity conservation was created between the Apuseni National Park in Romania and Koros-Maros National Park in Hungary (Ilieș Dorina & all, 2008), having as objectives biodiversity conservation and development of ecotourism and educational cross border projects (fig. 4).

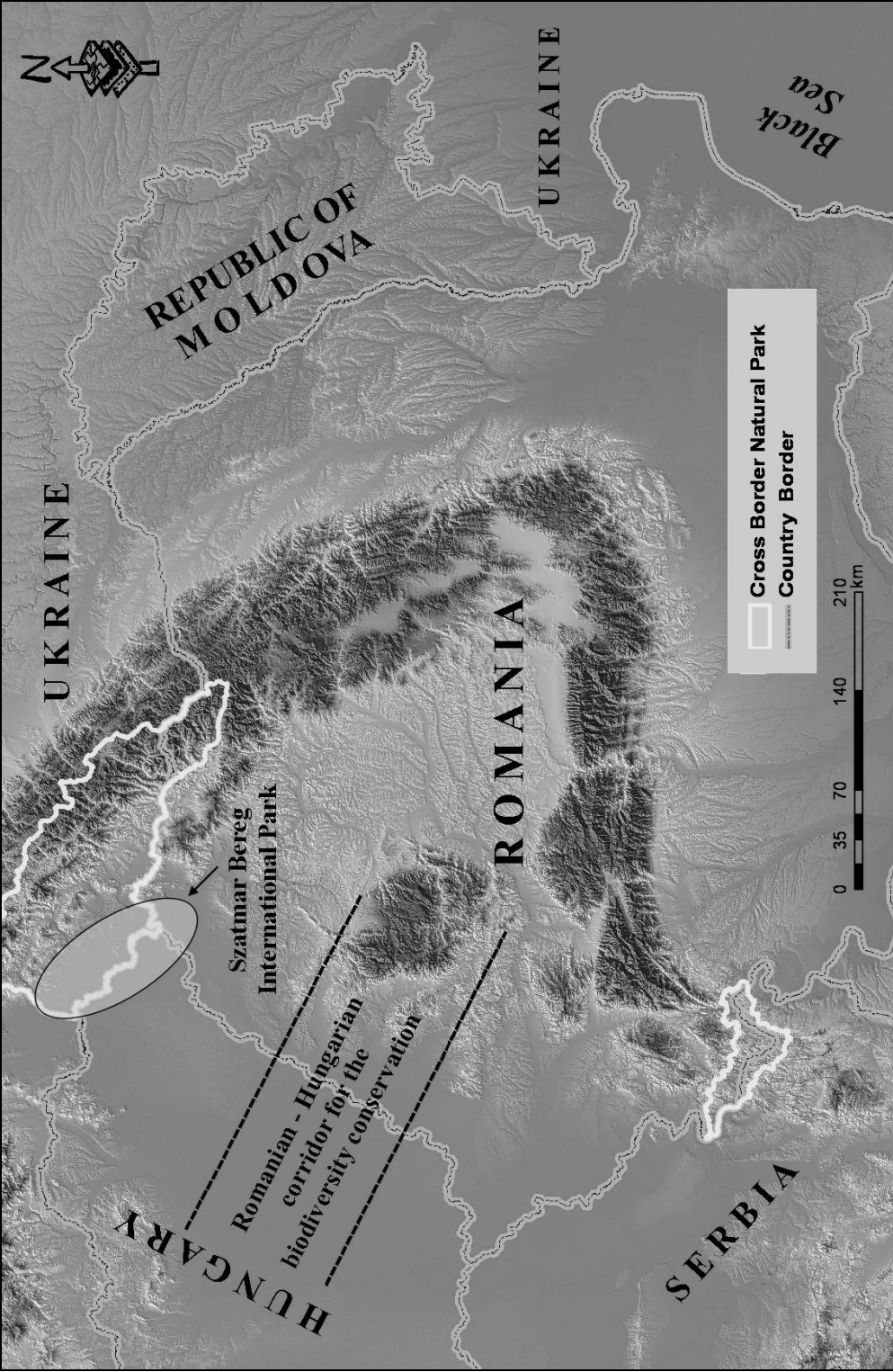


Figure 4. Localization of the possible Romanian-hungarian Cross Border Park (after: Digital Model Elevations & <http://cbr.nature.org.ua/main.htm>)

This conservation corridor includes the *Dévaványai-Ecsegi Lower Plain* (Hungary) where the relief was completely modified after the hydrotechnical works on Berettyó River (Barcău); the low plain area character is deeply reflected in the characteristics of the Dávaványai-Ecsegi National Park. The protected area has a surface of 13,085 hectares of which 2,659 hectares under strict protection. The meadow sector of the Hortobágy-Berettyó River protects the specific flora and fauna and also the cultural heritage. On the Romanian side the “corridor for the biodiversity conservation” includes the Apuseni Natural Park (Romania) with an area of 76,064 ha (Western Romanian Carpathians) with spectacular natural tourist resources of national and international e.g. the Scărișoara Glacier, Padiș Karst Plateau etc. This Romanian-Hungarian „corridor” also includes on the Romanian side the protected areas Radvani Forest and Cefa lake, with the relief characterized by wide marsh plains, located between the Crișul Repede and Crișul Negru River meadows, with channels and many lakes, having a total area of 693 ha (specific marsh flora and fauna protected elements).

5.3. Romanian-Hungarian-Ukrainian Border Cooperation

It's a future project that intends to extend the existing Hungarian Natural Park of the Szatmar-Bereg over the Romanian (Satu Mare, Tur region) and Ukrainian (Transcarpathia, Ungvar) border areas, in order to create a common cross-border natural park, the Szatmar-Bereg Plain and the natural areas to be protected do not end at the border line. On the Hungarian side important steps forward for nature protection have been made, in the Szatmar-Bereg Region the national nature protected area (nature conservation area) represent one third of its area is - at the same time 2/3 of the region falls under the rules of various international nature protection conventions (Ramsar, Nature 2000, National Agro-Environmental Programme Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs)) (ec.europa.eu/agriculture). There are no protected areas in Ukraine and in Romania the protection is limited to one Natura 2000 Site on the Tur Valley and to the Special Avifaunistic Special Protection Area Lower Tur Valley.

The Szatmar Bereg Nature Park model can be extended over the borders based on a good practice example, as the nature conservation system is not developed in Ukraine and offers limited protection in Romania.

5.4. Romanian-Serbian Cross Border Cooperation

Located on the south-western part of the Carpathian Basin, the Romania-Serbia border line is 546 km long and has the Danube River as natural border for approximately 230 km of its length. The Romanian-Serbian border area consists of three counties on the Romanian side: Timiș, Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți and four districts on the Serbian side: Severno-Banatski, Srednje-Banatski, Južno-Banatski, Braničevski, Borski.

The Portile de Fier Natural Park, Romania, is located in the South-Western Romania, having the Danube River as southern border (fig. 5, fig. 6); due to the great petrographical variety and to the geologic-tectonic complexity of the Danube it creates the most long and spectacular gorge throughout Europe, with a length of 134 km. It is one of the largest natural parks from Romania, it was established for the purpose of protecting the biodiversity and for the existing scenery conservation (area about 115,665.8 ha, maximum altitude 968 m – Teiul

Mosului Peak, in the Almăjului Mountains, including a total number of 18 reservations). It includes the Southern parts of Banatului Mountains (Locvei and Almăjului Mountains), Mehedinți Mountains. The structural units are the Getic and Autohton geologic layers. The most spectacular part of the gorges is on the Cazanele Dunării area, where the karst relief is very well represented by endokarst – caves and pit caves (vertical caves) ex.: Ponicoava Cave, the Cave with Water, the Gaura cu Musca Cave etc.) and also by exokarst: gorges, dolines, lapies zone etc in the karst plateau Sfânta Elena, in the Ciucarul Mare and Ciucarul Mic Hills etc. The endemic 5,200 fauna species and 171 flora associations (of which 26 are unique for Romania and 21 are of European importance) are protected by law.

The hydroenergetic system from Porțile de Fier I is the greatest Romanian hydrotechnical work. To the cultural valences of the natural park contributes the fact that this is a protected area with an important ethnic diversity for Romania; there were recorded Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic human settlement; with Historic and Architectural value of the houses and mills, unique as functional system (<http://www.portiledefier.ro/>).

The Djerdap Natural Park, Serbia, is located in the South Eastern Serbia, on the Romanian border (fig. 5). The total area of the Djerdap National Park is 93,968 ha and of the protected areas 63,608 ha. The Djerdap National Park together with the Porțile de Fier Natural Park forms one ecosystem and it was registered on the UNESCO list in 2002.

It contains the longest valley in Europe formed by three gorges sectors (clisuri), two canyons and three so called “cazane”; its ecosystem has a great biodiversity; also, a Neolithic settlement, over 8000 years old is situated here and an important number of Historic monuments from the Roman Limes period (defend system at the Roman Empire borders) (<http://wikimapia.org/5738782/National-park-%C4%90erdap>). The specific climate influences, the relief, soil, the Danube proximity had contributed to preservation of a beautiful and diverse vegetation (more than 1100 vegetation species, some of them important Tertiary relicts).



Fig. 5. Danube Defilee at Porțile de Fier
(source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Gate_\(Danube\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Gate_(Danube)))

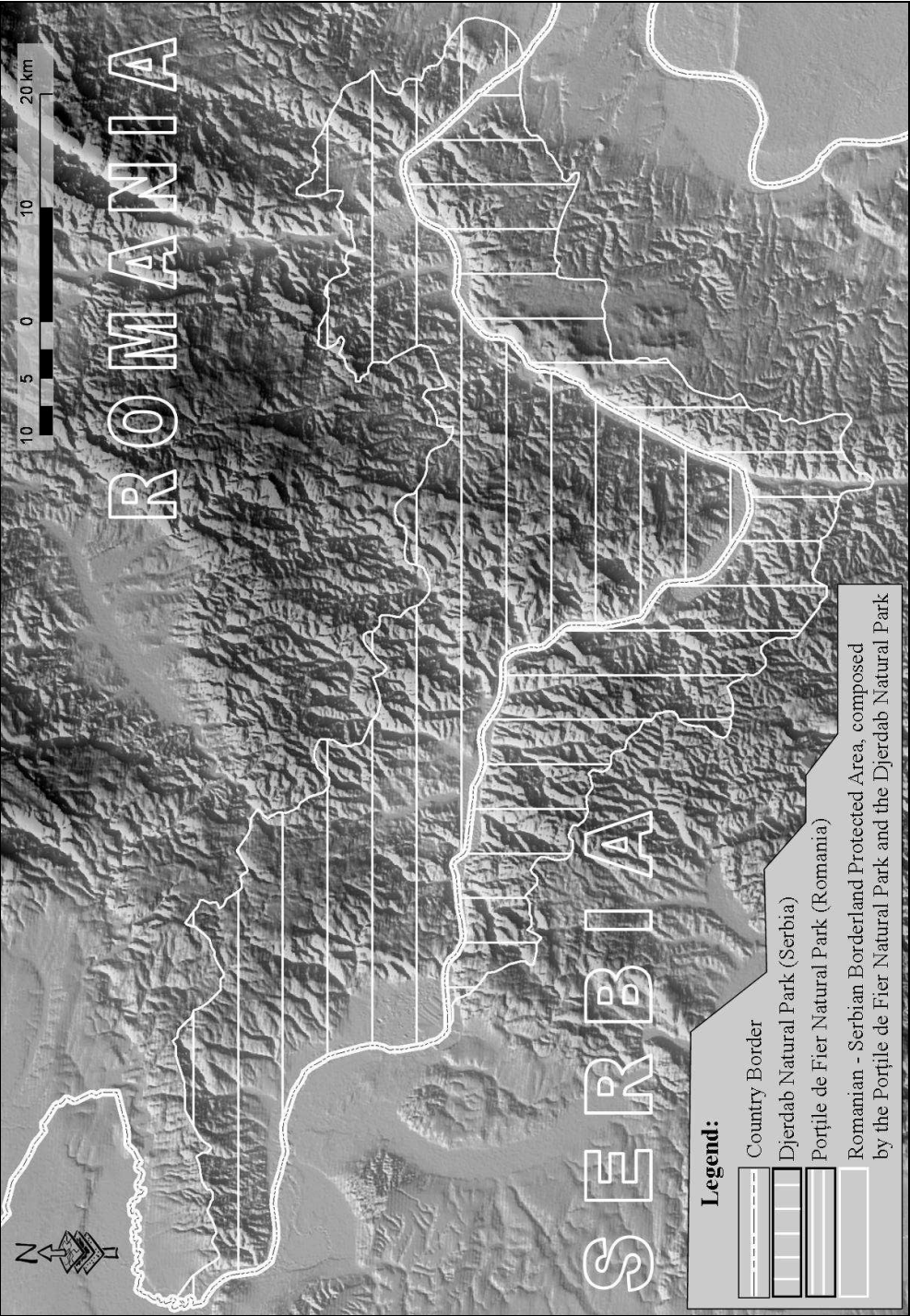


Figure 6. Portile de Fier Natural Park (Romania) and Djerdab Natural Park (Serbia) possible Crossborder Natural Park (after Digital Model Elevations and www.portiledefier.ro/, <http://wikimapia.org/5738782/National-park-%C4%90erdap>)

6. CONTRIBUTION OF THE BORDER REGION PROTECTED AREAS TO SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL DEVELOPEMENT

Border region areas covered by these Natural Parks have the same socio-economic similarities: small remote rural settlements with mono-industrial, mining and agricultural activities (like farming), population mostly under 500, (farmers are over 50 years old) with low self support economic abilities. Local communities cannot deal with the demands of the market economy because of their limited economic power (*Operative Programmes of the Hungary-Romania CBC 2007- 2013, Slovakia-Hungary-Romania-Ukraine ENPI CBC 2007-2013 and Romania-Serbia IPA CBC 2007-2013* (<http://www.huskroua-cbc.net>)). These economic and social disparities can be addressed by sustainable community based programs such as natural park establishment.

The local communities concerned cross border area will primary benefit from the existence of these parks. These rural settlements would have the chance to preserve their natural values. There is a need in the above mentioned communities for a joint complex of measures that regard the protection of the natural values as a priority, concentrate on environmental issues, develop sustainable agriculture and promote tourism.

Establishment of natural parks ensures community involvement, safeguards local rural cultural heritage and the natural environment by active protection, understanding nature & its values. Natural parks offer the chance for local economies diversification and development, by sustainable agriculture and economic development build on small family business and local products. Local tourism development that will generate revenue in the rural communities, this will improve the quality of life of local people and offer them a better future. Also, sustainable tourism can create positive opportunities for community development in remote areas or mono-industrial areas (mining or agriculture). Sustainable tourism is a “clean” industry, no smokestacks or dangerous chemicals, so a better “green” environment is ensured.

The development effects of natural parks at local and regional level are very important: development of under-developed local communities (with mono-industrial activities farming, mining) and diversification of the local economies; safer and better environment – eco-tourism brings sustainable development, it pose no danger to the environment and also tourism can provide the highest economic growth and can create new green jobs for the locals. Important developments are foreseen for local human resources in the rural communities (courses of foreign languages, catering, management, courses for guides). Local destinations from the border area are very little European and internationally known and cross border natural parks would increase their visibility at European and international level (*Operative Programme Hungary-Romania CBC 2007-2013*). Therefore Cross Border Natural Parks are very powerful tools for local and regional sustainable development.

The state governments already created national parks (e.g. Romania, Hungary, Ukraine, Serbia) in order to protect this area and to preserve the natural heritage. These transnational park areas offers huge potential for regional development which is indicated by protection and improvement of environment, transnational synergies for sustainable growth and tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

One country border line does not limit a natural protected area, because the functioning principles of a functional natural territorial system do not

overlap with the political-administrative structures. Establishment of natural parks ensures community involvement, safeguards local rural cultural heritage and the natural environment by active protection, understanding nature & its values, promoting and encouraging the tourist activities. Cross border natural park could be administered under one joint management. The Maramureșului Mountains is in the phase of initiating a project that intends the establishment and management of a Maramureșului Mountains joint Romanian-Ukrainian Natural Park.

The Szatmar – Bereg International Park intends to extend the existing Hungarian Natural Park of the Szatmar-Bereg over the Romanian (Satu Mare, Tur region) and Ukrainian (Transcarpathia, Ungvar) borders, establishing one joint cross border protected area.

Down south on the border line important parts of the Hungary-Romania border areas are covered by either national parks or landscape protection areas. An integrated approach replacing local limited actions, based on joint cross border measures should be designed.

The analyzed border area is rich in local natural resources and due to the geographic proximity and the complementarities of attractions active cross border cooperation is a must (*Operative Programme Hungary-Romania CBC 2007-2013*, <http://huro-cbc.eu/ro/>).

Even if the complementary cross border advantages are strong foundation for economic development when establishing and managing cross border natural parks there are several issues we have to deal with. Accessibility may be one of them (Klimkiewicz, M., 2002, pp. 2) as it can be either favorable or restrictive. Also, politics, both at local and national level, plays an important role in establishing a legal and administrative frame, in order to ensure a good functionality.

It is very important the process of spatial data standardization, in order to handle them (spatial data) and also for their spread (metadata) for the two protected areas, of both sides of the border, for their inter-operability (Malinverni, E., 2007).

In the present EU enlargement context, of EU/European non-EU members countries partnership, of continuous change of the European borders, it is necessary the promotion and valorization of the cross border natural structures, managed on a real partnership base, to turn into realities into contact areas of contiguous and different political-territorial systems.

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