

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION ELEMENTS ALONG ROMANIAN-UKRAINIAN BORDER – EMPIRICAL EVIDENCES

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Abstract

The study aims to identify several elements that influence the cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, also paths or fields for cooperation, as the local and regional stakeholders perceive. The field research had as subjects the potential applicants for cross-border projects in the eligible area of Romania-Ukraine Joint Operational Programme 2014-2020. The main research questions were related to the factors that encourage and block the cross-border cooperation, partnership aspects (partners, weaknesses or strengths, envisaged fields of cooperation), strategic ideas for the cross-border area development, universities involvement in the area. Comparing data from field researches applied at different times and groups we realized that in some aspects different groups give a different importance to the factors that encourage or block the cooperation, also, in the last research the relevance that the cross-border programmes have in the area to promote cooperation and partnership.

Keywords: cross-border cooperation, Romania-Ukraine, partnership

Introduction

The border between Romania and Ukraine is the second longest bilateral border between a Member State and a partner country and, while the first longest – Finland – Russian Federation – crosses taiga, therefore not so populated, the border we use for study sums 8,022,042 inhabitants included in the administrative units along the border. They are un-proportionally shared among the two countries - 26% on the Romanian side of the border and 74% on the Ukrainian side due to the difference between the administrative units – counties (Romania) and regions (Ukraine)¹. In the frame of European Union programming documents that are as base for encouraging the cross-border cooperation, along the four generations of cross-border programmes (CBC) the inclusion of Romanian and Ukrainian administrative units was different. Therefore, the pilot generation of Phare EBI

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¹ Read more about JOP Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020 (2015) at www.ro-ua.net.

CBC² and the Neighbourhood Programme Romania-Ukraine (Joint Programming Document, 2006) covered all the border administrative units, such as: Romania – Satu Mare, Maramures, Suceava, Botosani, Tulcea, and Ukraine – Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, Odessa. The design and the implementation of the programmes was also un-balanced because the leadership and the budget management belonged exclusively to the Romanian partners, but the partnership format was mandatory Romanian-Ukrainian with no restrictions on the number of partners on each side of the border or total. The 2007-2013 generation of CBC programmes split the border in two parts: Satu Mare and Maramures (Romania) with Zakarpattia and Ivano-Frankivsk (Ukraine) were included in Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Joint Operational Programme (JOP)³, while the rest of the counties and oblasts were included in Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova JOP⁴. In case of the former, as Ukraine was the only Partner Country included and in order to comply with EU regulation, the inclusion of a Ukrainian partner in the projects was mandatory. In case of the latter, the projects had to be implemented in partnership that will always involving partners from Romania and at least one partner country. But in the calls for proposals both programmes required four cooperation criteria that should be considered in the projects of all nature, while mandatory was to satisfy at least two: joint project development, joint project implementation, joint staffing and joint financing (Joint Managing Authority - Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Housing, 2009)⁵. This was an important step for the cross-border cooperation as the Ukrainian partners had more involvement and responsibilities in the leadership and the financial management of the projects. In the last generation of programmes, 2014-2020, the entire border area Romania-Ukraine was covered by the Romania-Ukraine JOP (JOP Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020), as detailed above in the first generations of programmes, but also the Romanian counties and Ukrainian regions included in 2007-2013 in the Hu-Sk-Ro-Ua JOP 2007-2013 are now included in the core area for the similar programme Hu-Sk-Ro-Ua JOP 2014-2020. Moreover, eligible entities from the Suceava county (Romania) and Chernivtsi region (Ukraine) may have access to the programme as partners from adjoining areas⁶. The four criteria are kept as to be

² Read more about Phare CBC EBI (2003) at http://www.mie.ro/_documente/cbc/2003/ebi/index.htm.

³ Read more about Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Joint Operational Programme (2008) at http://www.huskroua-cbc.net/uploads/editors/JOP-HUSKROUA%2030092014-amended_final.pdf.

⁴ JOP Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova (2008), (retrieved from http://www.ro-ua-md.net/images/stories/File/Joint_Operational_Programme.pdf).

⁵ Read more about the calls for Proposals Hu-Sk-Ro-Ua 2007-2013, Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-Border Cooperation Programme at www.huskroua-cbc.net/en/closed_call_for_proposals.

⁶ Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 (2016), (retrieved from <https://huskroua-cbc.eu/documents/programme-documents>).

considered, but with differences among the programmes calls for proposals – the Hu-Sk-Ro-Ua JOP mentions all four to be observed while the Ro-Ua JOP asks as mandatory at least joint staffing and joint financing.

The reasons for this introductory review of the programmes where the administrative units from Romania-Ukraine border are included reside in the variation and the diversity of the formal conditions where the cross-border cooperation developed. We use this argument as to underline that the field researches that we mention in this paper were held in different conditions, depending on the time of research, and there are difficulties to have some fixed issues or conditions as to be able to measure a variation in time. Therefore, we will have an incomplete comparative approach and a quite eclectic collection of information. Still, we try to make the best use of the data we collected in various stages and, where similar type to compare, where different, to add, as to identify the aspects that can help to maintain or build cooperation bridges or the aspects that can hinder the cooperation, therefore need intervention where is possible.

The main research questions we posed in the most recent field research were related to the factors that encourage and block the cross-border cooperation (what would be the hierarchy in a proposed list in some cases or what are the factors that respondents propose, in some other cases), partnership aspects (how many partners they have, what are the weaknesses or strengths of the partnership, envisaged fields of cooperation), strategic ideas for the cross-border area development, universities involvement in the area. For this paper we used the answers for only some of the questions, meaning the factors that encourage and block the cross-border cooperation, partnership aspects (partners, weaknesses or strengths) and universities involvement in the area. In the following section we will describe the methodological aspects from previous researches and the last one as guidelines for connecting the empirical evidences along the years in our researches.

1. Methodological aspects

In this paper we put together data from previous and actual on field studies. Therefore, we had differences in the methodological approach, in some cases we had the similar group of respondents, in some cases the same area or similar questions. Despite the fact that all the field researches mentioned here have not a red thread, they are connected with each other in a way or other.

The first survey was a preliminary one, in December 2011, applied to the potential applicants and beneficiaries of the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova (Slusarciuc, 2013) in the locations and during the information events that were organized in the whole cross-border programme area.

The survey was applied in the period November-December 2011, in the three programme countries, in 12 locations: Romania – Suceava, Botoșani, Tulcea, Galați, Vaslui, Ukraine – Chernivtsi and Odessa, Republic of Moldova – Chișinău,



Cahul, Rezina, Soroca, Ștefan Vodă. There were distributed around 800 questionnaires out of which over 300 questionnaires were returned, and 254 were considered valid. The distribution of respondents was proportional with the number of events in each of the countries and with the number of participants for each session. The respondents were former or actual beneficiaries or partners, former applicants or partners or potential applicants. The survey marked one of the first steps and the answers were used to formulate the following instruments – the interview guide and the experts' questionnaire we will refer to later.

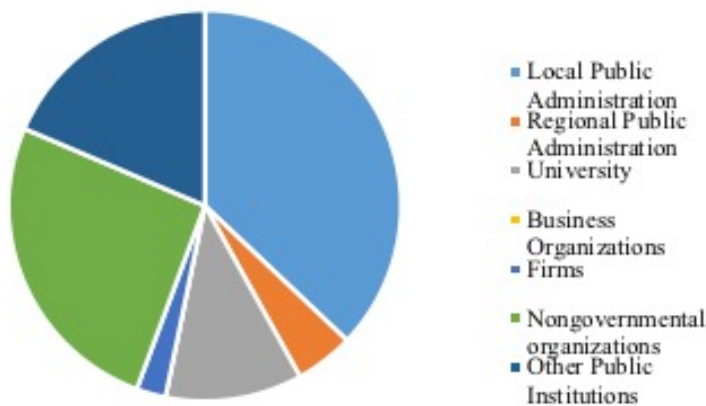
During October 2012 – March 2013 nine interviews with beneficiaries or partners involved were applied, from the projects granted by the first call for proposals JOP Ro-Ua-Md. In the selection of the beneficiaries we used as criteria: out of 83 projects list of financed grants we considered a minimum of 10% of beneficiaries as a relevant ratio (at least 8-9 interviews); representativeness for all three countries, also respecting the proportionality between countries as number of projects and funds granted (4 beneficiaries from Romania, 2 from Ukraine and 3 from Republic of Moldova), representativeness for the programme priorities, availability for interview and the costs and accessibility limitations. The interviews are a valuable source in terms of partnership issues, both good practices or strengths and drawbacks or weaknesses, the detailed results were included in a previous work while here we mention the ones relevant for this paper (Șlurariuc, 2013).

One following step was the application of 31 questionnaires to experts in spring 2013, guided by three representativity criteria: the first one, to cover local, regional and national level, the second one, to cover all three countries, Romania, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, and the third one, to be from different types of entities, from public administration, nongovernmental, research (universities) and business fields. The detailed results and methodology were published in a previous paper (Șlurariuc and Prelipcean, 2013). The expert questionnaire included hierarchies-like questions built on the previous research results as mentioned above, similar with the ones designed by the Delphi method. The questionnaire was designed gradual, starting with general cross-border issues, then aspects of previous and actual cross-border financial instruments contribution in the area, followed by aspects regarding the structure of the programme in place at that time and the partnership issue as relevant in cross-border cooperation.

In November 2013, under coordination of Regional Office for Cross-Border Cooperation Suceava for Romania-Ukraine Border (RO CBC Suceava), it was conducted a stakeholders' survey (Șlurariuc, 2014). The survey targeted general stakeholders with involvement in the cross-border cooperation or with potential future involvement, in Suceava and Botosani counties, Romania. Even the area was only in Romania and only in a part of the Romanian-Ukrainian border, 77 valid questionnaires were applied, respondents being representatives from variate types of entities: public administration (ex: county councils, cities administrations, county institutions), nongovernmental organizations and business associations (chambers of commerce and industry, business support organizations). The

questionnaire was focused on the development needs of a smaller part of cross-border area between Romania and Ukraine. The study is relevant for this paper due to the inclusion of a pair of questions with hierarchical approach on the factors that support or block the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine. In case of this survey and the experts' survey we faced a similar error - some of the stakeholders did not rank some of the items, case in which in the database the answer was counted as '0' value but it was counted in the number of answers. Some of the detailed results are in the paper mentioned above while here we use the ones relevant for this paper.

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by the type of entity



Source: own representation

The most recent survey was conducted in the spring 2018, the distribution having the support of RO CBC Suceava, as the questionnaire was applied to potential applicants of JOP Ro-Ua 2014-2020 that attended the information events organized in the border area. The questionnaire had mostly open question and was filled in by 124 respondents, 58 Romanians and 66 Ukrainians. The methodology is described in the following but for the present paper we use the answers of six questions: the first five factors that contribute to the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, the first five factors that block to the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, the number of partners on the other side of the border, strengths and weaknesses of the partnership, and cooperation with universities in the area.

Regarding the structure of the respondents and issues of representativity, the following charts show the distribution of respondents as type of entity and coverage of the administrative units from Romania and Ukraine. The corresponding figures are in the tables 1 and 2.

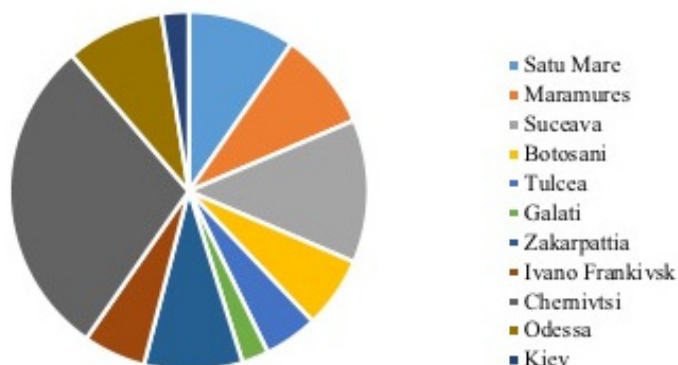


Table 1. The number of respondents per type of entity

Local Public Administration	46
Regional Public Administration	6
University	14
Business Organizations	0
Firms	3
Nongovernmental organizations	32
Other Public Institutions	23
Total	124

Source: own calculation

Even if it appears that the highest rate has the local public administration, in fact they are maybe the most important group of CBC project applicants and therefore, carriers of cross-border cooperation, due to their number and long-term stable financial sources. One of the limitations is that, considering that at this type of programme information events may attend more representatives of one entity, it could be that there are more questionnaires filled by representatives from one entity. Anyhow, we did not specifically intend to target entities, but more individuals involved or with interest of involvement in cross-border projects, therefore cross-border cooperation. As concerns the coverage of the counties in Romania and regions in Ukraine, we notice that there are Chernivtsi (UA) and Suceava (RO) the leading administrative units, fact that may be explained by at least two factors: the first is related to the possible number of participant at the event (correlated with a during time interest of potential applicants from these administrative units) and the second could be related to the low interest in filling the questionnaire. Anyway, for the present paper, the documentation of these factors is less relevant.

Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by administrative unit (county/region)

Source: own representation

Table 2. The number of respondents per administrative unit

Romania	58
Satu Mare	12
Maramures	11
Suceava	16
Botosani	8
Tulcea	6
Ukraine	66
Galati	3
Zakarpattia	11
Ivano Frankivsk	7
Chernivtsi	36
Odessa	11
Kiev	3
Total	124

Source: own calculation

The questionnaire was structured on different issues as in the Table 3 and it was applied in Romanian and Ukrainian language, depending the country where it was applied.

Table 3. The structure of the questionnaire

Question code	Issue	Type of question
1	Identification data - name of the entity - type of entity - city/county-region/country - level of responsibility of the respondent in the entity	Open List of options Open List of options
2	Minimum 5 factors that contribute to the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine ranked as importance*	Open list
3	Minimum 5 factors that block the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine ranked as importance*	Open list
4.a.	The number of partners on the other side of the border	Open numerical
4.b.	Details about the main partners (name, type of entity, city, partnership domain, how old is the partnership)	Open
5.a.	The strengths of the partnership(s) where the entity of the respondent was involved	Open list



Question code	Issue	Type of question
5.b.	The weaknesses of the partnership(s) where the entity of the respondent was involved	Open list
6.a.1./2./3.	Intention about future partnership and field of cooperation	Dichotomic Dual choice Open
7.	Minimum 3 needed actions to be included in a development strategy for the cross-border region Romania-Ukraine	Open list
8.a.	Development facilities offered by the local administration from the respondent location	Dichotomic Open
8.b.	Development facilities offered by the local administration from the respondent' partner location	Dichotomic Open
9	Cooperation with the university in the area	Dichotomic Open

*The importance order was implicit from the most important to the less important as based on the order that the respondent reminds it.

Source: own calculation

For the present paper we use the answers of six questions: the first five factors that contribute to the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, the first five factors that block to the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, the number of partners on the other side of the border, strengths and weaknesses of the partnership, and cooperation with universities in the area, namely the questions 2, 3, 4.a., 5.a., 5.b., 6.a.1./2., 9 (the dichotomic part of the question). The identification data (question 1) are presented in this methodological section.

For purpose of easy understanding of the references to each of the field researches we will use the following coding:

- PS - preliminary survey, December 2011
- BI - interviews with beneficiaries, October 2012 - March 2013
- EQ - questionnaires to experts, spring 2013
- SS - stakeholders' survey, November 2013
- PAQ - potential applicants' questionnaire, spring 2018.

The paper is structured partly on comparative view in case of similar answers from different studies - for the encouraging and blocking factors for cross-border cooperation, followed by partnership aspects and universities involvement in the cross-border cooperation. There will be following papers that will be focused on the remaining questions, namely 4.b., 7, 8.a., 8.b., and 9 (the open part of the question), where also, by case, results of the questions presented in this paper will be used.

2. Empirical results across surveys

2.1. Cross-border cooperation encouraging factors

In the EQ, the second question was to make a hierarchy of the factors that contribute to the development of the cross-border cooperation in Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova area, the list proposed containing the following factors ordered as in the questionnaire: the existence of common values, identification of common trade and economic issues, visa facilitation, management of the population migration, people to people contacts, contacts between institutions and local/regional administrations, political cooperation, financial cooperation, need for investments. The order proposed was based on PS and BI, also on discussions with RO CBC experts and university academics involved in cross-border cooperation, but without a strict methodology of hierarchisation.

The experts order the items as in the following: the existence of common values, contacts between institutions and local/regional administrations, identification of common trade and economic issues, people to people contacts, need for investments, political cooperation, visa facilitation, financial cooperation and last, management of the population migration. If we look at the table where we put together the proposed order with the one made by experts, we may conclude that, except the first rank - the existence of common values and penultima rank, financial cooperation, the ordering is different.

Table 4. The factors that contribute to the cross-border cooperation in Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova area (EQ)

Questionnaire order	Experts order
the existence of common values	the existence of common values
identification of common trade and economic issues	contacts between institutions and local/regional administrations
visa facilitation	identification of common trade and economic issues
management of the population migration	people to people contacts
people to people contacts	need for investments
contacts between institutions and local/regional administrations	political cooperation
political cooperation	visa facilitation
financial cooperation	financial cooperation
need for investments	management of the population migration

Source: Slusarciuc and Prelipcean, Intervention priorities for economic development in the crossborder area Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova - A WOT analysis approach, 2013

It is interesting to notice that an administrative issue as visa for Ukrainians, that was named many times by the ones involved in CBC projects as a problem



(before the visa waiver in September 2017), was placed by experts in the bottom of the list, while the contacts between institutions and local/regional administration was considered as second important.

The experts had open area to make proposals for other factors but only 4 proposals of factors that contribute to the cooperation were named, the overcoming of negative stereotypes, the right behaviour at the border crossing point, the harmonization of the legal frame and tourism.

In the SS, the question about the encouraging factors was similar as in the case of experts, only that mentions the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, and there are few differences in the list of factors: the facilities in getting the visa, contacts and partnerships between public institutions and local/regional administrations, people to people contacts, identification of common economic issues and development of local/regional strategies, need of investments in common interest areas, common values.

The stakeholders' order of items was the following: identification of common economic issues and development of local/regional strategies, contacts and partnerships between public institutions and local/regional administrations, need of investments in common interest areas, people to people contacts, facilities in getting the visa, common values.

If we do the same comparison between the proposed order and the stakeholders' order, we notice again that the visa issue is not considered as helping the cross-border cooperation but most, the identification of common economic issues and development of local/regional strategies and, contacts and partnerships between public institutions and local/regional administrations.

Table 5. The factors that contribute to the cross-border cooperation in Romania-Ukraine area (SS)

Questionnaire order	Stakeholders' order
the facilities in getting the visa	identification of common economic issues and development of local/regional strategies
contacts and partnerships between public institutions and local/regional administrations	contacts and partnerships between public institutions and local/regional administrations
people to people contacts	need of investments in common interest areas
identification of common economic issues and development of local/regional strategies	people to people contacts
need of investments in common interest areas	facilities in getting the visa
common values	common values

Source: Şlusarciuc, Matrix for Cooperation in the Cross-Border Areas, 2014

If further we put together the experts hierarchy and the stakeholders hierarchy we may conclude few aspects that we can correlate with the fact that the first group of respondents (the experts) are involved in national and regional level decision making or academics, while the second group of respondents are from local level decision making, local administration, business representatives, and non-governmental organizations, but more involved in direct cross-border cooperation through projects.

We can notice two ideas: a more pragmatic and business oriented view of stakeholders as far as the common values are placed on the last rank compared with the first rank on the experts list, and the elements that worth to be taken in the frame of this paper are the group of four factors that are placed in the first part of rank with a slight difference of order: *identification of common economic issues and development of local/regional strategies, contacts and partnerships between public institutions and local/regional administrations, need of investments in common interest areas, and people to people contacts*, in condition of different initial ranking proposed through the two questionnaires.

Table 6. The factors that contribute to the cross-border cooperation comparison of hierarchies (EQ and SS)

Experts order	Stakeholders' order
the existence of common values	identification of common economic issues and development of local/regional strategies
contacts between institutions and local/regional administrations	contacts and partnerships between public institutions and local/regional administrations
identification of common trade and economic issues	need of investments in common interest areas
people to people contacts	people to people contacts
need for investments	facilities in getting the visa
political cooperation	common values
visa facilitation	
financial cooperation	
management of the population migration	

Source: Șluserciuc and Prelipcean, Intervention priorities for economic development in the crossborder area Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova - A'WOT analysis approach, 2013; Șluserciuc, Matrix for Cooperation in the Cross-Border Areas, 2014

In the last survey, PAQ, we had 103 respondents that answered out of 124 for the open question regarding the contributing factors to the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, with a total of 425 answers to be processed, some with similar meaning. We did not work on ranking but on how often an item was mentioned. We grouped the items in three categories: factors that



contribute from outside the cross-border region (77 answers), factors from the region (245 answers) and factors connected with the partnership between entities/people (103 answers). We faced similar difficulty in placing some of the items in a group or other, as there were too general expressed, such as: common culture or infrastructure development. From the factors outside the region the most often mentioned are joint CBC programmes and granting (most nominated), membership to similar organizations, interest in cooperation with neighbour country, existence of various fields of cooperation, national level partnerships, free visa regime. Inside region and outside partnership factors, by far most of the items, we mention the most frequent answers: neighbourliness/geographic proximity near border or common border, common culture/history/patrimony, development interest, common problems. The most mentioned factors inside the partnership are: previous cooperation/partnership, experience in activity/previous projects, previous joint projects. It seems that the existence of the cross-border cooperation programmes had a significant role in boosting the cooperation along the border between Romania and Ukraine, and the several generations of programmes formed long-term partnerships. The factors outside the region are opportunities for a SWOT analysis of the cross-border region while the inside region and inside partnership factors are strengths in terms of the same analysis, therefore issues that can be exploited on long term basis.

2.2. Cross-border cooperation blocking factors

In the EQ, the third question was to make a hierarchy of the factors that block the development of the cross-border cooperation in Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova area, the list proposed containing the following factors ordered as in the questionnaire: existence of different legal systems, membership to different supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country), economic gaps, historical events, language differences and territorial disputes. As in the case of the encouraging factors the order proposed was based on PS and BI, also on discussions with RO CBC experts and university academics involved in cross-border cooperation, but without a strict methodology of hierarchisation.

The experts' hierarchy of the factors that block the development of the cross-border cooperation in Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova area was: different legal systems, membership to different supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country), economic gaps, language differences, territorial disputes and historical events. If we look at the similar table where we put together the proposed order with the one made by experts, we may conclude that the ranking of the items in the experts' opinion is the same with the one proposed by the questionnaire.

Table 7. The factors that block the cross-border cooperation in Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova area (EQ)

Questionnaire order	Experts order
existence of different legal systems	different legal systems
membership to different supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country)	membership to different supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country)
economic gaps	economic gaps
historical events	language differences
language differences	territorial disputes
territorial disputes	historical events

Source: Slusarciuc and Prelipcean, Intervention priorities for economic development in the crossborder area Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova - A WOT analysis approach, 2013

In the open area to make proposals for other factors experts had 5 proposals of factors that block the cooperation, namely the visa issues, the wrong behaviour of the officers at the border crossing point, the lack of common strategies for economic and social cooperation, the lack of short and medium term plans for the implementation of those strategies and the excessive duration of the projects assessment.

In the SS, the pair question - to make a hierarchy of the factors that block the cross-border cooperation in Romania-Ukraine area, the proposed list had: membership to supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country), lack of local/regional strategies, political instability, major economic gaps, significant differences between the political and administrative systems of the two countries and communication difficulties. The list had differences in order and on some items compared with the EQ list.

The stakeholders' order of items was the following: lack of local/regional strategies, political instability, membership to supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country), significant differences between the political and administrative systems of the two countries, major economic gaps, and the last, communication difficulties. In case of comparison between the proposed order and the stakeholders' order, we notice again that the communication difficulties are on the last place on the list, while the immediate issues that are affecting local life are the first on the list - lack of strategies and political instability (the last one can be connected with the moment of survey when in Ukraine was after the Russia intervention in Crimea and the start of Eastern conflicts).



Table 8. The factors that block the cross-border cooperation in Romania-Ukraine area (SS)

Questionnaire order	Stakeholders' order
membership to supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country)	lack of local/regional strategies
lack of local/regional strategies	political instability
political instability	membership to supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country)
major economic gaps	significant differences between the political and administrative systems of the two countries
significant differences between the political and administrative systems of the two countries	major economic gaps
communication difficulties	communication difficulties

Source: Şlusarciuc, Matrix for Cooperation in the Cross-Border Areas, 2014

Table 9. The factors that contribute to the cross-border cooperation comparison of hierarchies (EQ and SS)

Experts order	Stakeholders' order
different legal systems	lack of local/regional strategies
membership to different supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country)	political instability
economic gaps	membership to supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country)
language differences	significant differences between the political and administrative systems of the two countries
territorial disputes	major economic gaps
historical events	communication difficulties

Source: Şlusarciuc and Prelipcean, Intervention priorities for economic development in the crossborder area Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova - A'WOT analysis approach, 2013; Şlusarciuc, Matrix for Cooperation in the Cross-Border Areas, 2014

If further we put together the experts hierarchy and the stakeholders hierarchy we have only some soft possible conclusions considering the differences among the proposed items: in case of similar items it seems that the group of the ones directly involved in the cross-border cooperation are not giving to much importance to the membership to supranational structures (EU Member State/EU Partner Country) or the economic gaps, while being more focused on the immediate issues like lack of local/regional strategies and political instability.

In the recent survey, PAQ, we had 90 respondent that answered out of 124 for the open question regarding the blocking factors to the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, with a total of 304 answers to be processed, some with similar meaning. Similar as the previous factors, we did not work on ranking but on how often an item was mentioned and we grouped the items in three categories: factors that contribute from outside the cross-border region, factors from the region and factors connected with the partnership between entities/people. We faced similar difficulty in placing some of the items in a group or other, as there were to general expressed, such as: border crossing or mass-media. The most mentioned factors that we group as outside region are the following: different legislation, border procedures and difficulties for crossing, bureaucracy, the recent Ukrainian provisions related to the Romanian nationals, unstable geopolitical situation. By far, the most mentioned factor that we grouped as inside region and outside partnership is the language difference, then, bad infrastructure, lack of information, differences in mentality. Inside partnership factors nominated as most frequent are the lack of knowledge / abilities / experience in project management, the lack of financial / technical / specialization resources, and the lack of interest/involvement. In the frame of a region SWOT analysis the factors outside the region are threats, while the factors inside the region and inside the partnership are weaknesses.

2.3. Cross-border partnership aspects

The first field research that included significant qualitative data about partnership was the BI where, during the interview, the questions “What are the most important points that define a good partnership in the projects? Are these points fulfilled in your case?” was tackled. In the following we list an extract of the most important quotes from the interviews (Slusarciuc, 2013). The interviews were held in Romanian or English language.

- “It is important that the partners have similar experience about the project management. Otherwise, the most prepared partner will have to be patient and help the other to improve and be educated in this matter.”
- “The people involved are very important, the openness and availability to help being a plus to the partnership.”
- “The existence of the budget on the Ukrainian side is a complex issue that supposes a good preparation and knowledge as well as availability to work for a good management of financial documents.”
- “The first issue of a good partnership would be the common interest, the second the commitment and the third is the fairness, all three generating a positive reaction of the partners.”
- “It is good when the partners can develop common products of the projects, for example common touristic offers and when the partners can benefit from each other experience or knowledge.”



- “In the context of cross-border projects the trust is very important, also, in case that one of the partners will become suspicious about the actions and intentions of the other during the process, the second time will not join this partnership.
- “The financial contribution as involvement of all the partners is an element that can challenge and help a partnership.”
- “The reliability and the dedication are points that define a good partnership in order to run a successful project.”
- “In the partnership, firstly it is important that the planning be done jointly and secondly to follow the established schedule and to respect the terms of the agreement. In the planning stage all the parties should express their needs, comments or disagreements and to find the best version that can be good for all through consensus and flexibility.”
- “In the case of different languages of partners, the way of working is to ask clarification when there are issues of different meanings and to assure that all parties have the same understanding of a certain aspect. Also, the idea of language barrier can be overpassed.”
- “The partners should be really involved in the project and a project where the partners are formally is going to fail or not to be a real project. The involvement should be along all the activities.”
- “The partners should be aware of their common goals and figure out the best ways to reach them. In case of different visions, they should communicate and focus on the common points.”
- “The helping points in a partnership are the intelligence, tolerance and the common understanding of the joint objectives, also the good will for having a common project.”
- “A good partnership is the one that continues after the end of the projects in other new projects or activities with different sources of funding. Also, it is defined by the human relation that goes to a friendship and exchange of useful information between the teams of the project partners, frequent communication by email or skype.”
- “An important issue that defines a good partnership is the homogeneity of the partners, meaning their field of action and the approaches they have about that field. To this there can be added: a good communication, the same language, the continuity of the nominated staff from each partner.”
- “The first thing that define a good partnership would be seriousness, another one the desire to affirm in their field, and a third, to learn and to learn from each other. Another feature would be to count on the partners, to be responsible in organizing the activities drawn in the project design and to manage the budget.”

- “The partnership should be agreed between institutions or structures with a common interest of making things of whom should benefit the communities from both sides of the border.”
- “Another issue needed for a good partnership is a common language, regardless that it is one of the partners’ language or it is a third one, such as English. It is important the partners to find their own common language to exchange ideas.”
- “An important feature for a good partnership is the distance in the sense that having a partner placed to a long distance there is the risk of losing the warmth of the relationship. The short distance allows more frequent visits and meetings between partners.”

We keep as relevant a list of keywords that we can group in three: individual traits - the ones that belong to the people involved in the partnership, entity traits - the ones that characterize the entities involved in the partnership, and partnership traits - the ones that are characteristic for how the partnership relation is build. We consider as qualitative information that we can use further as adding to any work meant to improve the partnership in cross-border relations.

We take as relevant from previous work (Slusarciuc, 2013) two concluding aspects regarding the partnership: one related to the partnership network that should improve the situation in cross-border region Romania-Ukraine and the other one related to the features of a good partnership. We adjusted some of the referring that were more focused on projects/programmes and we give a more general dimension.

The partnership network, when is about cross-border cooperation between two countries, Romania and Ukraine, should consider a vertical partnership dimension approach on each side of the border; and a horizontal partnership dimension across the borders between partners who often differ from each other. Vertical partnerships dimension relies on the relationships across the EU level, the national level and the regional/local levels on each side of the border. Horizontal partnership dimension relies on the relationships between the partners (organizations/structures) on both sides of the border.

Besides the BI, within the previous research we held interviews with other bodies involved in cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and EU member states and as result we identify list of features that help building a good partnership that we formulate with more general terms, regardless the involvement in a specific cross-border programme or not: joint preparation of the strategy/projects, joint implementation of the strategy/projects, joint team for the project/strategy work, joint financial contribution to the strategy/projects, partnership generates new ideas and projects, long-term partnership, good communication, mutual support, mutual trust, similar experiences, openness and availability to help, existence of a common interest, involvement and commitment, fairness and tolerance.



Table 10. Traits that make a partnership successful

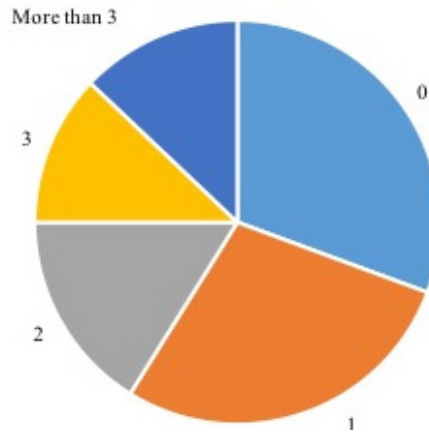
Individual traits	similar experience patience availability to help openness good preparation and knowledge commitment fairness trust reliability dedication respect of the terms of the agreement intelligence tolerance seriousness responsibility
Entity traits	similar experience availability to help openness availability to work for a good management flexibility real involvement homogeneity of the partners common language continuity of the team desire to affirm in their field
Partnership traits	common interest development of common products of the projects mutual benefits joint planning consensus common understanding of the joint objectives common goals and interest frequent and good communication focus on the common points exchange of useful information continuity of the partnership mutual learning proximity as distance

Source: own representation based on the interviews

In the PAQ research 86 respondents out of 124 (aprox.70%) answered that they have at least a partner on the other side of the border. This information may prove the level of partnership development in the Romania-Ukraine cross-border region, especially if we correlate with the data processed form the question regarding

the future partnerships. Most of the respondents have more than one partner, fact that may indicate a high degree of partnership working experience in the area.

Figure 3. Distribution of respondents regarding the number of cross-border partners they work with



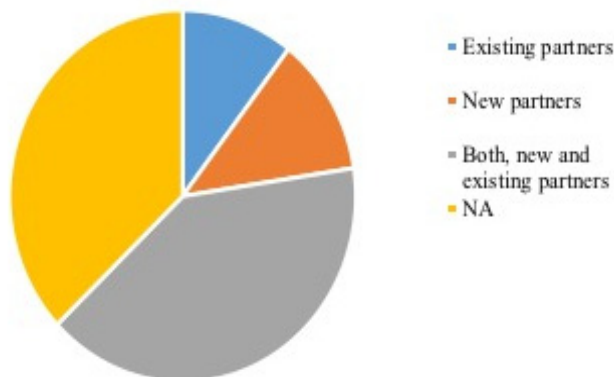
Source: own representation

Out of all the respondents 94% intend future partnerships, out of which, with new partners, with existing partners or with both, new and existing.

Figure 4. Intentions regarding future partnerships



Source: own representation

Figure 5. Preferences regarding the future partnerships

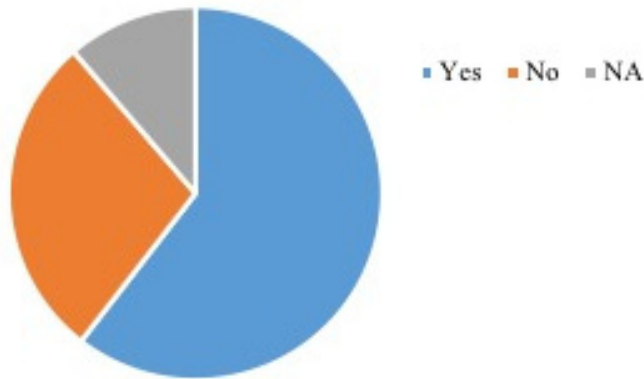
Source: own representation

Concerning the open answers about the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership we had 66 respondents that listed 194 items for partnership strengths and 38 respondents that listed 67 items for partnership weaknesses. The most nominated strengths are the experience in cross-border projects or other EU programmes, traditional partnership, professionalism/competence, knowledge of English language (required by the EU programmes), interest for cooperation. It worth mentioning again the contribution that the frame of the cross-border programmes offered as significant contribution to the development of cross-border partnerships. The number of items listed as weaknesses of the partnership is the lowest and the most mentioned items are the language difference and the legal differences.

2.4. Involvement of universities in the cross-border area

Based on a previous work on development poles with cross-border potential we identified that the universities are important centers in a partnership network for cross-border regions (Slusarciuc, 2016), reason for including this question in our recent research. In the present paper we only refer to the quantitative data, following in a future paper a work on the list of nominated universities and a mapping of them.

Out of all respondents 60% cooperate with universities from their area, on the same side or on the other side of the border.

Figure 6. Cooperation with the universities in the area

Source: own representation

The results give information regarding the high potential that the actual partnership network has and the opportunities that universities along the border have to explore.

Conclusions

An interesting first conclusion is that the respondents in the previous researches, both the experts and the stakeholders, had strong opinions on the importance/hierarchy of different factors that encourage or block the cross-border cooperation as they were less influenced by the already given hierarchy (as we notice there are significant differences between the order on the given list and the order proposed by different groups).

We noticed a more pragmatic and business oriented view of stakeholders as far as the common values are placed on the last rank compared with the first rank on the experts list, and the elements that worth to be taken in the frame of this paper are the group of four factors that are placed in the first part of rank with a slight difference of order: *identification of common economic issues and development of local/regional strategies, contacts and partnerships between public institutions and local/regional administrations, need of investments in common interest areas, and people to people contacts*, in condition of different initial ranking proposed through the two questionnaires. As this group is relevant for both categories of respondents we should consider as relevant and “bricks” for building long term cooperation network and possible regional strategies. Most of the factors from the previous researches can be identified in the answers of the last survey where it was open question about the factors contributing to the cross-border cooperation. Interesting is the high number of answers related to the existence of the cross-border programmes and previous joint projects. If we connect the data



from previous and last researches related to this aspect - the encouraging factors, we can conclude that the cross-border programmes, that granted joint projects and had as one of the aims to boost the cooperation in the border areas, fulfilled the designed role.

In case of the blocking factors we noticed a totally different approaches among the categories of respondents in case of previous researches where a hierarchy was required. It is therefore difficult for us to conclude a strong structured opinion. In case of the open questions, if we consider the most popular answers, there is a strong emphasis on different legislation and border crossing procedures as factors outside the region (as decision about the aspects mentioned), language difference (as factor inside the region) and poor abilities related to the project management or project related fields. Anyway, in the view of a strategic approach of the cross-border area, all the proposed blocking factors mentioned at least twice or the ones with similar meaning should be considered.

In case of the collected data on partnership we propose to keep as relevant a list of keywords that we can group in three: individual traits - the ones that belong to the people involved in the partnership, entity traits - the ones that characterize the entities involved in the partnership, and partnership traits - the ones that are characteristic for how the partnership relation is build. We consider as qualitative information that we can use further as adding to any work meant to improve the partnership in cross-border relations by preparing tools and training material that capitalize the existent knowledge in terms of partnership building. As data show, universities are included by most of the actors in the area as active partner, therefore it should not be neglected the opportunity to build educational programmes or at least courses on practical learning of "how to partnership". There is an important area where the lessons learnt by the previous project teams, the existent educational logistic and the cross-border programme structures can join forces as a good governance exercise and to figure out the best way to develop the partnership required abilities that looks like are of utmost importance in the cross-border projects but it seems that not only.

If we connect the data regarding the intention for future partnership which is very high (94% of the respondents) with the information regarding the factors that block the cooperation or with the mentioned weaknesses of the partnerships we may say that there are enough incentives for cooperation that make people to overcome the blockages or the partnership weaknesses, therefore there is a strong intention for long-term relations and bases for building networks and long-term development strategies of the regions in the cross-border area between Romania and Ukraine, even in a frame of geopolitical instability and internal political struggles in both countries. It may be that the periphery may have an effect on keeping communities more focused on their needs and less affected by the tensions in the centers. This could be a topic to explore, both theoretical and empirical, in future multidisciplinary researches - if the proximity may have benefits not only the shortcomings.



A possible future work on the collected data may be to group and analyse by more specific areas where there are historical or traditional partnerships and cooperation, such as: Satu Mare, Maramureș (RO) with Zakarpattia, Ivano Frankivsk (UA); Suceava, Botoșani (RO) with Chernivtsi (UA); Tulcea (RO) with Odessa (UA) and also connect or use in related researches with more focused and practical approaches for each region.

We acknowledge the limits and the thin methodological continuity that sometimes had to be adjusted to the changes of the frame of cooperation in terms of programmes (bilateral to trilateral and back to bilateral), therefore it was difficult to keep constant more elements. Also, in the case of the last research, there is a need of a more structured way to analyse optimal the answers to the open questions and perhaps a second survey that should have a more targeted and well selected group of respondents with a lower degree of randomization.

The eclectic and in some cases comparative approach showed differences of perspective along time and groups of respondents (experts/stakeholders/potential applicants). The finding is explainable due to the events that marked the border area and the two countries involved and also influenced the cross-border communities and cooperation. We find an optimistic sign in the declared desire for partnership/cooperation of the respondents and also in the good involvement and role of universities in the area.

Considering that the volume of qualitative data and the different words used to show similar things, we need more refined tools for processing as to have more meaningful results as to formulate adequate recommendations, good practices or paths to build a resilient and strong network partnership network and region along the Romania-Ukraine border. Another step would be to process the questions not used for this paper and to connect with the findings of this paper and the previous or more recent theoretical researches in the field.

Acknowledgement: The 2018 survey (the application of questionnaires) was realized with the support of Regional Office for Cross-Border Cooperation Suceava for Romania-Ukraine border.

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