

## TOURISM IN PERIPHERIC REGIONS - THE POSSIBILITIES OF THEMATIC ROUTES

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**Abstract:** This paper introduces the peripheral areas of Hungary and describes thematic routes as new tools for tourism and economic development. The aim of the paper is to summarize economic and touristic features of peripheral, mainly border regions, and to reveal possible economic growth inventiveness of thematic routs. Tourism of peripheral areas is parallel with their economic performance, which is sizeably below the national average. Tourism can be used as indirect tool to improve economic performance, if it is paired with externally founded cross border cooperation, a long-term and sustainable development viable.

**Key words:** regional policy, cross-border cooperation, Euroregion, border tourism

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### INTRODUCTION

The peripheral border regions due to their geographic positions are economically disadvantaged; however their key position is a good opportunity for establishing international cooperation in economy or tourism. A possible development path for these areas can be the latter mentioned tourism, especially shopping-tourism, excursion tourism, or thematic routes as part of cultural tourism which is newly appeared in Hungary. Thematic ways are explicitly capable for cross border cooperation, not surprisingly in the past years more and more programs are realized using European funds. In this paper firstly a short introduction summarizes the economic performance of peripheral areas, later it gives a brief insight on the history of European cross border cooperation and shortly touches upon the evolution of the cooperation process of Hungary and bordering countries. During the introduction tourism is highlighted as cohesion-strengthen process in peripheral areas. The last part of the paper presents two case studies with distinctive thematic routes, which are new phenomenon in Hungarian tourism.

### PERIPHERAL AREAS

Peripheral areas can be various, according to its geographic position we can define inner or outer peripheries, but peripheral regions can be economically or socially – sometimes both –

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delimited. In accordance with a complex delimitation, peripheries are „*poor and depended one the core for the means to produce*” (Graves, 2006), moreover low FDI investment rate and high unemployment characterizes the area besides people are partly or totally excluded from labour market. Usually minority proportion within the population is higher than the national average. In Hungary peripheric areas are mainly near to borders (see figure 1) (Soós & Fejes, 2009).

Having examined European scale, peripheries are mainly on the eastern border of the EU.

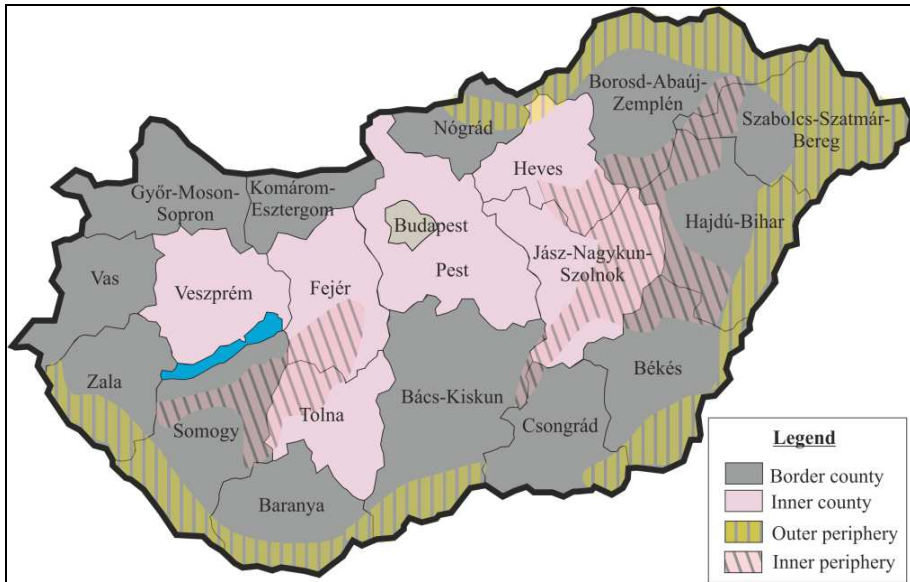


Figure 1. Inner and outer peripheries in Hungary and their distance from Budapest

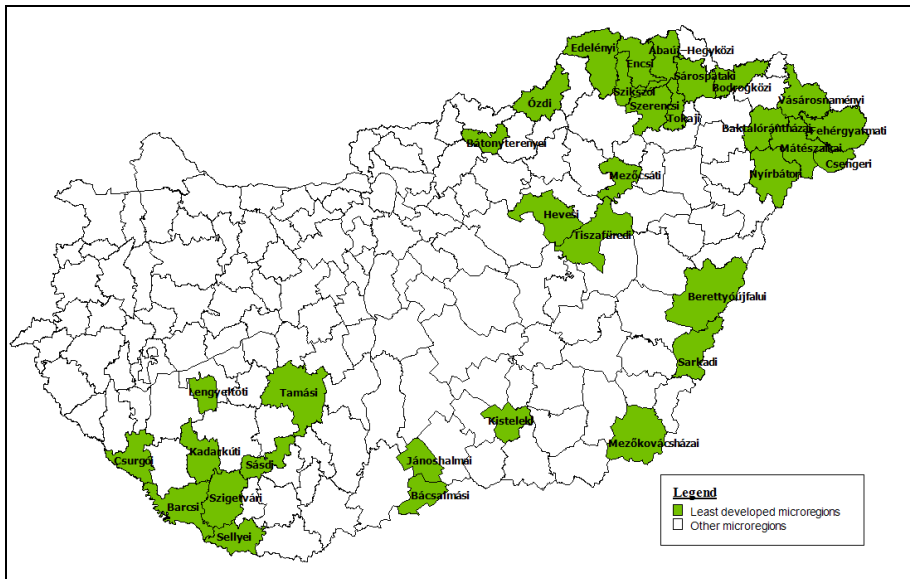


Figure 2. Least developed micro regions in Hungary <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nfu.hu/lhh>

Eastern border regions in Hungary were unable to adapt market economy and could not accommodate to the new deregulated free economy properly during the transition (Süli-Zakar, 1996). Therefore these regions became economic backward regions. Infrastructural, economic detriment, lack of workspace, high outmigration is featuring these areas (see table 1) (Boros, 2002; Bujdosó et al., 2012) which accompanied with geographical distance from the core areas such as Budapest, or Western Hungary. According to the table clear and deep economic differences can be observed, mainly the North-East and South-Hungarian counties are disadvantaged comparing to national mean values (see figure 2). Tourism can provide a partial economic development in the mentioned regions. For this reason in the last few years several cross-border cooperation were established in the mentioned counties. Not surprisingly in the mentioned less developed and border counties tourism and cross border cooperation is considered as breakout points, therefore several movements were started using tourism as development potential.

**Table 1.** Main economic indices of border counties – Pest is excluded while it contains the data of Budapest (Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2012)

<b>Border counties</b>	<b>GDP/capita (€, 2010)</b>	<b>Unemployment rate (% , 2010)</b>	<b>Foreign companies (pcs, 2010)</b>
<b>Baranya</b>	<b>6476</b>	<b>13.0</b>	557
Bács-Kiskun	<b>6207</b>	10.8	666
<b>Békés</b>	<b>5378</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén</b>	<b>5967</b>	<b>17.3</b>	392
<b>Csongrád</b>	<b>7105</b>	8.9	516
Győr-Moson-Sopron	10912	6.9	1292
<b>Hajdú-Bihar</b>	<b>7112</b>	<b>13.2</b>	337
Komárom-Esztergom	10250	8.8	628
<b>Nógrád</b>	<b>4345</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Somogy</b>	<b>6105</b>	<b>13.5</b>	440
<b>Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg</b>	<b>5207</b>	<b>18.4</b>	361
Vas	8072	10.4	692
Zala	7396	11.8	644
<b>National mean</b>	<b>7044</b>	<b>11.2</b>	-

### **EVOLUTION OF CROSS BORDER COOPERATION**

Both sides of borders – even they are separated by borders – socially, economically inseparable due to historical development and common features. This phenomenon can be used as potential for development. However cooperation is at least a bilateral process. Considering the often occurring similarities in natural resources, landscape and cultural heritages border regions are competitors on the market. Take in the situation parties can compete or take advantage by widening the spectrum of supplies, moreover do specification according to target groups. In other cases cooperation prove to be more or less efficient in growing competitiveness and equal allocation of funds (Boros, 2002).

In the 1960's Western European countries started to cooperate in cross border activities beating peripheral demerits grounded in border position or geographical isolations. In this process German, Danish, French, Dutch and Belgian border regions were pioneers. Cross border cooperation evolved spontaneous determined by ethnical, cultural, historical and economical similarities. This was followed by conscious planning, soon supporting, guidance institution and

legal background was created. Later another level was reached, Regional Policy was grounded in the EU with own financial funds; INTERREG programmes started to operate (Soós & Fejes, 2009).

The fast development in the „old EU” was only followed after 1990 in Eastern Europe due to economic transition and opening borders. Thanks for the relatively early start of cross border cooperation some important and still operating program started, using western capital or assistance, and reconsidered priorities. The newly built up cooperation like Euroregions, helped the mentioned to join up using western European best practices and scenarios by adapting the already existing legal and institutional frame. Certainly Hungary stated to cooperate with Austria, as a result in 1987 Alps-Adriatic Euroregion was founded as first international cross border cooperation in Hungary.

During the 1990’s cooperation started with all of our neighbours in Euroregions or working groups. Therefore Hungarian-Romanian-Slovakian-Ukrainian cooperation brought on the Carpathian Euroregion in 1993, which is now completed with Polish collaboration. Based on the good experiences in 1997 Hungarian-Romanian-Serbian concurrence resulted The Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa (DKMT) Euroregion which was followed by Danube-Drava-Sava Euroregion in 1998 as a Croatiaoan-Hungarian-Bosnia Herzegovinian cooperation.

At least, but not last the Vag-Danube-Ipel Euroregion was established in 1999 with an agreement between Slovakia and Hungary (Soós & Fejes, 2009; Aubert-Miszler 2000; Gulyás, 2010).

During the years of 2000 nine more Euroregions were founded, as a total fourteen Euroregions are operating (see table 2).

**Table 2.** Operating Euroregions or Cross border working groups in Hungary

Name of Euroregion	Membercountries	Date of foundation
Carpathian	Hungary-Ukraine-Romania	1993
Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa (DKMT)	Hungary-Romania-Serbia	1997
Danube-Drava-Sava	Hungary-Croatia-Bosnia- Hercegovina	1998
Ipel	Hungary-Slovakia	1999
Vag-Danube-Ipel	Hungary-Slovakia	1999
West-Pannonia	Hungary-Austria	1999
Kosice-Miskolc	Hungary-Slovakia	2000
Neogradiensis	Hungary-Slovakia	2000
Slaná-Rimava	Hungary-Slovakia	2000
Bihar–Bihor	Hungary-Romania	2002
Ister-Granum	Hungary-Slovakia	2003
Drava-Mura	Hungary-Croatia-Slovenia	2004
Murania	Hungary-Austria-Slovenia-Croatia	2004
Zemplen	Hungary-Slovakia	2004

At the same time there are lot confusions about the mentioned regions. Some of them are operating as working groups, some as Euroregions, but with same functions. In some cases a Euroregion is mentioned as an independent region, sometimes only as another name of a different region. For instance in some sources West-Pannonia is mentioned as Three Danubes Environ Euroregion, in some cases they are treated as separate organisations.

The mentioned connections were mainly founded to exploit the economical potentials, and to revitalize and develop the forgotten links between the border areas and economic activities. Several activities are connecting to this process such as infrastructural development, usage of modern communication technology or deepening commercial and business relations etc. Thus new touristic routs were created.

### RELATION OF TOURISM AND ECONOMY IN BORDER COUNTIES

Development demerits and backward position in economy has considerable effect on tourism. For an example low infrastructural supply can estop and worsen availability of a location, such no feasible touristic attraction can be developed so the region cannot enter a global network of tourism. Insufficient infrastructure like deficient road or sewage system, lack of internet or mobile communication availability shrinks possibilities. But not only infrastructure, the so called „*suprastructure*” is fundamental for running tourism in a region. Suprastructures are conditions which are providing operation of tourism in a defined region. It can be divided into primer suprastructure such as restaurants, accommodation facilities and seconder suprastructures which are only linking to tourism indirectly like renting houses or bazaars (Michalkó, 2007).

Tourist industry has personal and human resource conditions beyond infra- and suprastructure. Considering that semi-peripheral areas are affected by sizeable white-collar outmigration (Bujdosó, 2010; OTK, 2005) the exploitable human resource for tourism is relatively limited. Since not only the attendants are important participants of this industry, but also the projectors, guiders and the responsible management crew like Tourism Destination Management Offices, touristic officials in charge, or financial competent.

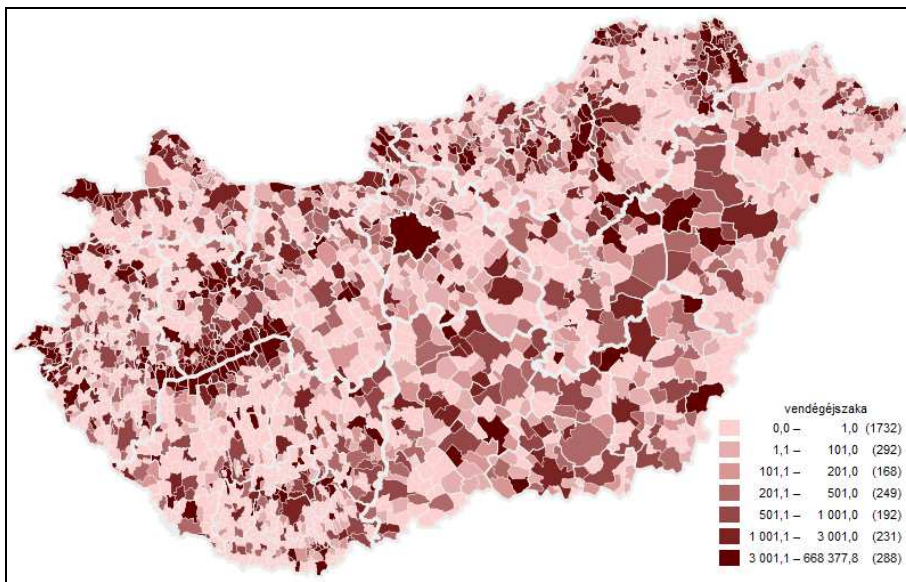


Figure 3. Number of overnight stays for 1000 persons in 2010<sup>2</sup>

Tourism of peripheral areas partially can solve economic and social problems, as it has been mentioned earlier, by creating new jobs and growing life circumstances, via foreign or domestic direct investments (AEBR, 1997). The first and the second National Spatial Development Plan of Hungary (1998 and 2005) highlight the importance of tourism development, advantaged financing and they also sketch some development strategies for the future in the peripheral touristic areas (OTK, 1998; OTK, 2005). These border regions can be featured with strong transit role (ie. passing through traffic and one-day-stay tourism). in economy and transport as well and also low number of overnight stays in tourism which also strengthening this role (Juray, 2005; Bujdosó, 2010). This feature was described by Bujdosó (2010) to Hungarian-Ukrainian border region, but figure 3 proves low number of overnight stays in the border regions, especially in Eastern-Hungary. Day trips, excursions and shopping tourism are the most

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ksh.hu/interaktiv/terkepek/mo/idegenf.html?mapid=OGA001>

determinant in this region, which are featured with short stay (Csordás, 1996; Aubert & Szabó, 2005; Aubert, 1996). Other authors consider border areas as bridges between two regions (the definition of region in this case is independent from similarities or differences) with rapidly changing temporary connections (Baranyi, 2001) which can be reduced by tourism via growing number of overnight stays and willingness for spending money.

### **POTENTIAL IN THEMATIC ROUTES**

More and more claims were formatting about researching elements of cultural tourism, which is a branch of tourism built up from - as its name implies – culture and human need for cultural diversity and novelty. The definition of culture is manifold and can be defined variously. A common point for all definitions is the dynamism of this term, while it is constantly changing and never steady, enmeshing our everyday life and activities (Nagy & Boros, 2012). Elements of culture can be separated into two groups, as material (buildings, furniture, tools etc.) and mental heritages (common customs, traditions) (Horváth, 1999; Kishenblatt & Gimblett 1998; Ashworth & Larkham, 1994).

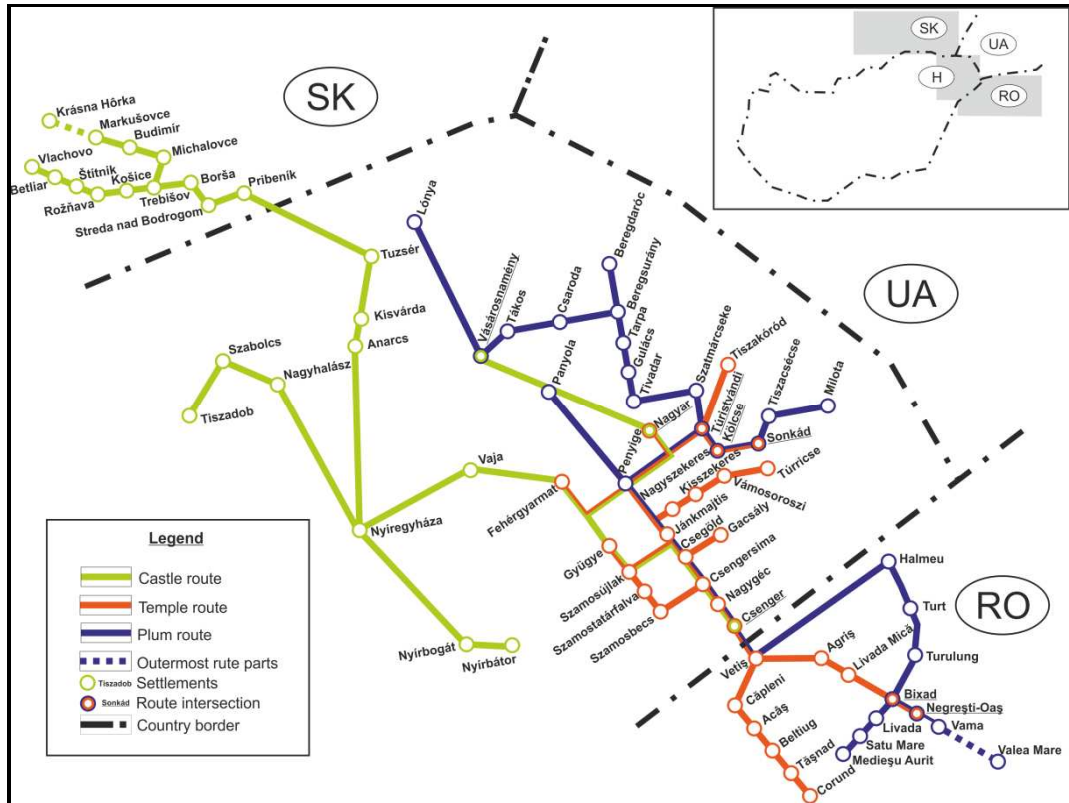
These elements give the base for new products of tourism like thematic routes which write up and detail a specified topic, a theme. Theme can be manifold or one fold about natural resources, cultural heritages, but the latter is more common (Puczkó & Rátz, 2002). Most famous thematic routes are mainly situated in Western-Europe in France or Germany. Latter country has strong traditions in creating thematic routes, such as Alpenstraße or Romantischestraße, or maybe the most famous Ruhr-Gebiet Industrial Route in Germany. Creation of these thematic paths is strictly regulated and operated in Germany (Juray, 2002; Demhardt, 2004).

Using the ideas of foreign thematic roads results the spread of these kinds of facilities in Hungary. The oldest routes are the Wine-routes which can be found in several Wine-regions. Castle-routes (northern and north-eastern part of the country) are also popular just like folk roads which are representing Hungarian traditions, folk art and more. But thematic routes are not only a new branch of tourism industry in Hungary, but best examples for cross border cooperation, since most of these paths are based on bilateral or multilateral partnerships within neighbouring countries and Hungary. The reason for the existence of these routes is grounded with the similarity of the natural and cultural heritage of the participants which can be utilized efficiently via collaboration. Good example for cultural homogeneity within cultural diversity is the Szatmár-Bereg region consisting of Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. This ethnic diversity, but cultural homogeneity is a good found for thematic routes.

First, the region's most characteristic fruit, the plum inspired the Hungarian-Romanian collaboration-borne Plum route. Since EU membership meant really the cessation of borders unhampered and easy travelling is provided between the two mentioned counties. The route introduces the traditional types of use of the fruit. Another theme of the region is a religious subject, the Church path presenting the medieval religious heritage. Cross border routes give omissible opportunity for faster integration for newly joined or future members why in one hand European funds are introduced for developing these themes. In another hand best practices can be adopted easily resulting territorial cohesion. In the followings two areas will be introduced via their thematic routes according to previous researches. The firsts are the routes of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and the seconds are paths of the Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa Euroregion.

### **RESEARCH RESULTS ON CROSS-BORDER TOURISM IN TWO STUDY AREAS, SZABOLCS-SZATMÁR-BEREG COUNTY AND DANUBE-KRIS-MURES-TISA EUROREGION**

The first study area is Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County where two Hungarian-Romanian and a Hungarian-Slovakian cooperation-borne routes were created using European funds from 2009 to 2012. The first two routes are the earlier mentioned Plum-route and Church route in the Romanian border region and the third one is the Castle route in the Slovakian border region (see figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Schematics of the three Cross Border Thematic Routes of Szabolcs-Számát-Bereg County

The research had examined the popularity, notoriety and satisfaction with quality of services of the thematic routes. It was based on a preliminary information and data collection, journal analysis. Later interviews were made with the Hungarian creators of the thematic routes. A survey was filled in on the internet ( $n=150$ ) within the Hungarian population to measure the foregoing factors and to find out the opinion about the visited routes. After the homepages of the routes were analysed according to subjective factors like availability of the pages, is there any maps about the route member settlement, in how many languages are these pages available or is there any information about the partner institutes.

As a result low notoriety and low popularity can be stated. Only few of the questioned population heard about or visited the mentioned routes. From those who have already visited the thematic paths moderate satisfaction was measured due to insufficient availability and services. However, all the respondents considered the routes as good and exemplary initiatives. There are problems waiting to be solved or developed, but the designated development path and these touristic products are accepted and supported by the public opinion. During the research the international context and theoretical background were also examined. According to the results the respondents are familiar with the cross border aspects of thematic routes. It is considerably eased with the reciprocal availability of the partner languages on the homepages. A problem occurs in connections with languages; however the pages are reachable in the creator's language, but no in others which determines guests. Only the Castle route's homepage is available in different language, like English, Hungarian, Romanian, Slovakian and Ukrainian. The Plum route is only presented in Hungarian and Romanian, the Church route's webpage in English, Hungarian and Slovakian. It is desirable to grow the language availability of these homepages to widen the range



of the visitors. Considering the results of the interviews the cooperation between the creators and the maintaining institution is constantly loosening. There are no forums where the problems can be discussed, not even solved. It would be desirable to strengthen the cooperation, grow the frequency of meetings and discussions, public forums for brainstorming and sharing experiences. As the connections are loosening the original goal, the growing economic performance is moving away. To prevent this constant development is needed.

The second sample area was the DKMT Euroregion which is a cooperation of Hungary Romania and Serbia. Seven thematic routes were created in various topics based on similarities in cultural heritage of the three countries (see table 2).

**Table 2.** Thematic routs of DKMT  
(Source: according to DKMT Euroregion, own edition)

Name	Thematic	Number of member settlements
„Recreation without borders”	wellness-health tourism	20
„Folklore without borders”	folklore heritage and memorials	31
„Happy times of peace”	secession/jugendstil buildings	17
„Wandering in the pantry of the Monarchy”	industrial, agricultural and water management memorials	35
„Enjoyable Flavours”	kadarka, beer and brandy	15
Gastronomic route	local courses and drinks	17
Historical memorials	historical heritages	42

Analysing the main priorities and goals of the Euroregions’ strategy a clear positioning is outlined strengthening territorial cohesion economic collaboration, developing infrastructure within peripheral areas via coordinated and sustainable planning, cultural and natural heritage protection. These goals are coherent with creation of thematic routes why:

- cross border cooperation strengthen cohesion;
- developing infrastructure for the routes is fundamental;
- strengthening economic performance can be realized via collaboration of partner countries.

The research clearly pointed out the potentials and the weaknesses of these thematic routes, and highlighted the reasons for existence. Thus now the routes are not operating properly, but conscious maintenance and utilizing possibilities can result sustainable growth in tourism so in economic performance as well.

## CONCLUSION

However peripheral areas struggle with bad economic performance, outmigration, social and economic backwardness the disadvantaged situation can be changed with international and cross border cooperation. In numerous cases best practices of western European countries can provide easily adaptable solutions with already built up institutional and legal background. Using their experiences Hungary started to develop her own cross border cooperation after the political transition which has been operating for more than 20 years now. In the beginning the main reason was grounding coherent development, easing integrations and fast closing up processes via cross border cooperation for future members of the EU. As a tool tourism and touristic routes were used to hype up economic performance of peripheral, but good touristic potential regions. These cooperations are giving a chance of a unified clout for the participants, as it was introduces via case studies of the paper. However these routes are juvenile movements, more collaboration can strength economic performance and have good effect on population creating coherent, developing, sustainable, truly European regions.



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