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DISCOVERING FOLK CRAFTS AND GASTRONOMY AS COMPONENTS OF THE COMMON CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE CARPATHIAN EUROREGION: EXPERIENCE OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Статтю присвячено практичній реалізації міжнародного проєкту КРА'ГАС – «Промоція ремесел та гастрономії як невід'ємних складових культурної спадщини Карпатського євро регіону» ID: HUSKROUA/1702/3.1/0027 (2019-2021) як прикладу транскордонного співробітництва трьох університетів і трьох бізнес-установ з Угорщини, Румунії та України з метою застосування інноваційного підходу до розширення культурного та туристичного потенціалу ремесел та гастрономії на їхніх прикордонних територіях. Хоча цей район має добре впізнавану культурну ідентичність, його багата спадщина страждає від згасання традиційних ремесел і гастрономії, а також від їх недостатньої популяризації. Проєкт полягав у тому, щоб шляхом впровадження туристичного транскордонного культурного маршруту у сфері ремесел та гастрономії подолати ці тенденції та сприяти розвитку туризму. Інноваційною є не ідея маршруту, а те, що він перш за все спирається на ґрунтовний антропологічний аналіз і розрахований на особливу категорію туристів. Гіпотеза дослідження полягала в тому, щоб висвітлити спільну культурну спадщину трьох країн, допомагаючи сприймати транскордонний регіон більше як спільну культурну територію, ніж як сукупність окремих культур. Матеріальні результати проєкту включають архів опитувань, оновлену базу даних ремісників, локацій та відповідних цікавих місць для тематичного транскордонного туристичного маршруту та наукову колективну монографію за результатами проєкту. Не менш цінними є нематеріальні результати співпраці міжнародних дослідників: краще розуміння спільного культурного коріння, зміцнення академічних мереж для професійного спілкування та надання можливостей пропагування культурної спадщини як у наукових колах, так і для бізнесу, сприяючи спільній міжкультурній обізнаності.

Ключові слова: культурний туризм, прикордонні території, антропологічний аналіз, тематичний маршрут, академічна мережа професійних контактів.

The paper considers the case of the international project KRA’GAS – “Promotion of Crafts and Gastronomy, as Relevant Components of the Cultural Heritage of the Carpathian Euroregion”, ID: HUSKROUA/1702/3.1/0027 (2019-2021) as an example of cross-border cooperation of three universities and three businesses from Hungary, Romania and Ukraine in order to test an innovative approach in boosting the heritage and touristic potential of crafts and gastronomy in their border territories. Although this area has a well-recognizable cultural identity, its rich heritage suffers from fading of traditional crafts and gastronomy, and from their lack of visibility. The project was to offer local producers an access to markets through tourism’ growth driven by a touristic cross-border cultural route on crafts and gastronomy. It was not the idea of a route that was innovative, but its being first grounded on an anthropological analysis and then, targeting the special category of “cultural tourists”. The research hypothesis was to highlight the common cultural heritage of three countries, helping perceive the cross-border region more as a common cultural area, than as a sum of local cultures. The tangible outcomes of the project comprise a survey archive (passports, video and audio records of interviews), an updated database of artisans, locations and relevant points of interest for a thematic cross-border touristic route and a scientific volume of collective research on the results of the KRAGAS project. No less valuable are the intangible outcomes of the international researchers’ cooperation: better understanding of the common cultural roots, strengthened academic networking and provided heritage dissemination opportunities both for academia and for businesses, promoting cross-cultural awareness.

Key words: *culture tourism, border territories, anthropological analysis, thematic route, academic networking.*

Justification of the problem. At a time of globalization and growing cultural sameness, it is of utmost importance to preserve the regional identity by means of cherishing those gems of the national heritage that create this identity. That was the primary goal of the international project KRA’GAS – “Promotion of Crafts and Gastronomy, as Relevant Components of the Cultural Heritage of the Carpathian Euroregion”, ID: HUSKROUA/1702/3.1/0027” (2019-2021), which brought three universities and three business organizations from Hungary, Romania and Ukraine together in order to propose and test an innovative approach in boosting the heritage and touristic potential of crafts and gastronomy in their border territories. Although this area has a well-recognizable cultural identity, its rich heritage suffers from fading of traditional crafts and gastronomy, and from their lack of visibility. Perceiving traditional food and crafts as strategic “spices” seasoning cultural tourism development, the project was ultimately to offer local producers an access to markets through tourism’ growth driven by a touristic cross-border cultural route on crafts and gastronomy.

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The research hypothesis was to highlight the common cultural heritage of three countries, helping perceive the cross-border region more as a common cultural area, than as a sum of local cultures. When proven, this hypothesis would provide an opportunity for businesses to promote the region not just as a list of sights, but as a common tourist destination. This hypothesis meant to test the research capacity and methodological reliability of three different research teams, which were to create a common vision and theoretical background the applied part of the project would proceed from.

Literature Review. Considering culture tourism as serious leisure dates back to the XXth century [11]. Developing the concept of alternative tourism, Triarchi, E., & Karamanis, K. explain the dynamic growth of cultural tourism by the fast growth of demand for trips to distant cultures, to the local heritage, various cultural attractions and amenities [5; 12; 13], which, in turn, stems from the increase of educated people around the world and the globalization [10]. The geographical factor in developing thematic routes was studied by Berki, M. & Csapó, J. [2].

Heritage has long been recognized as a pillar of tourism development in Europe. Studying cultural tourism as a very complex segment of the ‘tourism industry,’ János Csapó argues that as the tourists’ recreational needs are changing and their wish to get acquainted with the cultural values is strongly increasing, there emerge visitors with more diversified needs concerning cultural interest [3, 201]. According to Greg Richards, cultural tourism accounts for over 39% of tourism arrivals [8, 12]. Contemporary research in the field of cultural tourism has expanded into such domains as heritage conservation and anthropology, to mention but two relevant for this project, thus, creating a theoretical background for projects of this kind. Richards also highlights that the key research trends cover the ongoing transfer from tangible to intangible heritage, with more attention paid to indigenous and other minority groups and a geographical expansion in the coverage of cultural tourism research. Similar ideas were formulated by Du Cros, who maintained that intangible heritage, such as traditional culture, artisan skills and gastronomy, was able not only to promote tourism, but also to become special attraction that characterises the destination [4].

Determining the primary motive forces for cultural tourism, Richards and Wilson [9] mentioned the increased interest in culture and rising levels of cultural capital among the current demand factors. Against the backdrop of growing cultural tourism seen as a ‘good’ form of tourism and the increased role for intangible culture, image and atmosphere, the researchers, however, emphasise the growing problems of funding culture [7].

The up-to-date research has proven that the dividing lines between tourism and culture are becoming increasingly thin [6]. The UNWTO report (2018) emphasized the boosting demand for cultural tourism, which opens a lot of opportunities for the local businesses to expand this field [14]. Whereas up to one third of tourists in different parts of the world mention culture as the main reason for their holiday, people would

rather experience a wide range of cultural forms than one narrow form of culture, thus creating their own identity [6, 2-3].

However complicated and versatile the field of cultural tourism and heritage thematic routes proves to be for researchers, each practical realization in the field calls for scientific reflection and conceptualization to further contribute to the tourism industry development. The research findings were also informed by the recent publications of the UNWTO [14; 15], which overview the current trends in the cultural tourism development and provide a professional vision of its further prospects. The necessity to foster the traditional folk crafts in Transcarpathia and entrepreneurship skills of the local craftsmen, which was the focus of the KRAGAS project, has already become the focus of attention of Pannonia Socio-Cultural Development Society, which within the framework of the Eurasia Foundation project “Development of Private Entrepreneurship in the Field of Folk Crafts and Trades in the Mountain Settlements of Transcarpathia” held a seminar in Rakhiv for folk craftsmen and artisans who received free information and consulting help on marketing products of folk crafts such as embroidery, weaving, knitting, furriery, artistic working of metal, artistic treatment of wood, artistic treatment of stone and other types of folk crafts. Their findings were studied so that to benefit the KRAGAS project objectives. As the culture of the region is capable of stirring a strong tourist motivation to travel, the preservation of cultural heritage and its rational use are crucial for the sustainable attraction of tourist flows and for maintaining the popularity of a particular tourist destination.

The overall objective of KRA’GAS project was defined to develop the cross-border cooperation in the project region, by promoting the crafts and the gastronomic culture of the region as relevant components of the cultural heritage of the Carpathian Euroregion and as common regional tourist destinations, this way bringing closer the local communities and thinning the dividing lines between the EU members Hungary and Romania, and its neighbor, Ukraine. The specific objectives for research teams were to conduct an anthropological analysis in the project region on the subjects of crafts and gastronomy, in order to provide a rounded view of the knowledge, customs, and evolutions of the communities and to identify, map and test a thematic cross-border crafts and gastronomic touristic route in the project region. In view of the above-mentioned, the purpose of this paper is to trace various aspects of the researchers’ cross-border collaboration experience, evaluate its tangible and intangible outcomes.

Results of research. The reliability of the KRA’GAS project research findings was ensured by: (a) clear goal setting, which resulted from extensive consultations of research teams in view of the project’s overall objectives; (b) relevant staffing of the research teams by experts in cultural anthropology, applied anthropological research, European ethnology, history and tourism development; (c) well-thought-over methodology and justified methods and instruments of research; (d) the overall scope of research that thoroughly covered the territory of the project: multiethnic Maramureș

county (Romania), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county in Hungary and Transcarpathian region of Ukraine.

At the stage of the desk study, collaboration of three research teams was first managed by setting common directions of findings on the subjects of crafts and gastronomy, in order to provide a detailed view of the knowledge, customs, and evolution of the communities, highlighting the differences and similarities within and between these regional communities. There was first outlined a general view on rural gastronomy and crafts on the national levels. Then there were framed the ethnographic descriptions of the project target territories.

Altogether the international research team studied and processed 684 relevant publications and materials of 362 web-sites, compiling the common database of the project and repositiorium of research, which was the initial step for understanding the project area more as a common cultural area, rather than as a sum of small local cultures.

COVID-19 pandemic turned out to be a force majeure factor that not only made the project management have the research methodology adjusted but also put to test the cooperation opportunities of the research teams. Regular virtual meetings, zoom conferences, active e-mail and Viber message exchanges supported by project management documents proved effective in view of information exchange and efficient in term of the project budget.

The internet-mediated communication among the researchers allowed the teams frequently contact each other informally, re-think their findings in view of their practical implications for the cross-border touristic route, thus, overcoming a setback academia often faces: how to make desk research practically applicable. Besides discovering what three territories have in common and what is unique in each location, the scholars had to present the tourist points' unique selling proposition, i.e., what exactly can be offered for tourism markets.

The next, COVID-adjusted stage of anthropological analysis implied the in-depth research and a survey of culinary and craft artisans using any methods available to contact the target respondents. The international research team united their previous surveying experience and questionnaire samples to design a survey form that fits the project objectives, that is manageable and that can ensure the validity of the results received.

The total number of the respondents in three countries accounted for 308 people, all interviews conducted either face-to-face, on the telephone or via the internet messengers. The resulting database contained personal folders, one per each craftsman, containing a recorded interview, respondent's demographics, photos of the craftsman's products, workshops, etc. obtained from the internet or sent directly by the interviewees. Each interview was supported by the interviewee's official consent for using personal data and copyright agreement, which makes this database a valuable source of information for further research across cultures and beyond the framework of the project.

The process of implementing this stage of the research involved finding and identifying all craft and gastronomy producers in the selected regions; compiling a logical inventory with geographical locations; mapping the relevant producers and retailers to work out the route; determining length and duration of the cultural route, with a recommendation that distance traveled per day should not be more than 100-200 km; identifying other attractions and sites to link into the route; introducing visitors to local culture with a visit to local museums, carefully choosing hotels and restaurants to be incorporated into the route.

The logic underlying the desk research, when the development of rural crafts and gastronomy was studied in geographical clusters/districts, prompted the organization of the field research in the specified areas. The researchers incorporated the criteria selected for mapping the route into their field research trips and observations and recorded not only pure ethnographic/anthropological data but also existing infrastructure, accommodation opportunities, museums, festivals, etc.

Joint academic expertise produced the following shortlisting criteria for choosing the stakeholders to be included in the cross-border route:

- the stakeholder attractiveness (max. 20 points)
- interactivity (tourist engagement, max. 10 points)
- authenticity (max. 10 points)
- the number of tourists that can be accommodated (max. 10 points)
- meal/accommodations in the near vicinity (max. 10 points)
- points of interest nearby (max. 10 points)
- accessibility (roads, transportation) (max. 10 points) (Ukraine)

According to these criteria 92 stakeholders/locations and 85 points of interest were tested to be mapped on the route.

Thus, the joint efforts of university researchers managed to inform business regarding a cross-border thematic route, which, by the end of the project in September 2021, contained 30 tested locations in three countries, which were attended by influencers. However, populating this tourist path with relevant locations is a dynamic and continuous process, which relies on solid anthropological findings, and the route could be further populated by at least 50 other new locations by the end of 2021.

So, the cross-border cooperation of university researchers from Romania, Hungary and Ukraine brought the following tangible outcomes. A research archive (passports, video and audio records of interviews) of the traditional local crafts and gastronomy in the Carpathian Euroregion, project's interim reports on the research teams' activities, an updated database of artisans and locations and a database of the relevant points of interest on the thematic cross-border touristic route provide proven sources of information for further in-depth anthropological and ethnographic research and may brief tourist agencies and relevant stakeholders with consolidated applied data.

Another tangible result following the KRAGAS project was a scientific volume of collective research by scholars from three universities, which turned out to be analyt-

ical by nature, versatile by focus, yet permeated by common values and synergetic by its outcomes [1].

No less valuable are the intangible outcomes of the international researchers' cooperation. Primarily, it was better understanding of the common cultural roots, which was promoted not only by academic research but also by translating scholarly knowledge into its virtual presentation on the ViaGastrocarpathia tourist route web-site, which communicated the specific features of the route to the wide public. On-line cooperation of the researchers strengthened academic networking and provided heritage dissemination opportunities both for academia and for businesses, promoting cross-cultural awareness in all walks of life.

Conclusions and Implications. Responding to the tourist industry standstill, UN-WTO and UNESCO have developed guidelines on the responsible restart of cultural tourism [15] basing on the principles of shared responsibilities and greater inclusion, thus, contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. The document emphasizes promoting synergies, welcoming greater collaboration between the tourism and culture sectors stakeholders and greater coordination to increase and strengthen international cooperation and networks that can meet the society's need for intercultural dialogue and responsible consumption.

The case of KRA'GAS project successfully demonstrated that cross-border cooperation between research institutions and between academia and businesses can be effective even against the backdrop of such disasters as a pandemic. Facilitated by the internet technologies and boosted by the participants' motivation such cooperation is an impressive example of win-win partnership with far-reaching outcomes.

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