

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION OF THE TOWNS OF ŠTÚROVO – OSTRIHOM IN THE CONTEXT OF VISITORS'S OPINION

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Abstract: Aim of this research was an evaluation analysis of cross-border cooperation in two towns within the Slovak–Hungarian border area. Of fundamental importance was the evaluation of the cooperation in a context of frequency of visits and their purposes, frequency of shopping visits and their purposes, image and stature of the towns of Štúrovo and Ostrihom in the EU. The results obtained in this research point out the existence of positive relationship of visitors and can be useful in further orientation of cross-border cooperation for both of the towns.

Key words: cross-border cooperation, local development, Štúrovo, Ostrihom, the European Union

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays we have been witnessing an intensive interest of post-communist countries towards the integration into the EU. Integration of the Slovak Republic begins with the acceptance for full EU membership. Further development necessarily requires cooperation at all the levels of economic, social and cultural life with all other developed and developing countries of Europe. The existing economic cooperation, common historical and cultural development and national continuity of regions create a unique possibility to intensify cooperation of Central European countries.

There seems to be a possibility of cooperation, especially at the lower levels of administration. The cross-border regions have an important position in this process. They represent a significant spatial element, which enables a better mastering of the transformation process and development on the basis of supranational cooperation. Among these we include the area of the town of Štúrovo on the Slovak side and Ostrihom (Esztergom) on the Hungarian side of Danube.

2. DETERMINATION OF THE AREA

The area in question is located in the south part of south-western Slovakia. First peculiarity is that it covers the cross-border area of Slovak-Hungarian state border. Second peculiarity is that the towns are connected with Danube. The area consists of two towns. One of them, Štúrovo, is located on the Slovak side and Ostrihom on the Hungarian side.

3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Cross-border cooperation presents one of the basic problems of creating new Europe. Intensive development appears in this border area along both Slovak and Hungarian side of the state border. This contribution should help the spatial analysis of these trends.

Cross-border cooperation along the Slovak-Hungarian state border has been focused by following authors: Baková, Hasprová, Kramáreková (2001), Drgoňa (1999), Drgoňa, (2001a), Drgoňa (2001b), Drgoňa, Turnock (2000), Dubcová, Gazdag (2001), Halás, Slavík (2001), Krogmann, Pulpitlová (2001), Lauko (2001), Spišiak (2001), Terem (2000a), Terem (2000b), Zemko, Buček (2000).

4. METHODS OF RESEARCH

Our research uses the technique of questionnaire. The sampling included 200 respondents (100 from Slovak and 100 from Hungarian side). Total population of Štúrovo is 11,708. The population of Ostrihom is 18,224. The survey sample were visitors older than 18 years. The survey was held in the months of March and April 2005. It was based on subjective evaluation of the visitors of Štúrovo and Ostrihom.

From the total sum of 11 questions, regarding the cross-border cooperation:

1. four dealt with the question of visits' frequency, reasons of visits to the neighboring towns, satisfaction with the assortment of shops and reasons of shopping visit
2. one question tried to ascertain the intensity of cooperation in each field of economy
3. one question was aimed to ascertain whether the relation is positive or negative
4. two questions studied what do the visitors like most and what worries them mostly
5. last 3 questions of the questionnaire were oriented at ascertaining the stature of both cities after Slovak Republic and Hungary entered the EU

Part of the scientific study was preparation and work out of the questionnaire aimed at ascertaining the relationship between the two towns of Štúrovo and Ostrihom. The questionnaire was anonymous and consisted of 11 questions. It was written in Slovak as well as in Hungarian language. We asked the citizens of Štúrovo to express their opinions about the neighbor town of Ostrihom and the citizens of Ostrihom were asked to do the same in regard to Štúrovo. In both cities 100 people took part in filling out the questionnaire in the age between 18 and 75 (118 men and 82 women). We have collected total of 200 questionnaires.

5. THE RESULTS

Question 1: How often do you visit your neighbor town?

Based on the ascertained data on visits to Štúrovo (respectively Ostrihom) we can conclude that the citizens of Ostrihom visit Štúrovo more often than the citizens of Štúrovo visit Ostrihom. 78 of those who were questioned visit Štúrovo once a month yet not single one of them works there. We obtained different results from the citizens of Štúrovo, majority of whom goes to the neighbor town 2 or 3 times a year only. Thus have respond 75 of the respondents when expressing their opinion regarding this question. Still high proportion was of those who visit Ostrihom every month, precisely 69 of questioned people. Among those who were questioned were also workers who go to work to Ostrihom every day. 5 of them work in Suzuki establishment and 3 in the hospital Vaszary Kolos (see Table 1). For a comparison and for the purpose of transparency the results are illustrated also on the figure 1.

Table 1 The frequency of visits to Štúrovo/Ostrihom

Visits	Answers of the citizens of Ostrihom about Štúrovo	Answers of the citizens of Štúrovo about Ostrihom
Daily	22	15
Once a week	49	33
Once a month	78	69
2 – 3 times in a year	51	75
I'm employed there	0	8

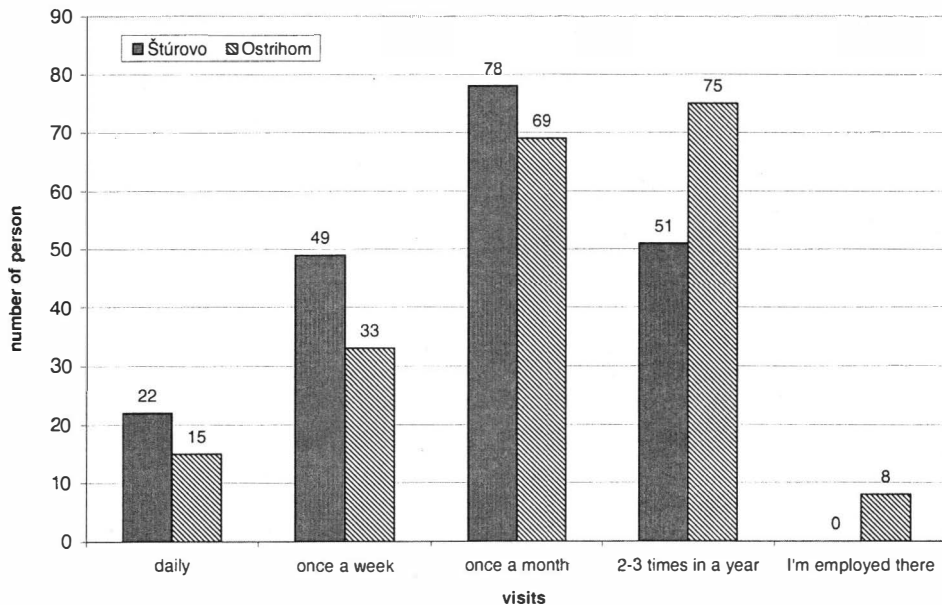


Figure 1 Frequency of visits of the towns Štúrovo/Ostrihom

Question 2: What do you visit the neighbor town for?

The citizens of Ostrihom visit Štúrovo mainly because of the water sports resort Vadaš during the summer season, (83 of those questioned). 77 respondents visit Štúrovo because of shopping and 34 declares refueling cheaper gasoline as their reason of visit (Table 2).

Table 2 Identification of the reason of visiting Štúrovo/Ostrihom

Reason of visits	Number of answers of Ostrihom citizens regarding Štúrovo	Number of answers of Štúrovo citizens regarding Ostrihom
Shopping	77	132
Swimming pools	83	6
Cultural events	0	59
Refueling	34	0
Other	6	3

We obtained completely different results from the citizens of Štúrovo, who visit Ostrihom mainly because of shopping. 59 citizens declared that they visit Ostrihom because of different cultural events and only a minimal part of citizens visits the swimming pools in the center of Ostrihom. The results are depicted transparently via figure 2.

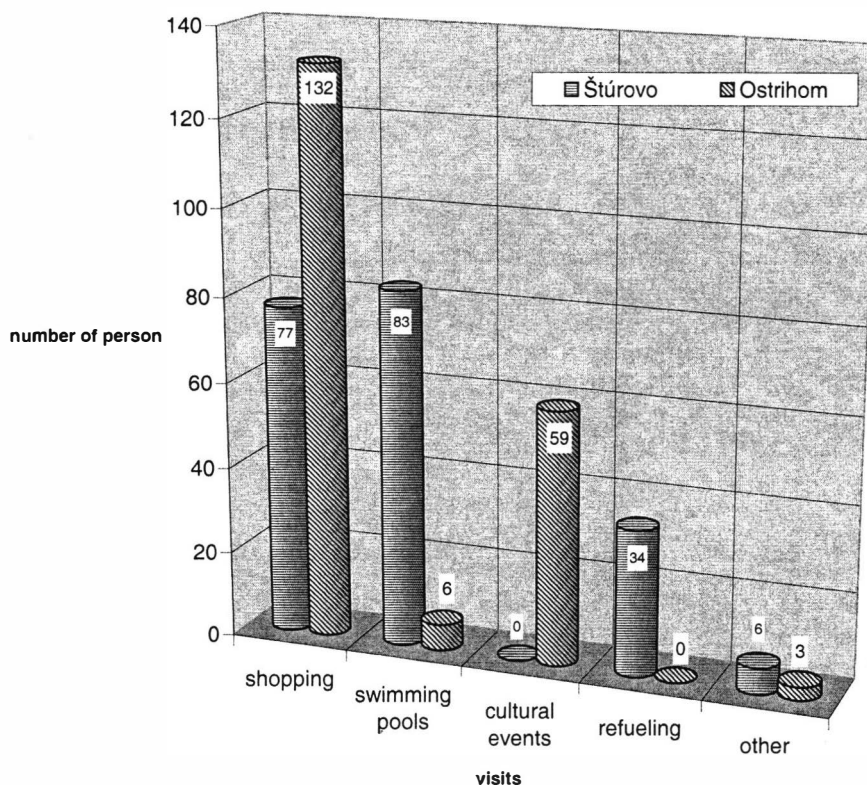


Figure 2 Graphic representation of visit's reason Štúrovo/Ostrihom

Question 3: Are you satisfied with the selection of goods in shops ? Is there anything you miss in the shops?

When answering this question, majority of respondents expressed their satisfaction in general. In case of Ostrihom some of the respondents expressed their opinion of missing specialized shopping assistants in shops. Citizens of Ostrihom on the other hand would warmly welcome a wider selection of goods in shops and more vintage products.

Question 4: Why do you go shopping?

When looking at the following two graphs we can see the difference of results we obtained from the respondents. 153 of questioned citizens of Ostrihom go shopping to the left bank of Danube. The reason is cheaper products (Table 3).

Citizens of Štúrovo go shopping in Ostrihom because of greater range of products. So has responded 108 questioned citizens. According to 53 of them they can buy some products cheaper in Ostrihom (Figure 3).

Table 3 Identification of reasons for shopping in Štúrovo/Ostrihom

Why do you go shopping in Štúrovo/Ostrihom	Answer of respondents from Ostrihom	Answer of respondents from Štúrovo
It's cheaper	153	53
They have higher quality	20	22
Bigger choice	8	108
You can't find that kind of product in our shops	19	17



Figure 3 Graphic representation of the reason of shopping in Štúrovo/Ostrihom

Question 5: In which branch of economy you see the cooperation between the two towns as the most intensive?

Most of respondents, 73 of those questioned, sees the most intensive cooperation between these towns in the area of health care. 65 inhabitants put culture on the second place according to great number of cultural events organized mutually. 36 inhabitants were in favor of tourism. While on the Slovak side it is mostly spa oriented tourism on the Hungarian side it is dominantly hiking and bicycle tourism. Industry is on the fourth place asserted by 11 of those questioned. They answered in favor of industry mainly because of work positions in the area of automotive industry. Sport activities especially

football and bicycle racing are coming to forefront. 10 of those questioned see the most intensive cooperation precisely in this area. The least respondents expressed their opinion to traffic which obtained only 5 votes. (Figure 4).

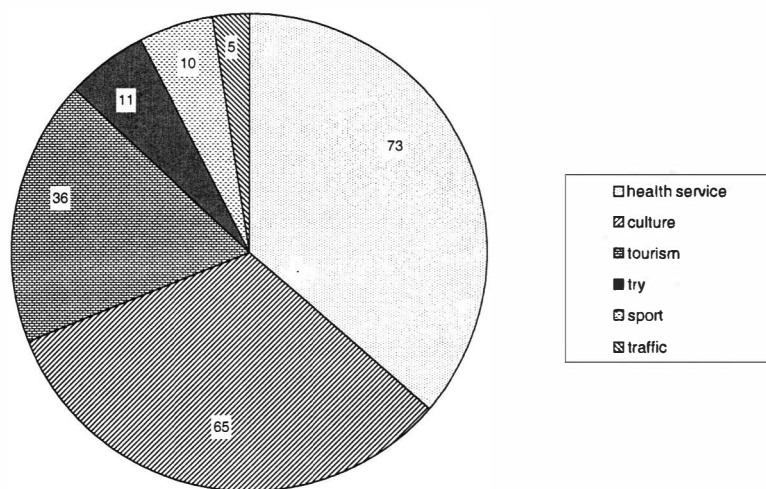


Figure 4 Graphic representation of cooperation according to its intensity

Question 6: Is the relationship between Štúrovo and Ostrihom positive or negative according to your opinion? Describe closer in which fields.

Majority of respondents expressed positive views. They see positive relation in the multitude of work places in the area of industry and health care. When identifying the opinions of citizens of Ostrihom, we obtained completely different standpoints. According to many of them the attitude of Slovaks to Hungarian citizens have changed in positive sense. Between the inhabitants of both banks of Danube strong relations of friendship have generated, they visit each other and organize mutual activities.

Some citizens of Ostrihom view negatively that some of customer's of Ostrihom's restaurants go to Štúrovo and its surrounding area. The reasons are lower prices of goods in equal quality as on their side of Danube.

Question 7: What do you like the most about Štúrovo/Ostrihom?

When answering this question the citizens of Ostrihom answered unanimously in favor of swimming pools Vadaš which they find to be on very good level. Many of them like to spend here their summer vacations. Many like Štúrovo because the culture has been preserved here as well as the fact that the city is cleaner. They like Štúrovo also because the view of basilica in Ostrihom is nicer from this side.

The citizens of Štúrovo like the most the historical sights, well organized cultural events or walks on the banks of Malý Dunaj.

Question 8: What worries you the most about Ostrihom/Štúrovo?

When answering the question "What worries you the most about the neighbor town?", many after long thinking answered that they like it as it is and would not change anything. But there were also some who did not like about Štúrovo that noticeable street

signs are missing. Many of the respondents reacted negatively also to the current (2005) reconstruction of the passenger zone in the center of Štúrovo which supposedly will not be completed by the summer 2005. The citizens of Štúrovo do not like that the shops selling clothes are – when compared to Slovak shops – more expensive. Many are worried about the night life in Ostrihom during different music festivals and badly solved traffic in the center of Ostrihom.

Question 9: Has the cooperation between these two towns changed in any way by the fact that they both became parts of EU?

The majority responded that the cooperation between these two towns did not change after joining the EU. Greater importance than to the fact of joining the EU is ascribed to the reconstruction of Mária Valéria bridge.

Question 10: Have the circumstances on borders changed in any way after both countries joined EU?

Respondents answered positively to the fact that the transport has become faster and thus the waiting times on both sides become shorter.

Question 11: How do you perceive Mária Valéria bridge?

Majority of respondents sees this bridge as a symbol of friendship, cross connection of nations as well as a possibility of barrier free traveling to the neighbor country. Some see this bridge as a bond which enabled cooperation between Štúrovo and Ostrihom.

6. CONCLUSION

The main aim of the research was the analysis and evaluation of cross-border cooperation of two towns in Slovak-Hungarian border area. Its basis was evaluation of cooperation in the context of visit's frequency, the reasons of visit, frequency of shopping, the reasons of shopping, their image and stature in EU. The obtained results point out to the existence of positive relation of visitors, their mutual image, fortified by no language barrier.

The results of the research can be used as guidelines for the future development of cross-border cooperation of both towns.

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Cezhraničná spolupráca miest Štúrovo a Ostrihom v kontexte názorov návštevníkov

Resume

V súčasnosti pozorujeme intenzívny záujem postkomunistických krajín o integráciu do modernej Európy. Integrácia Slovenskej republiky sa začala jej prijatím za rovnoprávneho člena Európskej únie. Ďalší rozvoj si nevyhnutne vyžaduje spoluprácu na všetkých úrovniach hospodárskeho, spoločenského a kultúrneho života s ostatnými vyspelými a rozvíjajúcimi krajinami Európy. Existujúca hospodárska spolupráca, spoločný historický a kultúrny rozvoj a národnostná previazanosť regiónov vytvára jedinečnú možnosť zintenzívniť spoluprácu stredoeurópskych krajín.

Ukazuje sa možnosť spolupráce najmä na nižších úrovniach riadenia. Dôležitú pozíciu v tomto procese majú pohraničné územia. Tvoria významný priestorový prvok, ktorý umožňuje lepšie zvládnuť proces transformácie a rozvoj na základe intenzívnej nadnárodnej spolupráce. Medzi ne radíme aj územie miest Štúrovo na slovenskej strane a Ostrihomu na maďarskej strane.

Vo výskume sa použila technika dotazníka. Výber obsahoval 200 respondentov (100 zo slovenskej a 100 z maďarskej strany). Počet obyvateľov Štúrova je 11 708. Počet obyvateľov Ostrihomu je 18 224. Anketovaná vzorka boli návštevníci starší ako 18 rokov. Výskum sa uskutočnil v mesiacoch marec a apríl 2005. Založený bol na subjektívnom hodnotení návštevníkov miest Štúrovo a Ostrihom.

Z celkového súboru 11-tich otázok o cezhraničnej spolupráci:

- štyri riešili problematiku frekvencie návštev, dôvodu návštev susedných miest, spokojnosť s obchodným sortimentu obchodov a dôvodu návštevy obchodov,
- jedna zisťovala intenzitu spolupráce v jednotlivých odvetviach hospodárstva,
- jedna skúmala, či je vzťah návštevníkov k mestám pozitívny alebo negatívny,
- dve študovali, čo sa návštevníkom najviac páči a čo ich znepokojuje,

- posledné tri otázky dotazníka boli orientovaná na postavenie obidvoch miest po vstupe Slovenskej republiky do EÚ (celkovo tri otázky).

Cieľom výskumu bola analýza hodnotenia cezhraničnej spolupráce dvoch miest slovensko – maďarského pohraničia. Jej základom bola zhodnotenie spolupráce v kontexte frekvencie návštev, ich dôvodu, frekvencie návštev obchodov, ich dôvodu, ich imidžu a postavenia v EÚ.

Získané výsledky poukazujú na existenciu pozitívnych vzťahov návštevníkov, ich vzájomného imidžu, umocnených neexistenciou jazykovej bariéry.

Výsledky výskumu je možné využiť pri usmerňovaní ďalšieho rozvoja cezhraničnej kooperácie obidvoch miest.