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CROSS-BORDER TOURISM COOPERATION OF SLOVENIA AND CROATIA

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to examine the possibilities of cross-border tourism cooperation in the border areas of Slovenia and Croatia. We wanted to determine whether interest exists for cross-border tourism cooperation and what is the level of interest according to tourism supply providers. In surveying the selected population, we have applied a standardized, self-administered questionnaire. In the introductory part, we list the motivations, advantages and weaknesses of cooperation, and in the following section, we focus on the specifics of cross-border cooperation and look at the development stages of cooperation as well as the levels of cross-border tourism cooperation. Results demonstrate a high level of willingness to cooperate. Respondents perceive possibilities to increase their tourism offering as well as possibilities of creating a joint tourism offering on the localities with compatible tourist attractions.

Key words: cross-border tourism cooperation, cross-border tourist destinations, tourism management, tourism.

Sažetak: PREKOGRANIČNA SURADNJA U TURIZMU NA PRIMJERU SLOVENIJE I HRVATSKE. Svrha ovog rada bila je ispitivanje mogućnosti za prekograničnu suradnju na području turizma u graničnom području Slovenije i Hrvatske. Željeli smo utvrditi postoji li zanimanje za prekograničnu suradnju i na kakvom je ono stupnju po mišljenju nositelja turističke ponude. Upotrijebili smo standardizirani upitnik za anketiranje odabrane populacije, koji su bili u potpunosti samopopunjavani. U uvodnom dijelu smo naveli motive, prednosti i nedostatke suradnje, a zatim smo se posvetili posebnostima prekogranične suradnje unutar kojih smo naveli razvojne faze suradnje kao i stupnjeve prekogranične suradnje. Rezultati su pokazali da je spremnost za prekograničnu suradnju na visokom nivou. Ispitanici vide mogućnosti povećanja svoje turističke ponude prekograničnom suradnjom kao i mogućnosti kreiranja integralnog turističkog proizvoda na mjestima gdje za to postoje kompatibilne turističke atraktivnosti.

Cljučne riječi: prekogranična suradnja, prekogranične turističke destinacije, turistički menadžment, turizam.

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INTRODUCTION

Because globalisation has spread to the tourist trade, expectations are that a large part of this industry - in particular, the part yielding greater value added - will be integrated directly into world competition. Today's tourism is characterised by emerging new destinations and increasingly fierce competition. At the same time, however, tourism demand is experiencing exceptionally rapid growth. From 1950 to 2000, this physical scope of tourism traffic has been growing at an average annual rate of 7% (Peric, 2000, 1356). Ritchie and Crouch (1993, 47-48) also call attention to the upshots of globalisation for tourism that make it essential to develop and enter into strategic alliances with other organisations and destinations.

Collaboration presupposes open communication and adaptability as key components in addressing joint issues and maintaining productive and satisfactory cooperation and interaction. Integration into a broader area has become an economic and technical precondition to survival, with integration processes requiring networked spatial arrangements, a concept that in every way exceeds the concept of a national economy.

Derived from the Latin *integer* (entire, whole), the term 'integration' means the bringing together of parts into one unit, but also the complementing and sustaining of existing units (Vujević, 1980, 7). Cross-border cooperation requires even greater care than inter-organisational cooperation within a country, because it operates in different conditions, requires legal and administrative regulations that have been adjusted accordingly, and depends upon an array of other factors linked to the purpose, objectives and support of collaboration. Cross-border interactions between local and regional communities can be formal or informal, primary (spontaneous) or secondary (organised).

Although state boundaries have most often been viewed through history as visible barriers to interaction among people, today the number of examples of cross-border tourism cooperation in advanced countries is steadily growing. The world is full of examples of neighbouring regions of different countries sharing priceless natural and/or cultural resources that have potential for joint tourism development. In some of these regions, the principles of sustainable development can be implemented more efficiently through cross-border cooperation. However, all of these cases require the support and approval of the state (government). In addition, a special tourism management structure is needed that will facilitate cross-border coordination, while respecting the sovereignty of all partners involved (Timothy, 2000).

MOTIVATIONS AND REASONS FOR COLLABORATION, STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Today, in fact, the primary stimulus to cooperation in tourism is the differentiation of products and services and the merging of strengths (know-how, ideas, innovations, and other resources) to gain competitive advantages on the international

tourist market. The major reason why many companies decide to enter into one form of cooperation or another is the speed at which objectives may be achieved on the market.

Lynch (1993, 20) suggests five basic criteria used in deciding whether to enter a strategic partnership or not:

1. A thorough conceptual understanding of the structure of collaboration and how it interconnects with strategic and operational functions,
2. Administration must fully understand the unique management components of auditing and the 'extended' organisation,
3. Both partners must enter into the partnership with a clear understanding and realistic expectations,
4. Regardless of the type of partnership, there must be a clearly visible singular 'entity' and the executive staff must be knowledgeable of all the resources and the nature of adjustments needed to respond to changes in the environment,
5. The process of building collaboration should not be separate from the signatories of collaborative arrangements and operating managers. Also, the objectives of collaboration and the possibility of their evaluation must be clear to all those involved.

According to Lynch (1993), the criteria for entering a collaborative arrangement are:

- the competitive attainment of strategic objectives,
- the reduction of risk together with an increase in benefits,
- the impact on valuable resources.

Providing collaboration is based on the above listed criteria, it can result in many advantages and benefits in the long-term outlook. Entering into a collaborative arrangement because of financial or other problems may easily result in failure and defeat.

Tefler (2001) sees the reasons for the accelerated development of collaboration and partnerships in a mutual resource fund, economy of scales or scope, and in the sharing of costs and risks between partners. Margun (in Tefler, 2001) adds that the increasingly subtle, profound and enduring driving power behind the rapid growth of collaboration worldwide can be attributed to the globalisation of world economies, the acceptance of the fact that competitiveness alone does not necessarily represent an optimum force of growth, and the understanding that competitive ability and collaboration among companies are needed to secure growth on a dynamic and unstable market.

Given the presence of a potential partner in a neighbouring destination having complementary attractions, it is better for both sides to cooperate, rather than to compete.

Lynch (1993, 21-22) also illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of collaboration. He lists the following strengths that are characteristic of collaboration:

- synergy, resulting from a combination of various resources,
- speedy operations, especially when larger companies are collaborating with smaller ones,

- shared risks and the possibility of taking risks for certain opportunities that we would otherwise decide not to take,
- the transfer of technologies among companies, and maintaining competitive positions on their individual markets,
- connecting rivals on their territories without spending money to battle them,
- the increase of sales and access to larger markets due to distribution channels,
- the flow of capital to smaller companies from larger ones based on stock agreements or R&D,
- protecting the unity within each company, as many forms of collaboration do not involve joint investments,
- faster adjustment to new changes in technology,
- increasing the scope of marketing, vertically or horizontally, making it possible to enter markets that otherwise cannot be concurred.

The weaknesses of collaboration involve:

- demands for new auditing methods,
- demands for unique management skills,
- demands for liability in the field of resources.

Timothy (2000) also points to some of the weaknesses of cross-border collaboration and partnerships. He notes that while participation and cooperation in cross-border relations are indeed necessary, it is unfortunate that not all results are satisfactory. He goes on to say that these forms of collaboration require substantial investments in time and funds, and if we are not careful, we could end up with more costs (not only in terms of money) than benefits. The opposite effect may occur in some cases of full integration, that is, the tourist attractions of two countries become the same, whereas the purpose of cooperation is, in fact, to integrate diversities that complement one another. Some theoreticians claim that contrasts in the spheres of politics, economics, culture and landscapes are part of the tourist attraction of adjacent regions (Arreola & Curtis, 1993; Eriksson, 1979; Leimgruber, 1989; in Timothy, 2000, 23). It may happen that in some cases cross-border coordination will give rise to a calculating attitude in political players and will lead to the strengthening of existing powers among the privileged on both sides of the border, which can result in more pronounced disparity in terms of the outcome of regional development (Scott, 1998; in Timothy, 2000).

SPECIFICS OF CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION

The specifics of cross-border tourism cooperation need to be considered with great care and with an understanding of fundamental notions. For example, it should be clear that collaboration agreements in tourism planning entail very close contacts and communication (face-to-face) with all participants, from the public to the private sector, and with an array of industries that take part in tourism planning. This type of collaboration can lead to effective dialogue and negotiations in building mutually acceptable interests and forwarding proposals on how to go about developing tourism

in a given region. Toplak (1999, 27) classifies issues regarding cross-border cooperation according to basic areas and degrees, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 1: Classification of cross-border issues per areas and degrees

Area of cross-border cooperation	Degree of cross-border cooperation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ecology and spatial planning ▪ transport and communication ▪ business and employment ▪ tourism ▪ education and culture ▪ cross-border population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ exchange of information ▪ consultation ▪ cooperation ▪ harmonisation ▪ integration

Source: Toplak, C. Priročnik o čezmejnem sodelovanju za lokalne in regionalne skupnosti Evrope, 1999, p. 27

In the field of tourism, cross-border collaboration can be classified according to areas of action (Toplak, 1999, 31):

The valorisation of joint tourism opportunities:

- designing joint tourism products;
- publishing tourist guides, joint presentations at fairs, building on the usual tourism products, cooperation in the field of tourism and organising joint promotional activities;
- providing information on exhibitions, fairs and presentation; producing joint maps.

Harmonising infrastructure (investments and training):

- producing and harmonising statistics regarding hotel bed occupancy rates or various attendance rates;
- developing cross-border sports facilities (also for water sports);
- setting up high-level training programs for the field of tourism.

Harmonising policies regarding possible leisure activities:

- cross-border investments in cultural projects;
- opening ticket offices for entertainment events on both sides of s border;
- exchanging musical and theatrical ensembles;
- harmonising museum exhibitions..

All other areas of cross-border cooperation mentioned above are also equally important for the tourism industry. This is because the extent to which tourism is interlinked with and dependent upon these areas is such that it determines and indirectly impacts of quality of this industry.

As we have stated earlier that any cross-border collaboration is a gradual process, it would be appropriate, at the end of this section, to look at this process's

basic development phases. We list the primary stages of development according to Klotjčnik (in Toplak, 1999):

Phase One involves preliminary activities to design a framework and create conditions that will lead to efficient cooperation:

- activities in making contacts and establishing connections that contribute to creating a favourable climate for the continuous exchange of information and experiences;
- setting up formal (public) and informal (private, combined) contacts and networks;
- conducting research and studies into the problems and potentials of economic growth, and based on these, studies into the opportunities that collaboration in transboundary regions provides.

Phase Two represents the beginning of cooperation that has a development orientation, is based on strategy, and anticipates specific goals. Valorising joint resources and skills should lead to synergic effects, which it is possible to achieve by attaining a higher degree of quality (goal economics) as well as a larger volume of business activities (economy of scales).

Phase Three merely leads up to the formation of joint structures of cross-border cooperation. This does not mean that new legal entities are created, but rather refers to interlacing and connecting the executives of organisations already existing at regional/local levels. In this phase, it is necessary to create the bodies that are essential to cooperation (joint secretariat, task forces, parliament).

Ravbar (1996) notes that the first steps of cooperation in frontier zones usually evolve out of the cross-border contacts of the borderland population, and that transboundary employment and shopping are the most common forms of spontaneous cross-border collaboration in its first phase. Cross-border collaboration is the result of inter-adjacent and other arrangements. From this aspect, we can speak of cross-border collaboration as an eminent regional planning process.

Tourism development should not be left to a few politicians, civil service offices or entrepreneurs in tourism, but rather it should be an issue addressed by entire range of industries that are either directly or indirectly associated with tourism. Bramwell and Lane (2000) point out that partnership approaches to tourism planning have been well received by government and public agencies in many advanced countries. Kotler *et al.* (in Bramwell and Lane, 2000) stress that the key reason for the growing interest in partnerships in tourism development is the belief that tourist destinations and organisations can gain competitive advantages by placing the knowledge, expertise, capital and other resources of partners into one 'mutual fund'. Some authors refer to the competitive advantages thus gained as 'collaborative advantages'.

Similarly, cross-border tourism collaboration between Slovenia and Croatia should be viewed as an opportunity for taking an innovative approach, innovations being the lever of development. By using and building upon innovations, we can insure specific competitive advantages on the international tourist market.

Gulič, Križičnik and Praper (1998) assert that in the case of Slovenia and Croatia it would be possible to establish so-called micro region alongside the border, considering that numerous contacts and urban networks exist on both sides of the border.

FEATURES OF BORDERS IN CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION

Private-public initiatives are of vital importance because the public sector depends upon private sector investors to provide services and finance the construction of the tourism offering. Similarly, the individual tourism projects require the approval, support and infrastructure development that the government provides. For these reasons the participation of government agencies is of the utmost importance if tourism development is to proceed smoothly. Also, the tourism development of a given region calls for the well-coordinated participation of all administrative levels (state, regional, local or destination, and municipal) according to their liability and competence within the tourism system. Partnerships between same-level administrative agencies are equally important, especially when natural or cultural resources located in the cross-border regions of two or more countries are involved. These partnerships can help to prevent the exploitation or poor valorisation of resources, as well as the economic, social and environmental imbalances that often arise on opposite side of state borders.

Although the typology of cross-border interactions varies in some minor details from one author to another (Martinez in Timothy, 2000; Toplak, 1999), in essence, it is the same in all cases. As we have used the typology according to Toplak in the empirical part of this paper, this section will focus only on Toplak's classification (1999, 35). According to this classification, we have:

1. **Complete absence of interaction** (The borderland populations know little of each other and adhere strongly to their national identity, with the border representing the safety and physical boundary of their systems. Through decentralisation, the majority of European countries have surpassed this stage.)
2. **Exchange of information** (This is the stage when first contacts are made, generally at the local level. Collaboration calls for better knowledge of the political, cultural, social and economic features of the neighbouring country. For example, what is the difference between a prefect in Slovenia and a mayor in Croatia? Knowing the neighbour well helps in assessing the opportunities for cooperation and in setting up efficient partnerships.)
3. **Consultation** (It is customary in Western Europe to inform and consult with neighbouring countries on planned activities that could be of interest to them, for example, in the field of spatial planning and environmental protection.)
4. **Collaboration** (Reaching joint solutions to joint issues is the most effective answer for borderland regions; in this way, best results can be achieved through the help of cross-border institutions, as well.)
5. **Harmonisation** (This stage of cross-border interaction has not yet been reached in Europe or is only being put in place, as it calls for mutual

understanding and previously defined common ground based on which it is possible to build formal arrangements and agreements for concrete action.)

6. **Integration** (This stage of cross-border social and economic collaboration can be expected only after the European Union has been fully integrated, that is, upon the final process of European integration).

RESEARCH RESULTS

This study is part of a broader study conducted within the framework of a doctoral dissertation on the topic 'Tourism Management in Designing the Tourism Offering in Border Regions'. One of the dissertation's hypotheses is: There is a high degree of interest among tourism offering providers for cross-border collaboration along the Slovene-Croatian state border.

The study involved the providers of the tourism offering located along the border of Slovenia and Croatia. A systemised questionnaire was used to investigate attitudes towards cross-border collaboration in tourism, previous experiences in cross-border collaboration, perceptions of the border and the level of cross-border collaboration.

In conceptual terms, we have defined the research subject and identified the primary relations arising out of the study's objectives. Variables were divided into contextual groups, among which we looked for the relationships to be covered in our study. This helped us to prepare a questionnaire consisting mainly of statements to be assessed on a 5-point Likert scale.

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. The survey was conducted from 1 February 2005 to 1 March 2005. The planned samples for Croatia and Slovenia consisted of 272 and 327 respondents, respectively. We obtained 70 properly completed questionnaires from Croatia and 77 from Slovenia, representing a response rate of 25.7% and 23.2%, respectively. This fairly low response rate is attributed to changes of addresses and activities, and to a lack of interest for participation in the survey.

In our study, we have used descriptive methods (mean value and frequency), as well as factor analysis. Due to limited space in this paper, results obtained using factor analysis (Vodeb, 2006, 152-154) will not be presented. Instead, we will focus only on those sets of questions pertaining to this paper and relating to cross-border collaboration.

Data for Croatia

CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION	AV	1	2	3	4	5	SK%
5. experience in entering into collabor.	3.47	19.1	0	22.1	32.4	26.5	100
6. awareness of attractions in adjacent region	3.22	10.3	13.2	33.8	29.4	13.2	100
7. awareness of advantages of collabor.	2.82	16.2	30.9	22.1	16.2	14.7	100
12. compatibility of offerings	3.73	1.5	4.4	23.5	60.3	10.3	100
19. knowledge about strategic partners	2.95	4.4	38.2	17.6	36.8	2.9	100
8. willingness to collaborate	4.48	0	0	1.5	48.5	50	100
13. considering collaboration	3.38	1.5	13.2	44.1	27.9	13.2	100
16. experiences in collaboration	2.79	7.4	30.9	39.7	19.1	2.9	100
17. assessment of collab. experience	3.58	1.5	4.4	42.6	36.8	14.7	100
9. fear of competition	1.73	41.2	45.6	11.8	1.5	0	100
20. barriers to collaboration	2.72	5.9	36.8	36.8	20.6	0	100
10. opportunity to increase tourism offering through collaboration	4.32	0	0	5.9	55.9	38.2	100
11. opportunity to create an integral product	3.95	1.5	2.9	13.2	63.2	19.1	100
18. own ideas on integral product	3.36	1.5	19.1	30.9	38.2	10.3	100
25. perceptions regarding the border	3.77	2.9	11.8	11.8	51.5	22.1	100
26. life in the borderland	3.92	0	2.9	17.6	63.2	16.2	100
27. degree of cross-border collaboration	3.13	13.2	30.9	11.8	17.6	26.5	100
28. improving competitiveness through collaboration	3.83	1.5	4.4	19.1	58.8	16.2	100

This dimension is central to our study and the results obtained are positive. The item *willingness to collaborate* has the highest average value (4.48) with 48.5% of replies for answer 4 (*I am interested*), followed by item *opportunity to increase tourism offering through collaboration* with an average value of 4.32 and answer 4 (*I agree*) accounting for 55.9%. Other items having a high average value are *improving competitiveness through collaboration* (3.83) and *opportunity to create an integral product* (3.95), with answer 4 (*I agree*) accounting for 58.8% and 63.2%, respectively. The lowest average value was measured for the item *fear of competition* (1.73), where 45.6% of respondents *disagree* and 41.2% *strongly disagree*.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION IN THE DESTINATION	AV	1	2	3	4	5	SK%
29.1 residents	2.55	23.5	23.5	30.9	17.6	4.4	100
29.2 tourist associations	3.79	4.4	7.4	25	30.9	32.4	100
29.3 municipal administration	3.39	7.4	11.8	36.8	22.1	22.1	100
29.4 regional administration	3.82	1.5	8.8	27.9	29.4	32.4	100
29.5 national administration	3.77	5.9	8.8	25	22.1	38.2	100

For this dimension, we have recorded no significant deviations; the replies of respondents are uniformly distributed. Nevertheless, the highest average value is recorded for the item *regional administration* (3.82) with 32.4% of respondents stating that the regional administration has the greatest responsibility for cross-border

collaboration. The item *national administration* is ranked surprisingly high with an average value of 3.77 and with 38.2% of respondents believing that this level is the most responsible for cross-border collaboration in a destination.

FUNCTION OF DESTINATION TOURISM ORGANISATIONS IN CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION	AV	1	2	3	4	5	SK%
33.1 developing basic ideas and competitiveness strategies in the destination	4.22	1.5	0	7.4	57.4	33.8	100
33.2 developing and shaping the tourism offering	4.22	0	1.5	8.8	55.9	33.8	100
33.3. marketing	4.35	0	0	8.8	47.1	44.1	100
33.4 representing interests	4.14	0	2.9	17.6	41.2	38.2	100

The average values of this dimension, dealing with the functions of tourist organisations in a destination through which cross-border collaboration could operate, are all above 4.10. The highest value (4.35) goes to the item *marketing* with 44.1% of respondents fully agreeing that this is one of the most important functions. The items *developing basic ideas and competitiveness strategies* and *developing and shaping the offering* follow with identical average values (4.22), with 57.4% of respondents agreeing that the former item is the required function, and 55.9% choosing the latter function of tourist organisations in a destination.

Data for Slovenia

CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION	AV	1	2	3	4	5	SK%
5. experience in entering into collabor.	3.01	23	8.1	32.4	17.6	18.9	100
6. awareness of attractions in adjacent region	2.60	21.6	24.3	33.8	12.2	8.1	100
7. awareness of advantages of collabor.	2.39	21.6	36.5	28.4	8.1	5.4	100
12. compatibility of offerings	3.58	5.4	6.8	21.6	56.8	9.5	100
19. knowledge about strategic partners	2.93	6.8	36.5	14.9	40.5	1.4	100
8. willingness to collaborate	4.06	0	4.1	10.8	59.5	25.7	100
13. considering collaboration	3.01	1.4	31.1	41.9	16.2	9.5	100
16. experiences in collaboration	2.58	5.4	45.9	37.8	6.8	4.1	100
17. assessment of collab. Experience	3.39	1.4	9.5	51.4	24.3	13.5	100
9. fear of competition	1.44	71.6	12.2	16.2	0	0	100
20. barriers to collaboration	2.85	8.1	32.4	31.1	23	5.4	100
10. opportunity to increase tourism offering through collaboration	3.37	1.4	24.3	20.3	43.2	10.8	100
11. opportunity to create an integral product	3.66	8.1	6.8	13.5	54.1	17.6	100
18. having own ideas on integral product	3.48	2.7	18.9	14.9	54.1	9.5	100
25. perceptions regarding the border	3.31	6.8	27	14.9	31.1	20.3	100
26. life in the borderland	3.70	2.7	14.9	20.3	33.8	28.4	100
27. degree of cross-border collaboration	3.25	17.6	18.9	12.2	23	28.4	100
28. improving competitiveness through collaboration	3.54	6.8	10.8	18.9	48.6	14.9	100

The highest average value was measured for the item *willingness to collaborate* (4.06), with 59.5% of respondents expressing their interest. The item *opportunity to create an integral product* has an average value of 3.66, with 54.1% of respondents agreeing with the statement that they perceive their offering within the framework of an integral offering. This is followed by the item *improving competitiveness through collaboration* with an average value of 3.54 and 48.6% of respondents agreeing with the statement, and the item *having own ideas about an integral product* with an average value of 3.48 and 54.1% of respondents having such ideas. The item with the least average value (1.44) is *fear of competition*, with 71.6% of respondent having no fear at all of competition.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION IN THE DESTINATION	AV	1	2	3	4	5	SK%
29.1 residents	2.90	12.2	23	33.8	24.3	6.8	100
29.2 tourist associations	3.97	4.1	6.8	12.2	41.9	35.1	100
29.3 municipal administration	3.85	2.7	5.4	25.7	36.5	29.7	100
29.4 regional administration	4.02	0	4.1	18.9	47.3	29.7	100
29.5 national administration	3.95	5.4	4.1	21.6	27	41.9	100

The highest average value for the dimension *responsibility for cross-border collaboration in the destination* was measured for the item *regional administration* (similar to the Croatian respondents). It amounts to 4.02 and accounts for almost half (47.3%) of the respondents. The item *tourist associations* follows closely with an average value of 3.97, as well as the item *national administration* (average value 3.95) with 41.9% of respondents considering this level of having the greatest responsibility in cross-border collaboration.

FUNCTION OF DESTINATION TOURISM ORGANISATIONS IN CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION	AV	1	2	3	4	5	SK%
33.1 developing basic ideas and competitiveness strategies in the destination	3.95	1.4	4.1	21.6	43.2	29.7	100
33.2 developing and shaping the tourism offering	4.17	0	1.4	17.6	43.2	37.8	100
33.3. marketing	4.22	0	2.7	17.6	33.8	45.9	100
33.4 representing interests	4.01	0	1.4	23	48.6	27	100

The average values of all items measured are high, leading us to conclude that Slovene respondents, similar to their Croatian counterparts, perceive collaboration through all four functions. The item *marketing* has the highest average value of 4.22 with 45.9% of respondents considering this function as very important. The items *developing and shaping the offering* (4.17) and *representing interests* (4.01) follow. The item *developing basic ideas and competitiveness strategies* has the lowest average value (3.95), which is nonetheless high, considering the average.

DISCUSSION

Our study has tested the hypothesis: *There is a high degree of interest for cross-border collaboration along the Slovene-Croatian state border*. Research results confirm this hypothesis and bear witness to a positive attitude towards cross-border tourism collaboration.

Although there is a low degree (2.82 average value – AV) of *awareness of the advantages of collaboration* on the Croatian side, the *willingness to collaborate* (4.48 AV) has the highest average value of all measured variables of the dimension *cross-border collaboration*. The high degree of *opportunities to increase the offering through collaboration* (4.32 AV) leads us to conclude that the time is right for intensive action in implementing the first development stage of cross-border collaboration (making contacts, exchanging information and experience, conducting research and studies on the problems and potentials of economic development).

In some parts of the area under consideration, we have noted undertakings and activities in the field of cross-border collaboration, while other parts are void of any entrepreneurial or administrative impetus needed in the initial stage of setting up collaboration.

Research results in Slovenia are very similar to those in Croatia, with only minor discrepancies. In Croatia also, *awareness of the advantages of collaboration* is at a low level (2.39 AV), while *willingness to collaborate* has the highest average value (4.06 AV). The degree of the variable *opportunity to increase the offering through collaboration* is slightly lower (3.37 AV)

The perceptions of both groups do not vary to any considerable extent regarding the responsibility for cross-border collaboration in a destination. Residents, that is their role in cross-border collaboration carries the lowest average value (2.55 – HR and 2.90 – SLO). Regional administration is recognised as a vital level with an important role in cross-border collaboration, while both respondent groups overestimate the responsibility of national administration. Obviously, each of these administration level has its own function in collaboration, but it is well known that local-level entrepreneurs provide the impetus, while the state complements its function in terms of creating a positive climate, promoting and stimulating cross-border collaboration through state measures and policies. Therefore, the state cannot be expected to take on the key role in this process.

Regarding the organisation of tourist destinations, we have focused on tourism management of cross-border destinations. In our study, we wished to learn which are the functions of tourist organisations in a destination through which cross-border collaboration could operate, in the opinion of the respondents. Although all functions received high ratings from both groups, the *marketing function* and *developing and shaping the offering* stand out. Marketing activities involve (Magaš, 2003, 60) formulating destination marketing strategies, taking care of a destination's image, branding, and improving sales through booking systems, promotion and by providing information to potential guests. Developing and shaping the offering involves initiating

and developing public offerings, coordinating offerings within a destination, creating package tours, initiating new offerings and auditing quality.

By preserving and emphasising the identity of destinations wherever the tourism offering is compatible, tourism destinations in border regions can be developed with long-term success providing specific efforts and activities are made across all levels of the tourism management structure. Each level must develop the mechanisms required to regulate cross-border collaboration to the advantage of all participants.

Strategic partnerships in cross-border tourism collaboration are the vehicles of accelerated development in all borderland destinations.

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