Synergy of Cross-Border Regions in the Context of Sustainability

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Abstract

The synergy of cross-border regions is based on several aspects: economic, social, cultural-historical, and transport-related. At borderlands, there is an interweaving of cultures and national identities, which contributes to the diversity and distinctiveness of these areas. This represents a potential that, especially in regions outside the main hubs of economic development, can significantly enhance their attractiveness and, consequently, support their economic and social advancement. This paper highlights the cultural, natural, and social potential of the region "Upper Záhorie" and its valorisation for the development of sustainable tourism, strengthened by robust cross-border linkages. The research is grounded in current trends in sustainable tourism development, based on successful strategies for revitalising regions located outside of economic centres. One of the globally recognised positive influences is the trend of reinforcing regional characteristics through local agriculture and gastronomy, the revival of crafts and traditional production. This forms one of the cornerstones of so-called "slow tourism," which is based on active leisure and discovery outside of busy tourist hubs. The region under study possesses favourable conditions for the development of such a model. The contribution presents the outcomes of ongoing research focused on evaluating the potential of cultural heritage in the region (with emphasis on industrial, craft, and gastronomic traditions that are characteristic for the area). The identification of potential centres for the revival of traditional production and craftsmanship forms a basis for restoring the genius loci of the area and for shaping a distinctive interpretative route. The support of these activities depends on the improvement of accessibility to these areas through the formation of adequate connections and high-quality public spaces.

Keywords: *Cross-border synergy, Upper Záhorie, Pomoravie, Sustainable microregion, Cultural heritage, Slow tourism*

1. Introduction

The synergy of cross-border regions is based on several aspects: economic, social, cultural-historical, and transportation-related. At these borders, cultures and nationalities overlap, which influences the diversity and distinctiveness of these areas. This represents a potential that, in regions outside the core economic development zones, can significantly contribute to enhancing their attractiveness, thus promoting their economic and social upliftment.

This paper highlights the cultural, natural, and social potential of the "Upper Zahorie" region and its evaluation for the development of sustainable tourism, strengthened by strong cross-border connections. The research is based on current trends in sustainable tourism development, focusing on successful strategies that elevate regions beyond economic centers. One of the proven positive global impacts is the trend of reinforcing regional characteristics through local agriculture and gastronomy, the revival of crafts, and traditional production. This forms one of the cornerstones of so-called "slow tourism," which is centered on actively spending leisure time and exploring areas outside the busy centers of tourist traffic. The region under study has the prerequisites for such development.

The paper presents the results of ongoing research aimed at evaluating the potential of cultural heritage in the region, emphasizing industrial, craft, and gastronomic traditions characteristic of the area. Defining centers for the potential revival of traditional production and crafts forms the basis for revitalizing the region's "genius loci" and creating a distinctive tourist route.

Support for these activities depends on improving the accessibility of these areas through the creation of appropriate connections and public spaces.

Cross-border regions are dynamic territories where cultures, economic relations, and social ties intertwine. Their development depends on infrastructure, economic activities, and cultural cooperation. The synergy of these factors opens opportunities for sustainable development, particularly in tourism, which today emphasizes authenticity and local identity. Tourism is seen as a tool for the development of peripheral regions [1], given their often natural character (untouched landscapes) and authentic historical sites and cultural practices, offering a place of rest.

The Upper Zahorie region, located on the Slovak-Moravian border, boasts a rich cultural heritage, traditional crafts, and natural values. This potential creates opportunities for the development of "slow tourism," focused on sightseeing activities outside major tourist centers. Effective cross-border cooperation allows for coordinated resource use and supports regional identity and joint initiatives. The Upper Zahorie region has historical ties with southern Moravia, and these mutual connections have persisted since the Austro-Hungarian Empire up to the present day. The region is home to significant industrial and craft heritage sites, historic residences, and valuable natural areas such as the Moravian Floodplains, the Chvojnice Hills, and wine-growing regions.

This paper analyzes the cultural and social potential of Upper Zahorie in the context of sustainable tourism and cross-border cooperation. It identifies key elements of regional heritage, examines the importance of cross-border strategies, and proposes

measures to support infrastructure, local production, and eco-tourism.

2. The Importance of Supporting Cross-Border Cooperation

Political and economic support for cross-border regional synergy.

Cross-border cooperation is an integral component of the European Union's regional policy, which is based on cohesion. Through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund, the EU supports competitiveness, economic growth, and the improvement of the quality of life in regions. Special attention is given to the issue of synergies between cross-border regions. One of the key tools for providing financial support for the development of cross-border regions is the Interreg program. Its objective is to uplift these regions by strengthening their mutual ties in various areas, such as the environment, transport, and research. Programs that provide investments to strengthen their economies, as well as local communities through tourism, include:

- Improving the technical condition of natural and cultural monuments,
- Improving access to natural and cultural monuments,
- Developing selected elements of green infrastructure,
- Enhancing regional connectivity through the construction of transport infrastructure with a focus on sustainable transport (supporting cyclists and pedestrians).

The Interreg programs align with European priorities such as supporting sustainability, social inclusion, and strengthening local governance.

Research on synergy in cross-border regions through sustainable tourism

To verify the potential for development and the possibilities of strengthening mutual ties between border regions, with an emphasis on utilizing their cultural and natural potential, many research projects have been focused on this area. Their goal is to explore cultural heritage and natural resources that can be valued to enhance these regions, particularly those outside major development hubs.

The results of implemented projects are valuable to the presented research, particularly in relation to Central European regions. In terms of complexity, the research conducted within the DANUrB and DANUrB+ projects is particularly inspiring. The primary aim of these projects was to create a spatial cultural network in the regions along the Danube, based on specific tourist destinations and thematic routes, with the goal of strengthening the viability of these regions through sustainable tourism, their economy, and the quality of life of local communities. The research focused on mapping and categorizing the characteristic cultural and natural elements of the entire area. Regarding tangible cultural heritage, the following were assessed: historical towns, industrial heritage, communist past heritage, fortifications, sacred and secular monuments, etc. Mapping intangible heritage focused on: living cultural traditions, characteristic gastronomy, customs, etc. The evaluation of natural resources was directed towards: cultural, recreational landscapes, and protected areas. Categorizing the characteristic cultural and natural elements provided the foundation for creating thematic areas with the potential for developing sustainable tourism along the Danube. The project identified key areas characteristic of the Danube region, including:

- Fortifications – castles, fortresses, bunkers from different periods,
- Architectural culture – religious buildings, monasteries, archaeological sites, historical objects, historical city centers,
- Technical structures and monuments – bridges, ports, mills, industrial sites, etc.,
- "Water" tourism – spas, swimming pools, thermal baths, beaches, waterways, waterfront promenades,
- Green tourism – related to natural and cultural landscapes,
- Traditions – linked to intangible culture – music and visual arts, folklore, gastronomy, viticulture, etc.

Based on these thematic areas, a joint strategic development plan was developed, followed by action plans for individual regions in cooperation with local stakeholders. The project is inspiring in terms of the methodology used for categorization and systematization, which was implemented at differentiated scales: regional, settlement, and zonal. [2]

The importance of interaction between individual regions and their tourist centers was highlighted in research by B. Kádár and M. Gede. They analyzed the network of connections and the intensity of visitor flows using a multi-stage clustering method based on Flickr data. This research was also focused on tourist destinations around the Danube. [3]

The significance of transport links for the development of cross-border regions through tourism is the focus of an extensive study by T. Makkonen and A. M. Williams. [4]

The role of involvement and the level of engagement of local governments, tourism stakeholders, and other actors in the region was the focus of research by A. Stoffelen and D. Vanneste. This study analyzed the role of tourism in European cross-border regions with different historical developments. The research pointed out that the distribution of socio-spatial benefits from tourism in the cross-border context depends on several factors, including: the number/intensity of tourism stakeholders, the degree of mobilization of local actors in decision-making processes, and the importance of tourism in regional development strategies. [5]

Cross-border development issues are examined by numerous researchers and experts from fields such as economics, tourism, urbanism, geography, and others, from various perspectives. There is a wealth of scientific studies focused on evaluating the connections between specific cross-border regions, particularly from the perspective of tourism functionality. [6, 7, 8]

Sustainable Tourism and Synergy as a Strategy for the Development of Cross-Border Regions

The development of peripheral regions is often associated with the function of leisure due to their predominantly natural character and the authenticity of cultural heritage. This development is intertwined with the application of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism represents one of the main development strategies for regions endowed with significant natural and cultural potential. The founders of the sustainable tourism concept include Bramwell & Lane. They view sustainable tourism as an appropriate tool for regional development capable of ensuring long-term viability, respect for the locality, and its inhabitants. It is based on supporting the local economy, balanced and sustainable development, and the preference for efficient transportation.

Slow Tourism

Slow tourism is a unique phenomenon with its own specific origin, set of characteristics, and practices. Slow tourism can be

characterized as a specific form of sustainable tourism that focuses on deeper interactions between tourists, local communities, and the environment. Slow tourism emphasizes enhancing the travel experience through visiting fewer places and a more intense perception of local culture and landscapes [9, 10, 11, 12]

The foundation of slow tourism is based on the following pillars:

- Sustainability: Minimizing the traveler's impact on the environment (preference for sustainable transportation, support for the local economy).
- Cultural Authenticity: Focus on authentic experiences related to local customs, traditions, and ways of life.
- Sufficient Time: Allowing for more time to experience and appreciate the surrounding environment.
- Connection with Local Communities: Promoting mutual interactions between visitors and local communities.

Synergy of Cross-Border Regions The synergy of cross-border regions represents a key factor in sustainable development, emphasizing the interconnection of neighboring areas and the efficient use of their shared potential. State borders are not merely administrative dividing lines but also dynamic zones of interaction, where intense exchanges of economic, social, and cultural ties take place. The importance of cross-border cooperation lies primarily in the synergistic sharing of infrastructure, the coordination of economic activities, and the strengthening of regional identity. In the economic sphere, it enables joint development planning, stimulation of local businesses, and the creation of new job opportunities. The social and cultural dimension is reflected in cooperation in education, the protection of cultural heritage, and the organization of joint events. These steps strengthen regional and cross-border dialogue, as well as mutual cooperation. An inseparable aspect of successful integration is transport accessibility, which supports population mobility and tourism development. The connection of transport infrastructure and the implementation of ecological solutions, such as cycle paths and public transportation, contribute to increasing the region's attractiveness and long-term sustainability. Cross-border synergy thus becomes a strategic tool for the development of peripheral areas, enhancing their competitiveness and contributing to long-term prosperity.

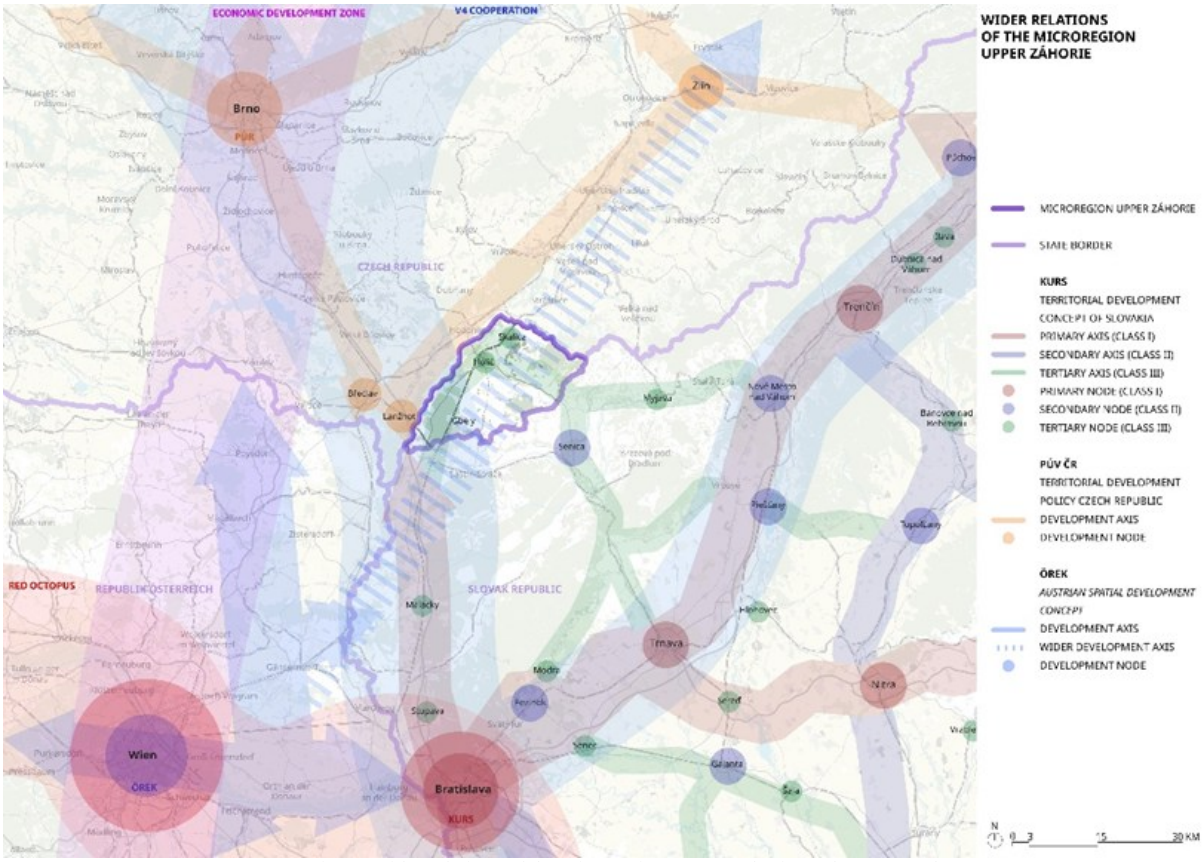

Fig. 1. Wider relations of the microregion Upper Záhorie, author. P. Beták

The intertwining of cultural and ethnic influences in cross-border regions is a significant factor and becomes a catalyst for regional development, as it enriches local identity, supports social cohesion, and creates conditions for economic growth. Cultural diversity generates dynamism in the region through the integration of various traditions, crafts, customs, and linguistic elements, which can be used in tourism, the creative industries, and regional marketing. Interaction between different ethnic and cultural groups fosters innovation in gastronomy, arts, and architecture, with these elements serving as a foundation for the development of authentic tourist products and attractions. Shared historical experiences and intertwined cultural heritage create favorable conditions for cross-border cooperation. On a social level, cultural blending contributes to the development of mutual understanding, tolerance, and the overall quality of life for residents. In the economic context, it supports entrepreneurial initiatives, craft production, and the development of regional brands, thus enhancing the region's competitiveness. Cross-border regions thus become an example of harmonious coexistence and sustainable development based on cultural diversity and joint planning.

In economically less exposed areas, cultural diversity and cross-border cooperation can be a significant factor in sustainable development. Utilizing historical, craft, and gastronomic traditions as pillars of local identity enables the creation of attractive tourist products and attractions that support the regional economy without the need for extensive infrastructure. Cross-border regions have the potential to develop the concept of "slow tourism," which emphasizes authentic experiences, natural and cultural

heritage, traditional crafts, and local gastronomy. Architectural, technical, cultural, and historical monuments thus become driving forces for the development of community-based businesses and job creation, without the need for new infrastructure, thereby primarily utilizing existing infrastructure, which contributes to the authenticity of the experience (e.g., accommodation in original houses with local architectural features, etc.). Supporting cooperation among small producers within cross-border networks also allows for increased competitiveness and visibility of local products and brands in broader markets.

3. Cultural and Natural Potential of Upper Záhorie

The Upper Záhorie is a distinctive cross-border region in western Slovakia, delineated by the upper course of the Morava River and forming a natural link between Slovakia and the Czech Republic. This area is characterized by a rich historical evolution that has shaped its cultural identity, economic structures, and social ties with neighboring Moravia. It is situated in the northern part of the Záhorská Lowland, with the Morava River defining its northern border and separating Slovakia from the Czech Republic. Historically, this territory has served as a significant point of contact between the two nations, reflected in the linguistic and cultural proximity of its inhabitants. Human settlement in the region dates back to prehistoric times, and during the era of Great Moravia, it played an important role within the power structures of Central Europe.

For centuries, the Morava River served not only as a geographical boundary but also as a communication corridor that facilitated trade, population movement, and the diffusion of cultural influences. A significant period in the history of the Upper Záhorie was during the Austro-Hungarian era, when the region flourished due to craftsmanship, agriculture, and cross-border trade. The historical interconnectedness with neighboring Moravia is still evident in several key areas. In the economy and trade, traditional economic activities such as agriculture, viticulture, and crafts maintained long-standing links with Moravia and Vienna.

The Záhorie region has a rich historical background. As early as the 5th century BC, the Celts inhabited the area, followed by Germanic tribes from the Elbe region in the 2nd century AD, whose settlement persisted until the 5th century. The area was also affected by the advance of the Huns in the last quarter of the 4th century. At the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries, the territory came under the influence of the Prague culture (Sclaveni). During the period of Great Moravia (833–907 AD), the territory was a central part of the Great Moravian Empire and served as a connection between the principalities of Moravia and Trnava. The region was influenced by key trade routes, such as the Amber Road, and later traversed by the Czech Trade Route, which played a critical role in Hungary during the 14th and 15th centuries. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the region saw a significant presence of ethnic groups such as the Vlachs (Hungarians) and Serbs from the southern Pannonian Basin, who were primarily engaged in vegetable cultivation supplying the Viennese court. Other notable groups included the Habans (Anabaptists), who practiced crafts, and Jewish communities, who played a central role in trade. The largest demographic presence consisted of Slovaks and Czechs from South Moravia. The Habans, who arrived from Moravia in the 16th century and settled in villages such as Sobotište, Brodské, Moravský Svätý Ján, and Veľké Leváre, were highly skilled craftsmen specializing in pottery and cutlery. Their activities significantly contributed to the region's economic development.

The rich history and abundance of cultural and technical monuments provide the microregion with a high cultural potential, which, unfortunately, remains underdeveloped or insufficiently utilized in its current form.

Potential for Development

One of the main challenges facing the Upper Záhorie microregion is the underdevelopment of its cultural and recreational potential-such as historical and technical monuments, wine routes, gastronomy, and cycle tourism—as well as its weak integration with the Czech and Austrian Republics.

In the past, several projects have addressed the development of cultural and natural heritage, aiming to foster cooperation with neighboring regions that are more advanced in tourism. However, a lack of financial resources, particularly for the restoration of historical sites and for the improvement of transportation infrastructure in the Upper Záhorie, has led to the failure of strategic goals. The current situation raises the question of how to support the region's cultural potential in the future. In this context, research has focused on areas of cultural heritage that are less dependent on large financial investments and are aligned with the principles of slow tourism. Therefore, we have identified sectors that hold traditional value in the region, are already experiencing development through small-scale entrepreneurial activities, or can be implemented via civic associations.

Potential areas suitable for enhancement include:

- Regional products (viticulture, gastronomy, agriculture);
- Related architectural heritage (wine cellars, mills, distilleries);
- Traditional crafts (ceramics, artisanal trades);
- Forms of recreation linked to the natural environment (watercourses and bodies, forests, cultural landscape).

The character of the Upper Záhorie region makes it particularly suitable for the application of slow tourism, a concept that emphasizes authentic experiences, deeper engagement with local culture, and environmentally responsible travel.

Identified areas align with the potential for the development of residential tourism programs focused on local gastronomy, artisanal workshops, and historical sightseeing. Examples include activities such as the production of Holíč ceramics, traditional baking of Záhorie-style pagáče, flax processing, and viticulture. Agrotourism and eco-farms can play a significant role in presenting traditional ways of life and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. There is also potential to establish thematic tourist routes connected to the region's historical heritage, such as the Great Moravian period or the Habsburg era. Ecotourism focuses on environmentally friendly forms of travel that respect and support the protection of natural ecosystems. In Upper Záhorie, this concept can be implemented through the use of the Morava River and its riparian forests for environmentally oriented activities such as birdwatching, water tourism (e.g., rafting on the Morava), or interpretive hiking trails. As part of cross-border initiatives, there is an opportunity to develop cycling tourism, with a key component being the integration with neighboring Moravia.

The increasing demand for authentic cultural experiences motivates the restoration of historical landmarks and supports local festivals and traditional crafts. Upper Záhorie has considerable potential in this context, as it is home to important heritage sites such as the Holíč Castle and the Romanesque Church in Kopčany. Organizing historical markets, night tours, and interactive exhibitions can enhance the attractiveness of these sites and contribute to the economic growth of the microregion. Additionally, regional festivals and folklore events, such as *Skalické dni* and *Záhorácka krojovaná zábava*, help preserve cultural identity and strengthen social cohesion. Another relevant area includes music festivals (e.g., *Fest Maringota*, *Cibula Fest*), which primarily serve to popularize the region and contribute to the formation of a regional brand identity, particularly from the perspective of the younger population.

Traditional crafts represent a key factor in shaping regional identity and preserving intangible cultural heritage, reflecting historical techniques and material culture. They also support local employment and foster economic diversification. A variety of crafts—such as pottery, weaving, rope-making, and winemaking—enable the creation of unique, high-value-added products with the potential to appeal to both domestic and international markets. Gastronomy, as an integral part of regional identity, plays an important role in shaping the region's image. The use of traditional methods and local/regional ingredients contributes to overall authenticity. Regional specialties often become part of cultural tourism, creating a synergistic effect between the hospitality sector, small-scale production, and agriculture. Agriculture is one of the main pillars of the regional economy, and its importance goes beyond food self-sufficiency. Traditional forms of agricultural production, organic farming, and the production of organic food are not only tools for economic growth but also a means of promoting environmental sustainability and biodiversity. The interconnection between agriculture and gastronomy ensures the circulation of capital within the region and strengthens local economic linkages. The integration of crafts, local gastronomy, and agriculture into regional development thus contributes to economic diversification, enhancement of regional attractiveness, and preservation of cultural heritage.

These areas are not only attractive for tourists but also offer valuable leisure opportunities for the local population of Upper Záhorie. Moreover, the proposed thematic areas correspond with tourism activities in neighboring regions such as South Moravia and Myjava, making it possible to develop joint thematic circuits.

Based on analysis, the primary cultural attractors of the region include the inhabited corridor on the Moravian side, stretching from Břeclav to Strážnice along the right bank of the Morava River. This line of settlements creates a valuable zone for contact and cooperation, with potential to stimulate further development on the left bank of the Morava - in Upper Záhorie. Additionally, a clearly defined cultural and tourism hotspot exists in the northern part of Upper Záhorie - specifically Kopčany, Holíč, and Skalica. The rest of the region remains relatively weakly interconnected and predominantly agricultural in character. The situation is gradually changing in the northwestern part of the Senica district - including Kúty, Šaštín, and Senica—where there is a renewed concentration of architectural and historical potential, alongside natural (Myjava River) and recreational (Borský Forest) assets.

The natural potential of the region is enhanced by a diverse range of natural elements. The Morava River and its floodplain forests form a significant ecosystem with high biodiversity. Areas such as the Záhorie Protected Landscape Area on the Slovak side and Lower Pomoravie in Moravia offer opportunities for ecotourism, cycling tourism, and water tourism. Increasingly, projects are focusing on cross-border initiatives in nature conservation, which promotes sustainable regional development and its tourist attractiveness (e.g., the Pomoravie Project – 2011, Interreg Czech-Slovak Republic, Interreg Slovak-Austrian). The area also has abundant watercourses and bodies of water, which can be utilized for activities such as fishing or other forms of recreation—rafting on the Morava River, hiking and cycling routes around the Morava River, around the Myjava River, fruit orchards, vineyards, gardening areas, viewing platforms, and golf courses.

Digital innovations are playing an increasingly significant role in tourism, enabling more effective destination promotion and enhancing the visitor experience. In Upper Záhorie, it is possible to implement modern tools such as mobile applications with interactive maps and customized thematic routes, QR codes on historical monuments offering extended information, and the use of virtual and augmented reality in exhibitions. In addition, an online booking platform for local experiences could be established, allowing visitors to plan their stay in the region, including booking excursions, workshops, or tastings of local specialties and cuisine.

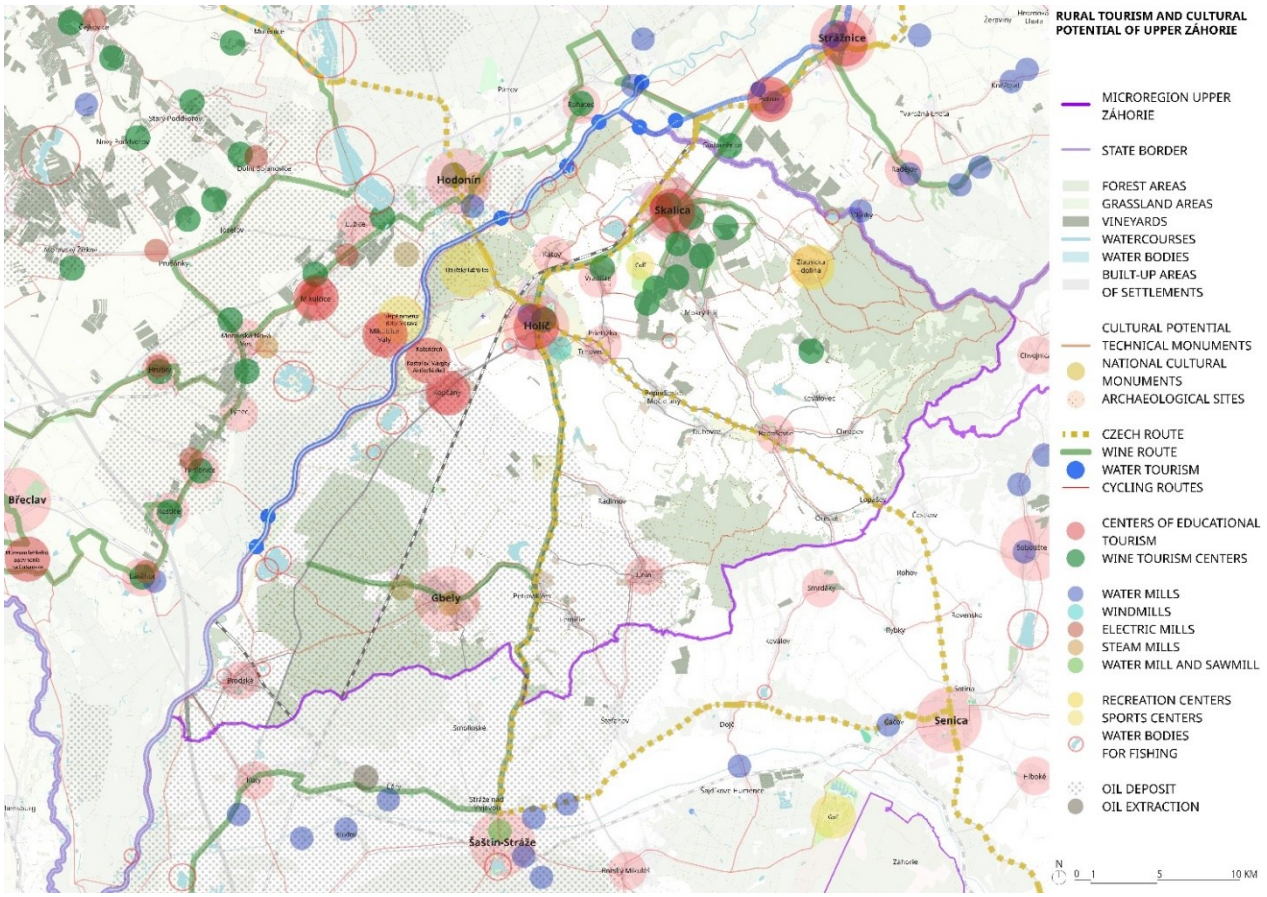

Fig. 2. Analysis of Rural Tourism and Cultural Potential of upper Záhorie, author. P. Beták

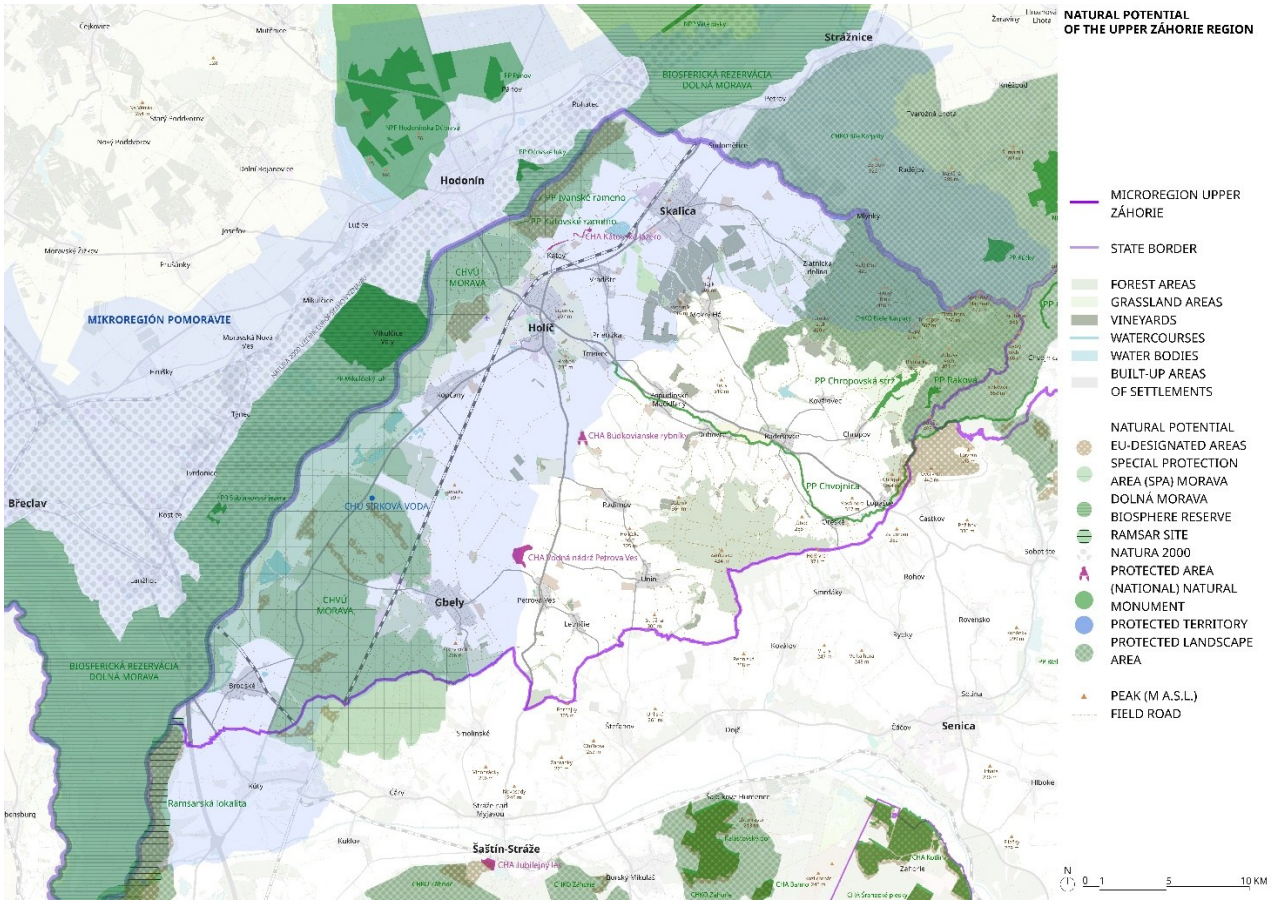

Fig. 3. Analysis of Natural Potential of the Upper Záhorie Region, author. P. Beták

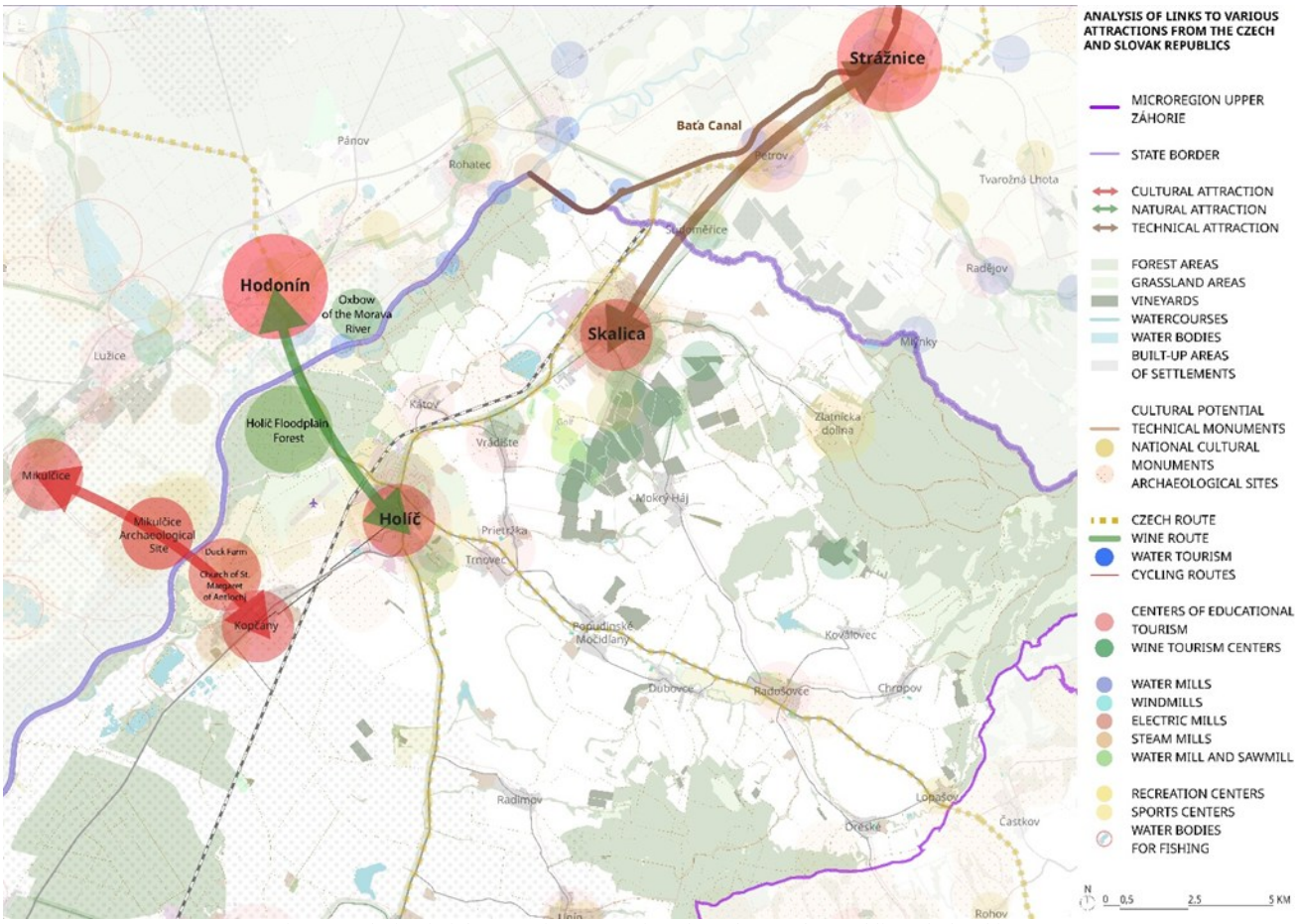

Fig. 4. Analysis of Links to Various Attractions from the Czech Republic and Slovakia

4. The Significance of Public Spaces in Supporting Tourism

"A good city is like a good party — people stay longer than really necessary because they are enjoying themselves."

- Jan Gehl [13].

Public spaces are a significant factor in the creation and development of communities. They serve several key functions (cultural, social, and economic). In the book *Prostor* [14], the authors discuss the concept of public space as any space that is public and, therefore, not part of private life. This article similarly understands public space as an area freely accessible to the residents of a city or municipality, where their mutual interactions occur. Common examples include squares, streets, parks, and riverbanks, which are typically owned by the municipality. Public space is also indirectly defined by the objects that delimit it. For example, the visual elements of a square are the adjacent objects, particularly their ground floors, which often activate the space. Jan Gehl, in his book *Cities for People*, emphasizes the importance of the quality of urban space, which influences the character and extent of urban life. The relationship between essential activities (e.g., movement), optional activities (e.g., recreation), and social activities (e.g., events) is key [15]. Public space plays an indispensable role in revitalizing settlements.

From a tourism perspective, public spaces such as squares and streets are usually the first point of contact for visitors with a city or municipality. In this case, the most important aspects become attractiveness, easy orientation, and safety. The perception of public spaces occurs both at the level of the physical environment and the social level. Both aspects can significantly support the identity of a place.

The quality of connections and public spaces can strengthen interaction between significant tourist centers and enhance the experience of the environment. Therefore, this paper focuses on comparing the quality of public spaces in three pairs of cities located on opposite sides of the Slovak-Moravian border: Kopčany - Mikulčice, Holíč - Hodonín, and Skalica - Strážnice.

Kopčany (2,509 inhabitants) **– Mikulčice** (1,972 inhabitants)

The linking element of the municipalities is the cultural-historical site of the Slavic stronghold in Mikulčice and the Church of St. Margaret in Kopčany. The connection between the municipalities (by bicycle and on foot) has been significantly helped by the construction of the Great Moravian Footbridge. Mikulčice has a strong winemaking character, which is visually represented by vineyards and various cultural and social events. The public space in Kopčany is poorly maintained and difficult to navigate. The village has the potential to create a lively public space, especially in the area between the Church of St. Stephen the King and the library, extending to the former T.G. Masaryk School, originally designed by Emil Belluš. The wide street profiles offer potential for the addition of cycling paths, greenery, and water capture elements in the area.

Holíč (11,283 inhabitants) **– Hodonín** (23,657 inhabitants)

The potential can be seen in the connection via a significant natural feature – the Holíč Floodplain Forest, where there is currently no cycling route. The main public spaces in Holíč are centered around the castle, the adjacent pond, and the herb garden, which are used by both locals and tourists. A strong axis runs from the castle, through Zámocká Street, towards St. Martin's Square, but this area is currently dominated by static traffic. Hodonín is a lively district city offering a wide range of activities for tourists in the center and nearby areas. The birthplace of T.G. Masaryk provides a quality public space at the square of the same name, around the town hall, and the Church of St. Lawrence. Public spaces provide safety for pedestrians, with active facades, adequate lighting, and the presence of greenery in street profiles, creating a welcoming and well-maintained atmosphere.

Skalica (15,461 inhabitants) **– Strážnice** (5,773 inhabitants)

The two cities are connected by the Baťa Water Canal, which runs through them. Both cities also share a strong winemaking tradition. Both cities have large main squares with a historical character. Strážnice offers spaces with differentiated cycling and car traffic, but large areas dedicated to static car traffic on the square detract from the attractiveness of the area. In Skalica, however, transit traffic enters the square. The large share of paved surfaces, due to historical contexts, leads to overheating of the area. The street profiles in the city often integrate greenery, and in some locations, pedestrians walk along pleasant tree-lined avenues without disruption from car traffic.

The current state of public spaces in the mentioned six cities varies. In Slovakia, public space is predominantly dominated by individual car traffic, and significant portions of public spaces, including squares, are occupied by static car traffic. There is also a lack of cycling route signage and safe routes within the municipalities. In the specific locations, especially in Kopčany, there is potential for enhancing the ground floors and promoting gastro-tourism. The width of the street profiles offers room for modifications, including the addition of safe routes for cyclists and low and tall greenery.

6. Conclusion

Upper Záhorie is a unique cross-border microregion located in western Slovakia, shaped by a complex interplay of geographical, historical, and cultural influences. Despite its rich historical heritage and significant cultural potential, the region remains underdeveloped and underutilized in terms of tourism and regional development. Tourist activity is primarily concentrated in the areas of Kopčany, Holíč, and Skalica, while the remaining parts of the region remain less integrated into economic and cultural networks. One of the principal barriers to development is the lack of adequate infrastructure and insufficient promotion of the region's tourism and cultural opportunities. Although cross-border cooperation programs such as Interreg Slovakia–Czech Republic and Interreg Slovakia–Austria have contributed to certain improvements, they have not succeeded in fully ensuring the long-term sustainability and economic self-sufficiency of the region. Research indicates a largely untapped potential in the areas of traditional crafts, agriculture, and recreational activities - sectors that are viewed as key drivers for the development of sustainable tourism and the enhancement of local economies and communities.

These are locally characteristic sectors, not requiring high levels of investment, with the capacity for organic growth in alignment with the principles of sustainable and slow tourism.

An essential factor in the development of Upper Záhorie is the establishment of efficient and modern transport infrastructure, which currently fails to meet the needs of tourism and broader economic development. Priority should be given to interregional connectivity, particularly the modernization of railway infrastructure, with emphasis on corridors linking the region to Bratislava, Brno, and Vienna. There is considerable potential in the utilization of inland water transport along the Morava River, which could serve as an ecological transport corridor connecting Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Austria. However, this would require

investment in appropriate port infrastructure and the development of water-based tourism. While cycling tourism has shown promising development, it requires better integration into comprehensive transport planning to ensure more effective connections with major cultural landmarks and natural reserves. Investments in sustainable modes of transport can significantly contribute to the region's economic dynamism, the expansion of tourism, and the overall quality of life for its residents.

There is also a strong rationale for the strategic creation of thematic circuits, organized at the intra-regional, national, and international levels, to foster robust linkages and stimulate economic and social growth within the microregion.

A key catalyst for the region's future development may be the promotion of sustainable tourism, with special emphasis on the revitalization of historic trade routes - notably the Bohemian Road (Česká cesta) - accompanied by efforts to reinforce regional craft and culinary traditions.

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