

UNLOCKING THE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF BORDERING REGIONS: A CASE STUDY OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN FOČA (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA) AND PLUŽINE (MONTENEGRO)

Tena Božović¹

Aida Avdić²

DOI: 10.35666/25662880.2023.9.43

UDC: 338.483.1(497.6 Foča:497.16 Plužine)

Abstract: Revitalizing border areas, which in the scientific discourse are most often considered peripheral, deprived, and less developed, is the focus of contemporary geographical research. Borders, acting as demarcation lines or points of convergence, possess a dual role, offering both positive and negative contexts. This duality adds complexity to the observation, diagnosis, and action required to stimulate economic activities. Tourism emerges as an alternative solution predominantly acknowledged by local communities, which would make it easier to achieve the inclusion of geographically isolated areas in regional development policies, ultimately achieving harmonization of economic growth at the national level. The paper deals with the analysis of the state and possibilities of the development of crossborder tourism in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian-Montenegro border sector, namely in the area of the municipalities of Foča, home to Bosnia and Herzegovina's oldest national park, and Plužine, housing the Piva Nature Park. Based on a qualitative methodology (questionnaires conducted among different tourism stakeholders), the research aims to determine whether tourism as the basis of crossborder cooperation can be considered an alternative for overcoming the marginalization of the observed areas, taking into account that these are demographically and economically weakened municipalities in the context of contemporary circumstances belonging countries and what are its future perspectives. The respondents are representatives of local stakeholders who possess valuable insights and knowledge about the unique social, cultural, economic, and ecological factors in their area. The research results can serve as a significant insight into the plans and priorities of tourism development.

Key words: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, tourism, borderlands, periphery.

INTRODUCTION

Borders function as not only delineations and demarcations separating distinct political territories but also as boundaries between cultures, landscapes, and even human

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Science, Zmaja od Bosne 33 – 35, 71000 Sarajevo, tena.bozovic@pmf.unsa.ba

²Senior Teaching Assistant, Department of Geography, University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Science, Zmaja od Bosne 33 – 35, 71000 Sarajevo, aidaavdic@pmf.unsa.ba

experiences. As essential tools of political-administrative and security structures, borders represent new spatial dimensions that become a significant factor in modifying numerous processes (Newmann & Paasi, 1998; Van Houtum, 2000). The concept of border areas—areas positioned in proximity to international borders—is increasingly capturing the attention of researchers through an interdisciplinary research approach, as exemplified by the emerging academic discipline—border studies (Winkler, 2023). The traditional paradigm describes them as predominantly marginalized areas, both geographically and functionally, which require more careful handling in the process of integration into regional development policies (Newman, 2006; Haselberger, 2014). More recent discourse on border areas emphasizes the significance of these spaces as contact zones to be considered in the context of crossborder and transboundary cooperation, regional identities, and local development initiatives (Klemenčić, 2005; Zorko, 2012; Konrad, 2015; Nail, 2016). An upward trend in research topics largely reflects the relevance of these regions in the post-globalization period, where through tourism impulses, strategic approaches, and adherence to sustainability principles, they can stimulate their economic, social, and cultural potentials (Hippe et al., 2023; H. Taubenböck, 2023). This gives rise to crossborder regions, primarily affirmed by crossborder cooperation processes.

Crossborder cooperation is a key concept in regional development promoted by the European Union as an important instrument and tool for integration processes that involve, among other things, enhancing economic competitiveness and reducing regional disparities (Banjac, 2012; Wevers & de Langen, 2020). The primary goal is to reduce regional development disparities, involving collaborative efforts and initiatives undertaken by neighboring/border regions and states within the European Union to address common challenges and efforts towards achieving better economic development (Toca & Czimre, 2016). Such a synergistic approach has proven beneficial in overcoming many development barriers, improving the standard of living in border areas through better communication among neighboring regions and fostering the functioning and integration of the European market (Del Valle, 2021). Horga (2019) emphasizes that crossborder cooperation instruments are increasingly coming to the forefront with the expansion of the European Union into parts of Central and Southeastern Europe, where the concept of border areas raises an entire set of new questions about political relations within the state and the very process of border formation and roles. A concrete initiative of crossborder cooperation is reflected through Interreg program funds, which promote and finance projects in these regions aimed at improving infrastructure, environmental, cultural, and other opportunities across multiple levels (A, B, and C programs depending on the spatial level). Users of these funds can also be non-member countries, as is the case with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Border regions of these two countries, considering administrative criteria – municipalities bordering each other, are socioeconomically and demographically less developed compared to the state capitals (Avdić et al., 2022). On the other hand, given that

the border between these two countries is determined by orography and hydrography, the attractiveness and uniqueness of natural landscapes make it a tourist attraction. However, unlocking the tourism potential is one of the challenges that goes beyond purely economic measures, and its significance lies in promoting intercultural understanding, fostering a stronger security climate, and certainly enhancing diplomatic relations.

In previous practice, tourism in crossborder regions has proven to be an alternative for economic development (Hardi et al, 2021; Clark & Nyaupane, 2023). By capitalizing on their shared resources and attractions, neighboring regions can attract more tourists, create jobs, and generate revenue while fostering cultural exchange and cooperation. However, successful crossborder tourism development requires effective collaboration, infrastructure improvement, and marketing strategies to maximize its potential economic benefits (Prokkola, 2022; Sustainable Crossborder Tourism Development Strategy 2020-2024). There are several examples of successful crossborder tourism initiatives in Europe, such as the Alsace Wine Route between France and Germany, which promotes wine tourism, and the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark between Ireland and Northern Ireland, which highlights geological and ecological attractions.

The study aims to explore various dimensions of tourism in border regions by analyzing the strategies, challenges, and opportunities of selected areas and tourism stakeholders in the transformation process. These often neglected, peripheral areas are targeted to be integrated into cohesive state regions, profiled, and recognized as tourist destinations. Despite numerous limitations, the allure of border regions lies in their unique diversity of cultures, traditions, landscapes, and more. The research seeks to address specific challenges faced by the selected border sector along the Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Montenegrin border in unlocking its tourism potential. It examines the strategies of tourism stakeholders responsible for planning and assesses the role of the state border in these processes. The research methodology involves a range of case studies, practices, and academic insights, exploring real-life examples of border regions that have effectively utilized their tourism potential. Field research and structured interviews among tourism stakeholders are some methods used to address these research questions. The findings serve as a valuable starting point for tourism development strategies and pave the way for further comparative research across various border regions.

THE CONCEPT OF CROSSBORDER COOPERATION AND TOURISM

Border areas represent spaces with specific characteristics where 'the border stands as a line of separation and connection between two or more states, established due to an evident discontinuity, even when it is not merely territorial but also cultural, economic, and religious' (Lacoste, 1993). Identified as historical battlegrounds crucial in preserving national identity, these regions often remain neglected in modern

state systems, sharing the fate of underdeveloped destinations characterized by high unemployment rates, lack of investment activities, and developmental conditions. Therefore, analytically approaching the study of activities and potentials within these areas presents a unique challenge. Numerous academic inquiries intensified in this field since the end of the last century emphasize that tourism can function as a sustainable strategy for crossborder regions to overcome obstacles related to borders that otherwise hinder socio-economic development and political collaboration (Prokkola, 2007; Timothy, 2001).

Researchers consistently highlight tourism as one of the primary themes in which successful development of crossborder projects could occur (Church & Reid, 1999; Timothy, 2001). Amidst numerous advantages and drawbacks, the border as a line of demarcation and connection serves as the main axis of development that, through a model of crossborder cooperation among border tourism destinations, can become an instrument for their unification into a sustainable tourism cluster. There is immense untapped potential it can offer to build new tourist experiences and products associated with linguistic similarities, shared culture, natural heritage, history, or tradition. Thanks to their cultural, historical, and ethnographic values, border areas can become tourism-relevant due to the uniqueness of their supply and the potential to generate a new tourism brand (EPICAH, Interreg Europe, 2019). From the perspective of tourism policy, borders can be viewed as part of the solution by defining and establishing appropriate management methods. Focusing on the stakeholders of tourism policy on crossborder development through predominant tourism potential can be considered a kind of tool for acquiring socio-economic and political power through adherence to a broader developmental rhetoric (Jakola, 2016).

Synergy among stakeholders in border areas within the tourism sector necessitates collaboration. Different economic systems and cultural patterns give rise to diverse borderland populations, and these differences can either positively generate certain advantages that foster border growth or function negatively as obstacles to sustainability. Cooperation forms the foundation of healthy business interaction and serves as a prerequisite for continuous progress in all segments. Collaboration is essential for the survival of destinations in the face of competition and environmental challenges (Pearce, 1992).

The primary objective of establishing integrative relationships is to create a unique tourism product by pooling the resource base (often a common good of both sides), enabling branding opportunities, better market positioning, knowledge transfer, and enhancing tourism supply in line with contemporary industry demands (building a robust product portfolio).

Crossborder cooperation in tourism between border destinations is described as a process involving several stages, illustrated by actions focused on creating conditions for effective participation, shifting from traditional marketing toward developmental goals, and establishing shared forms of collaboration involving all existing destination stakeholders (Šerić and Talijančić, 2011). The success of crossborder cooperation relies on various factors such as positive stakeholder experiences stemming from prior successful crossborder partnerships with neighboring destinations, availability of financial resources, the scope of the cooperation area, shared interests or challenges faced by potential partners, similarities in legislative and administrative frameworks, cultural affinities, and more (Cankar, 2014).

In the pursuit of identifying a competitive and sustainable concept for crossborder cooperation, particularly in crossborder tourism, it is crucial to specify the challenges inherent in the process. Numerous classification systems (Cankar, 2014) highlight prevalent challenges, including inconsistent legislation, unstable political situations, cultural incompatibility, infrastructure deficiencies, lack of understanding, communication gaps, stakeholder conflicts, clashes between the tourism industry and other sectors, varying levels of economic development among destinations, among others. The primary challenges of crossborder cooperation or crossborder tourism, recognized by the European Union as potential barriers to European tourism and the tourism industry at large, as outlined by the European Parliament's EPICAH (Interreg Europe, 2019), are:

1. Sustainability (assessing the impact of tourism on the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of a region or area)
2. Political instability (arising from economic crises, autocratic governance systems, or other factors that threaten democratic principles of governance)
3. Aggressive competition (growth within the tourism industry, both within local environments and on a broader scale, leading to intensified competition)
4. Shifts in tourist demand (emergence of new market niches or changes in what tourists seek and expect from their travel experiences)
5. Digitalization (the rapid technological advancements characteristic of the modern era, impacting how tourism is promoted, accessed, and experienced)
6. Empowerment of local actors (increasing authority granted to regional and local stakeholders in shaping and implementing tourism policies, often through a "bottom-up" approach in strategic actions).

Activities aimed at fostering crossborder cooperation constitute an institutionalized and legally defined process encompassing a series of projects. Often, the challenge

lies not in creating such a foundation but in implementing planned solutions in reality, hindered by bureaucratic limitations and a lack of interest.

In line with this, the pattern of crossborder collaboration encountered in practice does not always emerge solely from formalized strategies. Instead, it may result from decentralized and contextual processes within the formal cooperation framework (Perkmann, 1999; Princen et al., 2016; Tölle, 2013). This means that the initiator of collaboration between destinations is often political decentralization, aiming to encourage regional strategists and investors to foster development and enhance governance. Such an approach primarily aims at redistributing responsibilities to alleviate financial pressures on public finance systems, increasingly adopting a holistic approach to combat poverty and economic disparities in urban and peripheral destinations. Moreover, in the absence of a well-thought-out tactic, practice reveals isolated instances demonstrating the effectiveness of integrated actions at the local destination level by „collecting mainly ad hoc and unconnected activities of experts and organizations within local administration, which together produce a specific pattern of crossborder collaboration“ (Princen et al., 2016). By overcoming national and regional legal disparities, eventually crafting their own strategies, and relying on „informal agreements in the exchange between two legal-institutional frameworks separated by a border“ (Weidenfeld, 2013), local stakeholders successfully align defined strategic objectives with the interests of local development. Equally, practice acknowledges numerous negative instances of crossborder cooperation due to linguistic or cultural barriers, political circumstances, and the like, emphasizing the importance of individuals in adapting to the specific governance conditions required by this form of collaboration. Therefore, establishing trust through formal and informal agreements on cooperation is crucial for the stability of crossborder governance (Trippel, 2010). An example showcasing the successful initiation of integration processes based on these principles is precisely the Foča–Plužine case study, the focal point of our observations.

TERRITORIAL SCOPE OF RESEARCH

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro share a border spanning 249 kilometers (Lepirica, 2009), which predominantly features high mountainous terrain, except for sections where the border partially follows the course of rivers such as Tara, Piva, Ćehotina, and in the southern sector, the Bileća Lake. This border is largely impassable and rugged in its physical geographic nature.

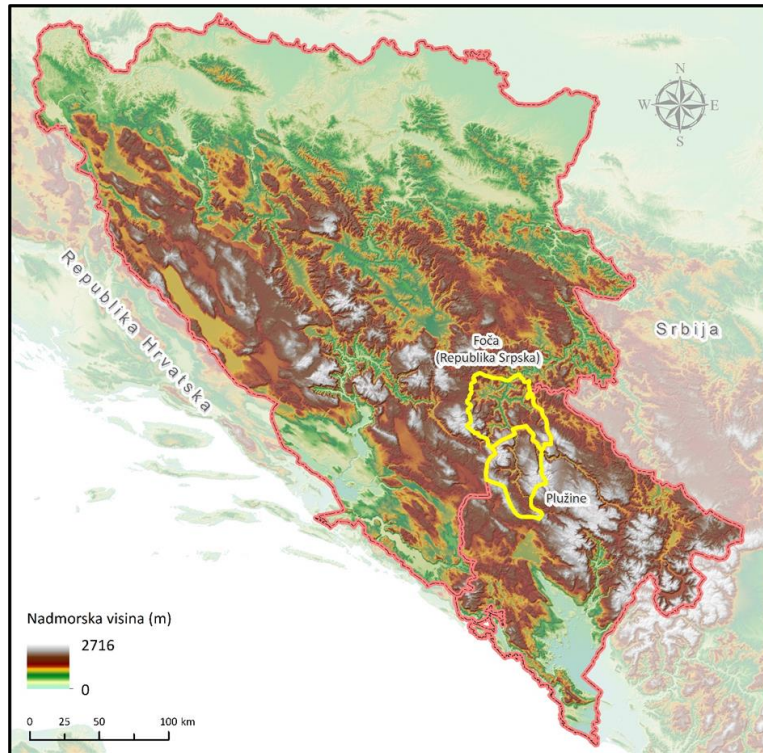


Fig. 1. Territorial scope of research
Source: Authors

In a socio-political context, the border region is governed by a ratified border agreement signed by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, resolving previous disputes and open border issues primarily related to the Sutrina area (Halilović & Suljić, 2016; Spahić, 2017). According to the administrative criteria defining the border area (Zupanc, 2018), the Bosnian-Herzegovinian-Montenegrin border sector comprises the following municipalities: Čajniče, Foča, Gacko, Bileća, and Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina), as well as Plužine, Žabljak, Pljevlja, Nikšić, and Herceg Novi (Montenegro). Given the research focus on the possibilities of crossborder collaboration between these countries in the context of tourism, Foča and Plužine case studies were chosen (areas with a significant proportion of protected areas). These local administrative units manage declared protected areas: the Sutjeska National Park (Foča) and the Piva Nature Park (Plužine), which form a natural connection with Montenegro's Durmitor National Park.

Therefore, it pertains to an area with exceptional potential for crossborder cooperation in environmental conservation, a topic that has been under consideration since 2009 through the UNEP's 'Durmitor Tara Canyon Sutjeska UNEP Feasibility Study,' aimed at elucidating the possibilities and potential for creating transnational cooperation

among stakeholders from three countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia.

According to Stupar and Milanović (2017), the physical connection between the Sutjeska and Durmitor parks by declaring the Piva Regional Park brings benefits in terms of enriching the tourist offer and biodiversity of these areas. The authors note that spatial planning documentation for protected areas, such as Sutjeska, has been considered expanding towards crossborder cooperation since its early establishment. Additionally, as part of the pre-accession policy to the European Union, efforts have been made to integrate these areas into broader ecological networks such as NATURA 2000, EU-ROPARC, UNESCO, and others. Presently, the greatest potential for tourism development in this crossborder sector lies in the Sutjeska National Park and its natural attractions. Notably, among these is one of Europe's last remaining primeval forests – Perućica. Within it lies the Tjentište memorial complex, erected in memory of the Fifth Enemy Offensive during World War II. Another heavily utilized tourist attraction is the Drina River, primarily for rafting tourism. Foča's entire tourist supply is predominantly centered around visits to the Park, with a positive trend observed in the number of foreign tourists (URL1). On the other side of the border, the Piva Nature Park, occupying just under half of the territory of the Plužine municipality, was established in 2015 and has taken charge of local tourist development beyond the Park's boundaries (Management Plan of the Piva Nature Park 2021-2025). Its diverse relief, characterized by the incised canyons of Tara, Piva, and Sušica, along with mountain lakes, forms a solid basis for developing various selective forms of tourism. This tourism potential must also be viewed in a broader socio-economic and demographic sense, considering the associated municipalities, which still represent peripheral and less developed spatial entities within the national context.

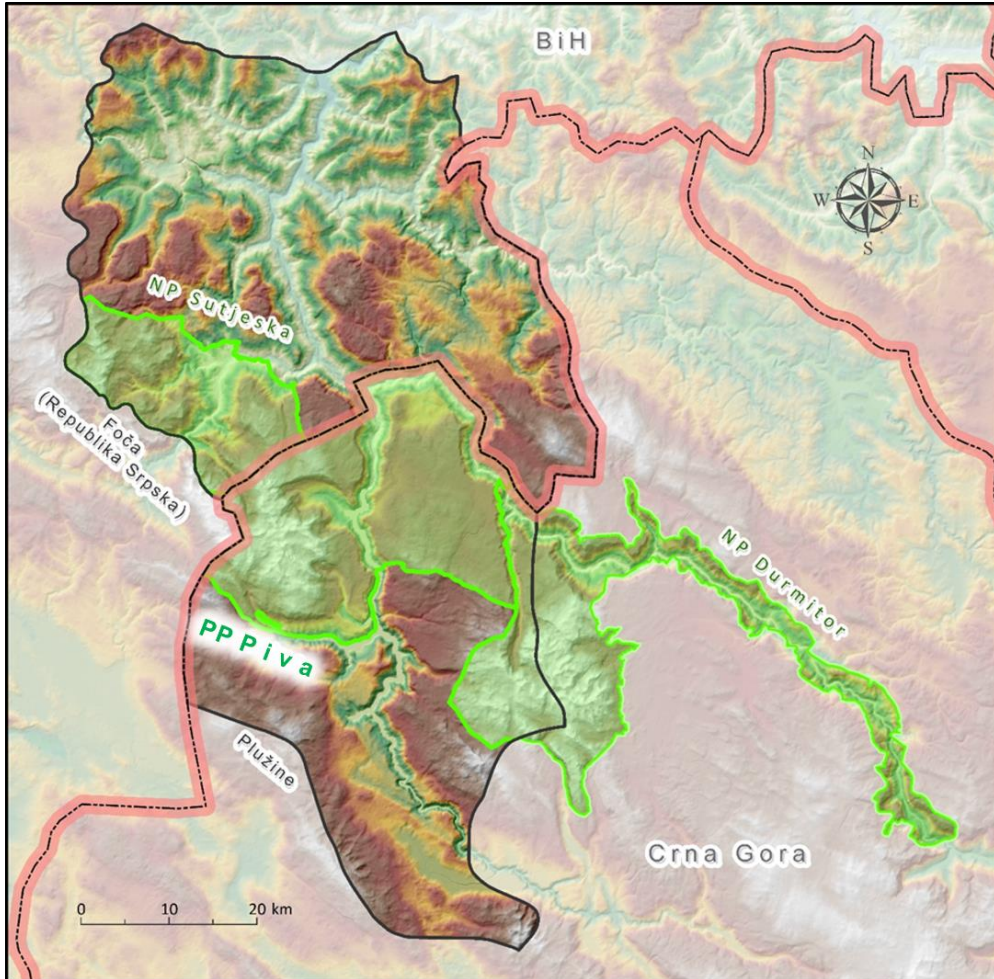


Fig. 2. National Park Sutjeska and Nature Park Piva;
Source: Authors

Foča is a municipality in southeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, covering an area of 1,115 square kilometers, making it the fourth-largest local administrative unit in Bosnia and Herzegovina, immediately behind Banja Luka, Mostar, and Konjic. Its entire eastern and partially southern sides border Montenegro (municipalities of Plužine, Žabljak, and Pljevlja). It holds significant importance in terms of transportation due to the Hum/Šćepan Polje border crossing, facilitating road communication between the main cities of the two countries. This border crossing is located in a highly mountainous area, and another smaller passage – Vitine – also serves in this capacity. The majority of Foča lies within a high-mountain zone, and its border with Montenegro boasts the highest peak in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Maglić (2386 meters). The principal hydrographic feature of the area is the Drina

River, and upstream lies the Tara River Canyon, one of the deepest canyons globally. It is a sparsely populated area (17 inhabitants/km²), where the population decreased by almost 50% between the last two censuses. Of the total 101 inhabited places, nearly 20% of them extend to the border with Montenegro. Out of this number, only four settlements have more than 50 residents, indicating significant depopulation. The economy of the Foča municipality was significantly affected by the events of the 1990s and is largely based on forestry enterprises, while in recent times, due to the so-called tertiary sectorization of the economy, service industries have been gaining prominence. On the other hand, the Plužine municipality is slightly smaller than Foča. Covering an area of approximately 850 square kilometers, it is the seventh-largest municipality in Montenegro. Located along the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is part of the Durmitor region along with the municipalities of Žabljak and Šavnik. This forest-pasture region is well connected to the rest of the country and neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina, thanks to the Podgorica-Sarajevo main road. Due to the dominance of high mountains, it is an area of significantly low population density (just over 3,000 inhabitants) and highly unfavorable demographic trends. The natural values of the Plužine region, from natural lakes like Trnovačko and Stabanjsko to mountains (Durmitor, Maglić, Pivska Planina, etc.) and rivers with canyons (Tara, Piva...), form the primary resource base for the development of agriculture, forestry, hydro energy, and ultimately tourism. Besides the natural attractions, the area's cultural-historical heritage from various periods, as it has been inhabited since the Illyrian era, also contributes to its tourism potential.

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study is to examine the current status and further possibilities of crossborder cooperation in the field of tourism along the Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Montenegrin border. The focus is on the following research questions: Is the border, by its nature and function, a barrier or an opportunity for enhancing better crossborder cooperation in tourism? What is the current situation, and what factors might influence the enhancement of these processes? Can tourism, given its substantial economic effects, act as a revitalizing force in the peripheral regions of two nations?

This analysis is based on a questionnaire completed by two local consultants (Josipović, 2011), one representing each side of the border within the protected areas –Sutjeska National Park and Piva Nature Park. The questionnaire was developed by Dr. Tena Božović and consisted of a total of 27 open-ended questions, divided into two thematic groups – questions aimed at providing authors with information about the state of crossborder tourism, coordination of organizational units on both sides of the border, and the perception of the border and its role in tourist activities and

movements. The second group of questions focuses on challenges in the development of crossborder tourism to identify factors that may limit or enhance crossborder cooperation in this field. One of the secondary objectives is to present a literature review on crossborder cooperation in this area, as a tool created by the European Union to reduce regional developmental disparities and stimulate the development of national peripheries. The research aims to enhance the depth and comprehensiveness of the investigation by integrating historical methodologies, statistical data analysis and cartographic methods. These approaches will complement the interview analysis, facilitating the systematic organization of existing knowledge pertaining to the subject matter.

RESULTS

Over the past few decades, the growth of the tourism market, driven by increasingly liberal socio-economic relationships in modern society and thanks to technological advancements making even the most remote and previously inaccessible areas accessible, has spurred what we call global tourism. Tourism bridges countries and people across international borders and presents an ever-growing challenge to how borders have historically been perceived and portrayed. Crossborder regions are one of the prime examples of lesser-recognized but equally significant sub-destinations. They attract both domestic and foreign tourists, contributing to the development of these physically and often functionally peripheral areas. Crossborder tourism aims to promote, enhance, and integrate natural and anthropogenic resources and social relationships built over time.

The collaboration between the municipalities of Plužine in Montenegro and Foča in Bosnia and Herzegovina in historical retrospect dates back to the medieval period, with intervals of interruption when, according to the territorial arrangement at that time, they belonged to the same state. Despite numerous political and social upheavals over time, local communities have always maintained good relations. Today, they face similar developmental problems arising from the consequences of transition, the democratization of society, and the shift of focus of the national economy towards the service sector dominating contemporary economic systems. In this context, tourism has been targeted as a significant driver of economic development for both municipalities, given priority over other activities.

The subject of the research is the crossborder cooperation between Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on the case studies of the municipalities of Plužine and Foča. The selection of these two spatial units is perhaps most interesting from a tourism perspective, as they share significant natural resources along with a similar cultural matrix. Despite the aftermath of the conflict in the 90s, which separated

aspects of their political and economic life along the line of their convergence, the stabilization and establishment of peace in the last two decades, primarily through shifts in political rhetoric, have led to a significant positive reflection of the developmental potential of these areas. One concrete example of activity in this field is the recently concluded joint project funded by the EU through the IPA fund within the Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro crossborder program, named "Tourism, Adrenaline, and Rafting Adventure" (T.A.R.A). This is a continuation of the project initiated by these municipalities since 2013, titled "Sustainable Crossborder Development of the Municipalities of Foča and Plužine." The main goal of both projects was to enhance the potential for crossborder cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, contributing to the European integration process of both countries, as well as sustainable development in border areas, with a focus on enhancing socio-economic development in the municipalities of Foča and Plužine through collaboration among actors from the public, private, and civil sectors in key development areas such as tourism, rural development, and environmental protection.

During July 2023, two structured interviews were conducted in the municipality of Foča (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the municipality of Plužine (Montenegro) with stakeholders actively involved in the tourism and economic development of the respective areas. In the municipality of Plužine, the local tourism organization associated with the Piva Nature Park participated, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the PI Sutjeska National Park represented the municipality of Foča. The intention was to analyze the current state of crossborder tourism and explore the potential for further collaborative action through these two key organizations within the local administration, which have intertwined activities and resources. Considering that both municipalities are smaller destinations with vital roles in tourism, the focus was on gathering perspectives, opinions, and facts from the direct participants involved in the creation, implementation, and monitoring of crossborder development.

The interview encompassed a series of questions concerning the overall state of tourism, stakeholder strategies, crossborder tourism and coordination, perception and role of the border in marketing strategies, strategies to attract residents from the other side of the border, and the significance of crossborder tourists in the overall tourism flow and border challenges.

After conducting and analyzing the interviews, two main themes emerged. ***The first one focused on tourism and the border***, where participants expressed their views on the state of the tourism industry, existing strategic actions, the perception of the destination as crossborder, experiences in crossborder cooperation and its benefits, marketing activities, and the perception of the border as an advantage or limitation. ***The second theme addressed the challenges*** related to the development of

crossborder tourism, aiming to define the challenges faced by the stakeholders concerning the border status, the established cooperation with neighboring municipalities, as well as identifying new threats or opportunities.

Tourism and border

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the tourism industry, imposing entirely new market dynamics that both the tourism supply and demand had to adapt to. The previous concept of strategic planning across all governance levels among tourism policy creators has undergone substantial changes, defining entirely new priority points or focal areas that will shape future development. Stakeholders from the local public sector in both observed destinations explicitly mentioned at the beginning of the interview that the market has begun its recovery phase, showing visible changes in tourist preferences, styles, and modes of stay.

"After quite a challenging period for tourism during the pandemic, the market has recovered, but there have been changes in the market itself, with more people preferring active tourism, staying in nature..." (Plužine).

The sustainability concept, identified as one of the primary trends in contemporary tourism development, has, as indicated, been put into practice long before its formal definition in strategic documents. The growth and development trend, with visible changes on the demand side, requiring a more active role from providers and creators of tourism supply, is more than evident, according to the interviewees.

Regarding the planning documentation for managing tourism development, facts indicate that there is currently no active strategic document defining the tourism development policy in the Municipality of Plužine, while in the Municipality of Foča, there exists a general development strategy emphasizing the influence of the tourism industry. This lack of top-down directive from the top hierarchical level in tourism policy formulation reflects the specificities of their cooperation and prioritizes local efforts within communities. Aligned around a „bottom-up“ approach, frequently guided by initiating, creating, and implementing various forms of cooperation in crossborder tourism, these affirm the contemporary foundations of European tourism policy concerning this method as effective in achieving developmental outcomes.

In terms of defining the destination from a spatial perspective, tourism, and other aspects, areas of natural protected zones (Sutjeska National Park and Piva Nature Park) stand out, implying stricter protection regimes to preserve natural values.

Tourism is about „creating experiences“ and „geographical images“ to attract people and encourage travel (Coëffé, 2017, p. 28). The border and what awaits travelers on

the other side could be promoted as an experience, even a „tourist product“ (Simon, 2019, p. 234). The border is often taken for granted and hence is not prioritized or made appealing, commonly seen as a multiple challenge for stakeholders, without recognizing the potential for its valorization as a tourist destination.

Addressing the perception of the border as an obstacle, as highlighted by most authors dealing with crossborder tourism, opens new possibilities for marketing campaigns to increase crossborder travel. Significant results in this field have been achieved in the observed area. The proximity to the border is generally perceived positively. The potential cooperation between the two municipalities is seen as an opportunity and enhancement for developing the tourism supply, with a tendency to disperse from local to regional integration:

"...The proximity of the municipality of Foča, as well as Gacko, represents an opportunity for further development and enhancement of the tourist supply in the area of the Plužine municipality... In the upcoming period, the Piva Nature Park plans to establish better communication with tourist organizations in neighboring municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina..." (Plužine)

The research revealed existing activities between bordering destinations through collaborative programs, conferences, and other forms of joint efforts aimed at cooperatively promoting cultural-historical identity within the field of tourism. The experiences are positive, highlighting significant advantages in collaboration concerning sustainable management and area preservation:

"The protected area of the Sutjeska National Park holds significant benefits through robust crossborder cooperation, primarily in terms of area preservation and sustainable management. Crossborder collaboration enhances various aspects, environmentally, touristically, socially, and culturally..." (Foča)

The entire area, according to stakeholder perspectives, can be seen as a geographical entity comprising „mountain ranges, lakes, rivers, hiking trails“ whose „flora and fauna know no boundaries“ (Foča).

The focus is on the Tara site as a tourism product, which has been subject to several extensive international crossborder projects and holds a synergistic effect in defining a potential unique tourist destination.

Among earlier forms of cooperation between the two bordering regions, ranging from joint studies on sustainable natural resource use to spatial mapping, there is the existence of a unified information center in Šćepan Polje.

Visible drawbacks manifested by the border in integrated action are overshadowed by the advantages it offers for the development of the observed area. On the downside are complex and unaligned administrative procedures and the need for improved bilateral relations between the two neighboring states to address existing issues, with the primary highlight being the problem of transportation infrastructure.

The border as a tourist destination is rarely the subject of marketing activities, as per the interview results. It is not referenced in that manner, nor do marketing strategies directly address breaking the psychological barriers within which the border exists in the minds of certain tourists. Simultaneously, there might be value in emphasizing its unique qualities and the value it offers to the border area. However, it can also be problematized as a barrier and, through direct confrontation, mitigate the negative perception from the demand side. According to the opinions presented, the border as a product and resource is not present in marketing strategies. On the one hand, this is perceived as a unique market in both municipalities without the need for a specific approach in positioning and highlighting the dividing line as a geographical, cultural, economic, and social category. From another perspective, it can be interpreted as an untapped market space, prompting further research and focus on the border itself as a tourist resource.

Promoting the border as a tourist resource could create an experience that significantly changes the negative attitudes held by both the local community and tourists toward tourism development. However, in practice, „the border is often a more functional access point lacking enough cultural allure to be used as a marketing point.“ (Beylier,P.A. 2020).

Surveyed participants' marketing strategies indicated that the market, in terms of promotion, is perceived as unified through the application of the same advertising instruments in both Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Respondents from the municipality of Plužine stated:

„Mostly, the same marketing strategy is applied to attract tourists from both Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The only difference is that in Montenegro, we use multiple platforms to disseminate content.“

Regarding the character of the border in positioning within the tourist market, the director of the Sutjeska National Park, when asked, „Do you rely on visitors from Montenegro?“ affirmed that „The tourism supply is almost inseparable considering our destinations, the peak of Maglić, Trnovačko Lake; these are all our shared tourists,“ promoting the proximity of the border in the tourism strategy by „emphasizing in all statements our closer location, highlighting that we are in a

crossborder area with the Piva Nature Park in Montenegro. “The director of the Piva Nature Park confirms this: „For guests from Bosnia and Herzegovina, we apply the same strategy as for guests from Montenegro.“

The challenges of crossborder tourism development

Considering the challenges that exist or that the tourism sector faces regarding the border position of the municipalities, the responses were similar. In the interview, a set of specific challenges was divided into four groups, namely:

- Social, cultural, and economic factors (language, tradition, history, tax systems);
- Political factors (laws and regulations, policies, power relations);
- Factors related to organization and management (communication, networks, visions, coherence);
- Other factors (physical barriers, weak transportation links, lack of financial resources, private stakeholders' interests);

The predominant issues identified relate to laws and regulations, administrative problems, and infrastructure deficiencies such as poor transportation links and weak financial incentives.

In response to addressing or avoiding these challenges, they emphasized initiating communication to enhance bilateral cooperation. In the words of Plužine municipality:

"Crossborder cooperation represents a crucial aspect in further tourism development in our municipality... We often initiate communication at the bilateral level with decision-makers (mostly institutions at the central level) to address identified issues (improving road infrastructure, liberalizing border crossings, constructing new border crossings to other municipalities in BiH)..."

One of the challenges faced, particularly on the side of the Plužine municipality, is the unfavorable demographic situation, somewhat limiting the development of tourism and the overall economic growth of the area under observation. Following the period of transition and privatization in the late 1990s, which had a negative impact on the economy of the northern region of Montenegro, including this area, demographics significantly changed due to urban core emigration and pronounced aging in rural areas. The current dynamics of tourism movements certainly have a positive impact on alleviating these negative effects, laying the groundwork for potential economic growth in the future. Stakeholders unanimously agree on tourism

as a revitalizer in the economic and demographic development of these municipalities:

"Tourism represents the backbone of our municipality's development. Further enhancing the tourist supply aiming for a longer tourist season through favorable investment arrangements, especially in adventure and winter tourism, would create solid foundations for economic recovery." (Piva Nature Park)

Every form of collaboration, viewed as a business relationship, is a dynamic and evolving phenomenon, modified by numerous internal and external factors. If crossborder cooperation is perceived from this standpoint, accommodating stakeholders with new ways of thinking becomes inevitable. As the final part of the research, stakeholders were asked for their opinions on whether there is readiness or, more specifically, openness in the public and private sectors for new strategic policies and how this process can be influenced. It was assessed that the path to this involves openness, dialogue, and intensive communication while simultaneously acknowledging that political instability poses a threat, causing inconsistency in implementing defined policies.

The essence of healthy cooperation lies in accepting the fact that efficient collaboration is not eternal and is not shaped by limitations, choices, and competition but rather by the "potential for collaboration" as an element capable of countering limitations, diverse choices, and competition, allowing for resistance against the intensifying industry turbulences (Fajal, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The primary resource of border areas is the border itself, which, depending on the perspective and function, symbolizes either openness or closure, signifying a significant catalyst for tourist movements. It is interpreted as a site of social and economic interactions, which, depending on its nature, can have positive or negative environmental implications. In the context of this research, the observed area showed a considerable level of tolerance toward the border as a barrier and an unconscious perception of it as a unique resource concerning tourism activities. At the time of the interviews, existing forms of collaboration were local with a tendency toward regional cooperation, but not yet at the level of fully developed crossborder coordination. The research motivation was partly driven by the idea of tourism valorizing the border as a foundational resource between two states, akin to the concept established by the U.S. and Canada during the 1990s called the "Two-Nation Vacation" (Portland State University, 2016). The intention was to explore the foundations for similar projects in the observed area, highlighting tourism as the

primary mechanism to initiate economic revitalization in peripheral, borderland areas.

Some of the recommendations and conclusions derived from the research, defined as guidelines for further promoting crossborder cooperation in tourism, include:

1. By identifying similarities and differences, aligning developmental goals, and defining a vision, the foundation for an integrated tourism supply is established, adapting to the evolution of the tourism industry and enhancing competitiveness. Leveraging the uniqueness of the resource base, encompassing natural, cultural, and historical treasures, exploited sustainably and systematically, benefits all stakeholders, ensuring a secure positioning of the destination within the tourism landscape.
2. To overcome weaknesses like inadequate transportation infrastructure and peak-season congestion, initiating the development and implementation of new technologies and programs through digitalization models is a crucial measure to enhance border fluidity and the entire borderland area. Such a system would centralize information about tourist attractions and events, developing applications providing tourists comprehensive access to supplies in border regions, thereby promoting crossborder tourism to a certain extent.
3. Creating a brand and defining an appropriate strategy, such as a destination management strategy, stands as a crucial measure within the tourism policy for border regions. Establishing a unique marketing strategy based on the diversity of a universal landscape that serves as an attraction for both border destinations. Municipalities within border regions, in their marketing efforts, strive to allure tourists and visitors by highlighting attractive elements that set them apart. However, despite existing cooperation, this approach can create a competitive environment. Literature often notes the oscillating relationship between border local communities, swinging between competition and collaboration (Ehlers, 2001). Competition tends to prevail in the tourism sector as many destinations compete for the same tourists, often hindering collaboration (Cevat,Dallen et al., 2005). Incompatible visions regarding tourism branding among businesses, tourism communities, and local authorities on both sides of the border consolidate rather than overcome competition (Ilbery & Saxena, 2011). Hence, additional efforts are required to establish effective stakeholder coordination in crossborder contexts to avoid cementing power imbalances and asymmetric development among border destinations (Altinay & Bowen, 2006; Ioannides et al., 2006).

4. Enhancing existing crossborder initiatives through a strategy to develop new products and diversify the regional tourism supply.

The lack of formal partnerships is often justified in practice by the collaborative nature of border regions. However, formalizing relationships would create capacities for better socio-economic conditions within these destinations. Crossborder cooperation is a process that requires continuous commitment, willingness, and time from tourism policymakers to build healthy and productive relationships. Hence, it should be considered a demanding yet promising developmental goal.

In future research, involving a larger number of participants and enhancing the mentioned qualitative research approach with surveys of local residents and tourists in border areas should be considered. This method could provide more comprehensive and detailed insights into the tourism development processes on the periphery.

REFERENCES

1. Avdić, A., Avdić, B. & Zupanc, I. (2022). Socio-demographic Analysis of Border Regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Acta Geographica Slovenica*, 63(2), 7-21. OI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/AGS.10859>
2. Altinay, L., & Bowen, D. (2006). Politics and tourism interface. The case of Cyprus. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33(4), 939–956.
3. Banjac M. (2012). Building Crossborder Communities Through Cooperation: Eu Regional Policy and Crossborder Regions as Spaces of Government. *Journal of Comparative Politics*. 5(2), 42-60.
4. Beylier, P.A. (2020). Crossborder Tourism in Cascadia – Perspectives from Tourism Stakeholders and Residents," Special Research Report, Border Policy Research Institute. 126.
5. Cankar, S. (2014). Factors that influence crossborder cooperation between businesses in the Alps–Adriatic region, *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 2014 Vol. 27, No. 1, 304–319.
6. Cevat, T., Dallen, T. J., Parnairis, A. & McDonald, D. (2005). Cross-border cooperation in tourism marketing growth strategies. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 18(1), 5-23. https://doi.org/10.1300/J073v18n01_02
7. Church, A. & Reid, P. (1999). Crossborder cooperation, institutionalization and political space across the English Channel. *Regional Studies*, 33(7), 643–655.
8. Clark, C., & Nyaupane, G. P. (2023). Crossborder Tourism and Community Solidarity at a Militarized Border: A Photo Elicitation Approach. *Journal of Travel Research*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875231195734>

9. Coëffé, V. (2017). Chapitre 1: Penser le tourisme pour en construire la définition. In V. Coëffé (Eds.), *Le Tourisme – De Nouvelles Manières d’Habiter le Monde*. Paris: Ellipses.
10. Del Valle, G. A. (2021). Gibraltar after Brexit: Looking for a New and Imaginative Model of Crossborder Cooperation in the EU Framework. *Cuadernos de Gibraltar*, (4)
https://doi.org/10.25267/Cuad_Gibraltar.2021.i4.1101.
11. Ehlers, N. (2001). The utopia of the binational city. *GeoJournal*, 54, 21-32.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021132413677>.
12. EPICAH, Interreg Europe (2019). For a new EU integrated Tourism Policy: Europe – 27 countries, one destination;
13. Fajal, A. (2015). Izazov partnerstva: Destinacija kao brend – upravljanje reputacijom mjesta CLIO, Beograd.
14. Halilović A., Suljić, A. (2016). Granični (teritorijalni) sporovi Bosne i Hercegovine sa susjednim državama, *Zbornik radova PMF*, 12, 49- 64.
15. Hardi, T., Kupa, M., Ocskay, G. & Eszter Szemerédi. (2021). Examining Crossborder Cultural Tourism as an Indicator of Territorial Integration across the Slovak–Hungarian Border, *Sustainability* 13, 13: 7225.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su13137225>.
16. Haselsberger, B. (2014). Decoding borders. Appreciating border impacts on space and people (OPEN ACCESS article). *Planning Theory and Practice*. 15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2014.963652>.
17. Hippe, S., Bertram, D. & Chilla, T. (2023). The COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst of crossborder cooperation? Lessons learnt for border-regional resilience. *Europa XXI* 43.
18. Horga, I. (2019). European Studies Research in the Sphere of Border and Cross-Border Cooperation Development with Special Overview at the EU’s Eastern Borders with Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, *EuroTimes*, 27(28), 15-48.
19. APRO GROUP, Sustainable Cross-Border Tourism Development Strategy 2014-2020, available at:
https://www.pbu2020.eu/files/uploads/pages_en/kapitalizacija/368/strategia_sokolka-grodno_eng.pdf
20. Ioannides D, P Nielsen & P Billing (2006). Trans-boundary collaboration in tourism: the case of the Bothian Arc. *Tourism Geographies* 8: 2, 122–142.
21. Jakola, F. (2016). Borders, planning and policy transfer: Historical transformation of development discourses in the Finnish Torne Valley. *European Planning Studies*, 24(10),1806–1824.

22. Josipovic, M., (2011). Feasibility study on establishing transboundary cooperation in the potential Tara-Drina National Park. Gland, Switzerland and Belgrade, Serbia: IUCN Programme Office for Southeastern Europe.
23. Klemenčić, M., (2005). Igre s granicama. Poimnaje političke granice u političkoj geografiji // 3. hrvatski geografski kongres / Toskić, Aleksandar (ur.). Zagreb: Hrvatsko geografsko društvo, 51-59.
24. Konrad, V., (2015). Toward a Theory of Borders in Motion, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Vol. 30 (1), 1-17.
25. Lacoste, Y. (1993): *Dictionary of geopolitics*. Paris: Flammarion.
26. Lepirica, A. (2009). Historijsko-geografski razvoj granica Bosne i Hercegovine, *Zbornik radova PMF*, 6, 53 – 64.
27. Livandovschi, R. (2017). Crossborder Tourism and its Significance for Tourism Destinations, *Eastern European Journal for Regional Studies (EEJRS)*, Center for Studies in European Integration (CSEI), Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM), vol. 3(1) 1-108.
28. Nail, T. (2016). *Theory of the Border*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, England, 288.
29. Newman, D. (2006). Borders and Bordering Towards an Interdisciplinary Dialogue, *European Journal of Social Theory* 9(2): 171–186.
30. Newman, D., Paasi, A. (1998). Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography, *Progress in Human Geography*, 22 (2), 186-207.
31. Pearce, D. (1992). *Tourist Organizations*. Harlow: Longman.
32. Perkmann, M. (1999). Building governance institutions across European borders. *Regional Studies*, 33(7), 657–667.
33. Plan upravljanja Parkom prirode Piva za 2021. godinu, available at: <https://www.parkpiva.com/dokumenta/>.
34. Portland State University. (2016). Cascadia: Ecolopolis 2.0. Portland State University. Available at: pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/usp_planning/2/.
35. Princen, S., Geuijen, K., Candel, J., Folgerts, O., & Hooijer, R. (2016). Establishing crossborder cooperation between professional organizations: Police, fire brigades and emergency health services in Dutch border regions. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 23(3), 497–512.
36. Prokkola, E.K. (2007). Crossborder regionalization and tourism development at the Swedish-Finnish border: “Destination Arctic Circle.” *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 7(2), 120–138.
37. Saxena, G. & Ilbery, B. (2011). Integrated Rural Tourism in the English-Welsh Cross-border Region: An Analysis of Strategic, Administrative and Personal Challenges. *Regional Studies*, 45. (8), pp. 1139-1155.
38. Simon, A. (2019). *Tourisme: Fondamentaux et techniques*. Malakof: Dunod

39. Spahić, M. (2017). Some problems of borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Acta Geographica Bosniae et herzegovinae*, 8, 5-23.
40. Stupar, V. & Milanović, Đ. (2017). Hystory of nature protection in the Sutjeska National Park. *Glasnik Šumarskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Banjoj Luci*. 26. 113–128. <https://doi.org/10.7251/GSF1726113S>.
41. Šerić, N. & Talijančić, J. (2011). Identity of national heritage in function of specialised tourist offer of Croatia. *Scientific Annals of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi - Stiinte Economice* 58, 327-338.
42. Taubenböck, H., Otto, C., Gülzau, F., Mau, S. (2023). Border regions across the globe: Analyzing border typologies, economic and political disparities, and development dynamics, *Applied Geography*, Volume 151, 102866.
43. Timothy, D. J. (2001). *Tourism and political boundaries*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.,
44. Toca, C. & Czimre, K. (2016). Crossborder cooperation at the EU internal and external borders. *Eurolimes*. 21:7-19, 242-243.
45. Tölle, A. (2013). National planning systems between convergence and incongruity: Implications for crossborder cooperation from the German–Polish perspective. *European Planning Studies*, 21(4), 615–630.
46. Tripl, M. (2010). Developing crossborder regional innovation systems: Key factors and challenges. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, 101(2), 150–160.
47. URL 1: <https://poslovnenovine.ba/2018/08/27/povecan-broj-turista-u-nacionalnom-parku-sutjeska-za-30-posto/> (accessed in November 23, 2023).
48. Van Houtum, H. (2000). An Overview of European Geographical Research on Borders and Border regions, *Journal of Borderland Studies*, XV, 1, 57-83.
49. Weidenfeld, A. (2013). Tourism and cross border regional innovation systems. *Ann. Tour. Res.*, 42, 191–213.
50. Wevers, HT. & de Langen, F. (2020). Social entrepreneurship as a form of crossborder cooperation: Complementarity in EU border regions. *Sustainability*. 12 (20): 8463. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208463>
51. Winkler, D. (2023). The political economy of bordering and the reproduction of borders in the case of Frontex. *Human Geography*, 16(2), 162-174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19427786221135577>
52. Zorko, M. (2012). Pojam granice u postmodernoj geopolitici, *Politička misao*, 49 (2), 30-44.
53. Zupanc, I. (2018). Demogeografski razvoj hrvatskog pograničja 2001 – 2011, *Migracijske i etničke teme*, Vol. 34 No. 2, 113-142.