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CULTURAL CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION AMONG BALKAN'S COUNTRIES WITH THE CASE OF SERBIA AND BULGARIA

Abstract Cultural cross-border cooperation includes all fields of cross-border cooperation and gives base for main connections and interactions. Without strengthening cultural cross-border cooperation, it is impossible to build significant relations between neighbours. Culture, as a foundation, an activator and a purpose of development in cross-border regions, represents a cardinal and conditional factor of cross-border cooperation. Today's situation in the Balkans reveals ethnic diversity of this region and territorial dispersion of ethnic groups. This implies at the same time great cultural diversity as well as dispersal of various national cultures over the Balkan's states. During the 20th century Serbia and Bulgaria have very complex political and intrastate relations. But in the last 10 years there have been significant improvements in the cross-border cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria. The results of these improvements are established Euro-regions and implemented cross-border projects between these two countries. Existing Euro-regions between Serbia and Bulgaria created links between various local authorities and made excellent basis for cross-border initiatives and joint projects to promote common interests across the border and cooperation for the common good of the border areas populations. The well managed cultural cross-border cooperation between these two countries will provide a clear view of common features and raise common identity for the region, contribute to tolerance and understanding between people in this area and enable them to overcome the peripheral status of the border region in their countries and improve the living conditions of the population.

Key words: Cross-border cooperation, culture, Balkan's countries, Serbia, Bulgaria

Sadržaj: Prekogranična saradnja u oblasti kulture daje osnov za veze i interakcije u okviru delovanja prekogranične saradnje. Kultura kao osnov, activator i svrha razvoja u prekograničnim regionima predstavlja bitan i uslovni faktor prekogranične saradnje. Današnja situacija na Balkanu otkriva etničku raznolikost regiona i teritorijalnu disperziju etničkih grupa. Ovo izražava, u isto vreme, veliku kulturnu raznolikost kao i širenje različitih nacionalnih kultura preko Balkanskih država. Tokom dvadesetog veka Srbija i Bugarska su imale veoma komplikovane odnose, ali je u poslednjih deset godina doslo do značajnog poboljšanja u interakciji ove dve zemlje intenziviranjem prekogranične saradnje. Rezultati su uspostavljeni Euroregioni i ostvareni prekogranični projekti. Postojeći Euroregioni između Srbije i Bugarske uspostavili su veze između lokalnih vlasti i stvorili dobru osnovu za prekogranične inicijative, zajedničke projekte, promovisanje zajedničkih interesa i kooperacije zarad sveopšteg dobra stanovništva prekograničnog područja. Sa intenziviranjem saradnje u oblasti kulture bolje ćemo poznavati naše susede i uočiti zajedničke osobine u svakodnevnom načinu života što će rezultirati jačanju bliskosti sa susednim zemljama i time dobiti razvoju zajedničkog identiteta regiona, toleranciji i razumevanju između stanovništva i omogućiti da zajedničkim snagama prevaziđemo periferni status pograničnih oblasti čime ćemo značajno doprineti poboljšanju kvaliteta života stanovništva u prekograničnim područjima.

Кljučне речи: Prekogranična saradnja, kultura, Balkanske zemlje, Srbija, Bugarska

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Introduction

Since the foundation of the European Union, a lot of attention has been dedicated to cross-border cooperation. Reason for that is recognition that sustainability of the European Union depends on good cooperation among neighbouring countries at the regional and local level in the established Euro regions.

Today, cross-border cooperation remains crucial in achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe, particularly with regard to the borders between new and old EU Member States, between new EU Member States and between the new EU Member States and the Neighbouring Countries (www.espon.eu).

According to the “European Charter for Border and Cross-border Regions”, overcoming previous mistrusts, developing mutual confidence and grass-roots connections are the key elements in any cross-border cooperation (www.aebr.net). Cross-border cooperation can be defined as an action on building respectable neighbouring relations, connections and interactions in every field of cooperation.

Cultural cross-border cooperation constitutes every field of cooperation and gives groundwork for main connections and interactions. Without strengthening cultural cross-border cooperation, it is impossible to build significant relations between neighbours. Culture, as a foundation, an activator and a purpose of development in cross-border regions, is being deemed as the cardinal and conditional factor of cross-border cooperation.

The question is whether the culture is of real importance for cross-border development and planning? The next question is whether it implies positive or possible some negative effects to economic or social development, one to some past experiences in Balkan’s countries in particular? And finally how should culture be treated in cross-border areas over Balkan’s border area in the transitional period nowadays?

Culture and its reality in Balkan’s countries

Today’s situation in the Balkans reveals ethnic diversity of this region and territorial dispersion of ethnic groups. This implies at the same time great cultural diversity as well as dispersal of various national cultures over the Balkan’s states. The spreading of influences, emerging as cultural frameworks in territories along the Danube is so immense that it is sometimes accepted only with disbelief (Stojkov B., 2002). Romanian ethnos and Romanian culture can be found in Hungary, Serbia and Bulgaria; population of the cross-border regions in these countries marks their affiliation to the Romanian culture and nation by cultural affirmation and identification. In similar manner Serbian ethnos and culture are found in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Hungary, confirming their culture through written documents, folklore art, spiritual life, festivals, etc. Just as well Bulgarian and Macedonian ethnos have their enclaves in neighboring countries, and even mixing with Turkish ethnos and cultures from the southeast. Albanian ethnos is deeply infiltrated within Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija and dominant in the space with profound and vast traces or Serbian culture (Stojkov B., 2002).

Cultural patterns of these nations are developing on three levels:

- elite culture level,
- mass culture level,
- level of traditional folkloric, more or less autochthonous culture.

Elite culture is generated in urban centers, mainly those with the highest rank in the urban centers hierarchy. Hence, today, although under difficult financial and economic conditions, Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia, Ohrid, Sarajevo and other big cities, organize art festivals (film, music, theater), they launch artists in various arts (design, architecture,

painting, music) they revive tradition of cultural manifestations at the European level and thus they try to keep in touch with the European centers of greater tradition and greater economic potentials.

But, urban centers are also generators of mass culture, as a mean of spreading their wider influence and consequently empowering material basis for other forms of culture through tax policies, there where this policy is adequately oriented. In the era of the fast commercialization various types of mass culture supported by the money of the "nouveau riche elite" are aggressively spreading, and they correspond to their cultural pattern (Stojkov B., 2002).

Numerous festivals of national, regional or local character gather a huge number of people, idols of the popular music dominate the mass media and in public and so they crack some but very fixed regional and national barriers (connection through the clan affiliation, religion or mentality).

Urban physical structure, as a manifestation of the cultural and style pattern in every society, nowadays in Balkan countries shows a lack of defined and articulated style. Today, cities are developing without form and clear inner structure and identity, abandoned under the attacks of building entrepreneurs and with no clear housing policy; they directly reflect the social and economic situation. Elite architectural models are taken from the West, without national style recognition, with mass housing without any order submitted to individual tastes and interests. The domination of the illegal construction in Albania, Macedonia, Serbia or Montenegro represents at the same time the decline of the regional tradition and endangers the regional interaction because of the housing and employment irregularities.

A village as an important element of the settlement structure is mostly a consumer of the mass culture and it is a creator of the regional or local in some cases even autochthonous folk culture, especially in the regions with dominant and deeply traditional rural structure. To the opposite, architecture is suffering the primitive tendency and attitude to pompous, highly tasteless creations under poor economic conditions, just for the reason of prestige thus directing funds (emigrant working population from abroad!) to the "dead capital"?

Analysis of the situation in the Balkans today indicates a serious economic, social and ecological crisis in rural settlements, i.e. a lack of adequate policies, for cultural protection, which could help them gain a higher quality of living in a more proficient economic and social context.

To cherish native culture, folklore and to connect it with other cultures on the regional or even cross border grounds, therefore can be assumed as a good receipt for regional development as well as a mean of achieving integration at the wider Balkans' framework. Similar folklore roots in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro or Albania, familiar ethnographical features (costumes, folklore tradition, food) and the traditional hospitality are all important factors that could be employed through special programs, whether for tourism, or economic development and cultural exchange. Binding patterns of rural cultural belts have their own natural, geographical links and paths and often stretch regardless of administrative borders. This is the case between Northern Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia, South Serbia with Kosovo and Greece, or the case of the rural culture of Vlachian, border regions between Bulgaria, Romania and East Serbia, culture of specific Islamic origin in the three-border zone between Bosnia, Montenegro and Serbia rural culture of Banat between Romania and Serbia, or rural culture of Bunjevac between Croatia, Serbia and Hungary. It is evident that Serbia, due to its central position in this constellation, surrounded by seven states draws most influences and interconnections with its neighbors

Cultural cross-border cooperation

Cultural cross-border cooperation acts in all the areas of life: in economic, environmental and social issues. It involves an ongoing process to break down mistrusts and prejudices, and to build up confidence in neighbouring border regions (www.aebr.net). It helps to increase apprehension and tolerance between neighbouring countries, fortifies regional identity and improves the business environment. It plays an essential role in national and international development, tolerance and harmonious interactions between cultures (www.bmvbs.de). Therefore cultural cross-border cooperation has a decisive effect on the quality of life of the population on both sides of the border.

The actual cultural cross-border cooperation takes place at regional and local level in established Euro-regions. The first Euro-region, named EUREGIO, was formed in 1958th on Dutch-German border. Today there are approximately 190 established Euro-regions on internal and external EU borders. On one hand, cross-border regions are contributing to tolerance and understanding between different nations. On the other hand, they are laying the foundations which will enable them to tackle their other important task: to cater for the sustained economic and infrastructure growth of the cross-border area (www.aebr.net).

With extension of EU on 1 May 2004 (Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia) and 1 January 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania) the EU extended its cultural identity as well. Increasing EU cultural differences cause rising problems in mutual understanding and tolerance between different nations. Cultural cross-border cooperation at the EU's external borders not only differs greatly, but is also highly divergent and complex. In addition, these border regions are often confronted with rapid changes in border regions next to them (www.aebr.net), like in the case of cultural cross-border cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria.

Cultural cross-border cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria

During the 20th century Serbia and Bulgaria have highly complex political and intrastate relations. The geopolitical framework and the dominating ideology were both a reason and a pretext for the troubled relations between Bulgaria and Serbia. Even after the end of the Cold War these trends, in bilateral relations, have not been overcome because of the crisis in former Yugoslavia in the 90s. The changes in Serbia since the end of 2000 have set a new political opportunity for commencing a dialogue between both states (Abrova A., 2003). In the last 10 years there have been significant improvements in the cross-border cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria. The results of these improvements are established Euro-regions (Stara planina, Middle Danube Iron Gates, Morava-Pčinja-Struma, Eurobalkan, Nišava) and implemented cross-border projects between these two countries through CARDS and IPA programmes.



Map No 1. Cross-border area between Serbia and Bulgaria
(Source: Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme)

Existing Euro-regions between Serbia and Bulgaria created links between various local authorities and make excellent groundwork for cross-border initiatives and joint projects to promote common interests across the border and cooperation for the common good of the border areas population. Spheres of cooperation in these Euro-regions are cross-border activities aiming economic development, infrastructure development, cultural development, tourism development, protection of the environment, exchange of information and networking, transfer of know-how, education, media (www.evropa.sr.gov.yu), etc. Realizing the cross-border cooperation established Euro-regions deals with many constraints which lag the development of cross-border cooperation.

The main constraints of cultural cross-border cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria are: the long historical memory, which is directly interrelated with the internal resistance to get closer; psychological barriers and stereotypes (Abrova A., 2003); weak infrastructure - small numbers of border crossings, poor quality of road connections; low level of economic integration (www.balkancoalition.org); high depopulation rate and unsatisfactory age structure; no established practice in every day communication between different social, professional, territorial and civil communities; dependence on visas create difficulties in the interactions (www.rec.bg); limited financial possibilities for participation in the realization of common projects (www.balkancoalition.org); different status in the European Union which requires, on one side different regimes of interaction with the structures of the EU, and access to different funds (www.rec.bg); lack of knowledge about the high cultural achievements of neighbours, which additionally distorts mutual recognition (Abrova A., 2003); etc.

Cultural cross-border cooperation constitutes every field of cross-border cooperation enabling groundwork for the main connections and interactions, so all the mentioned constraints slowdown the development of cross-border cooperation in general. To improve cross-border cooperation in general the cultural cross-border cooperation has to be raised on higher level in the first place. That can be achieved by using the cultural strengths and potentials to overcome main constraints.

The cross-border area between Serbia and Bulgaria has rich traditional and cultural inheritance manifesting through various customs, ceremonies, costumes, specific architecture, religious elements, traditional use of the resources (www.rec.bg), etc. Tradition and culture, building regional identity over the centuries, certainly represent one of the most integrative components for the cross-border area and could easily be utilized as a driving engine for regional development, regeneration and prosperity (www.evropa.sr.gov.yu).

The people in border area are very close, with similar languages, folklore, history and national mentality (Abrova A., 2003). Language, more than any other cultural trait, reflects culture. Languages of Serbia and Bulgaria belong to the group of Slavic languages. Because of that, they share similarities in vocabulary and linguistic heritage and it is a reason why they see the world in a similar way and have similar habits creating common regional identity (www.cultplan.org). In-depth knowledge of the language of the neighbouring countries is a prerequisite for lively communication, cooperation and interaction in cross-border area which in this border area have high-quality base to be materialized through the cross-border language education and literature presentation projects.



Picture No. 2. Minster Poganovo

Overcoming the barriers made by historic developments in the last three centuries, causing serious disadvantages for the people in the border area, is one of the most important objectives of the cultural cross-border cooperation (www.aebr.net). The mistrust, psychological barriers and stereotypes accumulated for centuries could not be overcome in days, but certainly, informing and attracting of local people and institutions to associate in

cultural cross-border projects and getting to know their neighbours are a real way to fulfil that objective.



Picture No.3. Kamenica village

Different social and cultural policies concerning legal regulations, administration, taxation, economics, culture and social affairs, on both side of the border, will never be totally prevailed because no state is able to draft its laws in such a way that they harmonise with all the neighbouring states on its borders. Anyhow, political problems and jurisdictional difficulties between Serbia and Bulgaria can be reduced by creating equal strategic framework for sustainable and long-term cooperation. The Strategy have to identify main constrains and provide ways to overrun or reduce problems that has been made by different administrative structures and powers, fiscal and social legislation, and many other different areas of political activity (e.g. spatial planning, economic support, media landscapes, etc.) (www.aebr.net).

During centuries border area between Serbia and Bulgaria has been developed into peripheral, structurally weak areas with limited transport links. Natural borders (rivers and mountains) even reinforced frontier barriers. The lack of infrastructure slows down the development in this border area, and because of that economic activity has been moving away from the borders and population emigrated towards centers of the national states. Developing infrastructure will create conditions for intensifying direct contacts between people, communication and deepening of the cultural co-operation and will give a real physical dimension to cross-border cooperation (Abrova A., 2003).

The relation towards environmental protection and cultural heritage is the reflection of the cultural level of population in border area. The main characteristic of border area is the existence of the rich natural and cultural resources that have to be preserved and protected. Air, water and natural development do not stop at borders and effective environmental protection and nature conservation is needed in border area (www.aebr.net). Serbian-Bulgarian border region have wide biological diversity with great variety of plant and animal life where numerous plant species are endemic. The natural resources of border area are: diverse relief with numerous geomorphologic phenomenon (caves, natural bridges, gorges and canyons), rich forests, thermal springs, exit to the Danube river and huge number of natural parks (Djerdap National Park, Rila National Park, Vitosha National Park, "Belogradchishki Skali, etc.), protected areas (Kučaj, Suva Planina, Jerma river, Seven Lakes of Rila, Stob Pyramids, etc.) and natural reserves (Nature Park Stara Planina, Nature Park Sićevačka gorge, Chuprene, etc.).



Map No 2. Infrastructure connection in cross-border area between Serbia and Bulgaria
(Source: Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme).

These natural beauties combined with the rich historical and cultural heritage of the region are unique regional assets. The cultural heritage of the border area includes monuments and sites related to churches, old towns and old rural areas, archaeological sites, as well as monuments devoted to commemoration of historical events or figures. Using the potentials of rich natural resources and cultural heritage for improving the region's activities in field of cultural cross-border cooperation and making border area a place for living with good quality of life can be achieved by planning and implementation of numerous activities for the development of joint tourism routes, joint studies, promotion and advertising, joint actions for preservation, intercultural education, etc (www.evropa.sr.gov.yu).

The cross border cooperation success or failure depends greatly on the involvement and active participation of its citizens. Promotion of the border area and sharing the information about cultural cross-border activities on the historical, socio-cultural, geographical, structural and economic conditions of the cross-border region is necessary to achieve day-to-day cooperation. The setting up of a cross-border press association and creating media network for improving information systems about cultural events in border area is one of the ways to achieve that goal (www.aebr.net). Projects that could also contribute to fulfil that goal are: developing a web site for cultural exchange between the two countries; building a circle of committed experts and promoting educational and academic exchange (Abrova A., 2003); providing an overview of cross-border regions in maps, publications and educational material; networking the tourist information centres established in all municipalities that are functional; promotion of partnerships, youth encounters, family gatherings, sports events,

exchanges of civil servants, seminars, study conferences, ecumenical meetings, subject-related events on cross-border regional issues (www.aebr.net); etc. The existences of international organizations representing the Euro-regions, are a good basis for exchange of experience and information with similar structures in Europe. The membership of the Euro-regions in border area between Serbia and Bulgaria in the “Association of European Border Regions” increases the chance for these regions to be promoted on an international level (www.rec.bg).



Picture No. 4. Traditional Balkan's food

Conclusions

In the guidelines and principles for the future the Strategies define a series of positions with regard to the cultural heritage emphasizing importance of equally treating the past and present as corner stones of the regional and national identity has been identified. For the purpose it is suggested that countries from this region protect their cultural heritage on cultural but also on economic basis that understands carefully defined normative instruments as well as a treatment at all spatial planning levels.

Beside the protection of the cultural heritage a special attention is recommended to the so-called transnational paths of Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman cultures, which would provide protection of the special character of various social communities and their features.

Furthermore, the establishment of strong scientific and administrative criteria for identification of the structures that represent historical or art heritage is recommended. It is also recommended that legal regulations be moved from the protection of the buildings towards the protection of cultural complexes and areas (in an integrative way).

It is assessed as necessary to establish legal and professionals arrangements for preserving the collective memory of all nations and nationalities, ethnical and religious groups who created cultural specific heritage in countries such as Balkan ones.

The legal protection is important and necessary but it cannot be applied to all assets because of practical and financial reasons. Therefore, very important is the education and enlightenment of the population which could result in a change of individual attitudes toward cultural and natural assets. Particularly important is the protection of the rural architecture, folklore art and traditional handcrafts, which can help improving the economic basis of rural communities and local/regional identity (VISION PLANET). The local and

regional identity is thus becoming the prerequisite for achieving European spatial development objectives such as attractiveness, but also cohesion as precondition for better common development and common understanding in Europe. In this the private capital and public private partnership ought to take a special position in the restructuring, maintenance and utilization of the cultural heritage. Ways of utilization should be carefully defined within the privatization with improved systematic control and supervision.

Finally, the nationalistic attitudes on both national and regional levels, are not to be forgotten for historic reasons and enormous troubles, conflicts and tragedies but, to the opposite, have to be avoided by common interregional, cross-border or transnational actions and open exchange of ideas, projects and realization.

It is obvious that contemporary European strategies give a paramount role of culture and cultural heritage to the future regional development and to possible ways of cooperation and integration so necessary for Balkans in particular. This also considers the cultural diversity as an important factor in the integration processes between countries (Eser, Thiemo W., 2000) but with some critical issues or fallacies in practical actions in the region.

For the beginning of the cross-border cooperation between Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria, and other Danubian countries, and for the reason of the present situation in the whole region of the Southeast Europe, the most convenient starting point seems to be culture, i.e. cultural paths, values and activities. The soft cultural issue and its international orientation might be the initial trigger for other significant projects in the future (economy, transport, infrastructure, environment) in the IRON GATE area, with an open hope that Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia expert initiative will get stronger support from various economic and political powers, international, national, regional and local.

Tradition and culture, that have built regional identity over the centuries, certainly represent one of the most integrative components for the cross-border area. The well managed cultural cross-border cooperation providing a clear view of common features and convergences contributes to a common identity for the region, tolerance and understanding between people in this area and enable them to overcome the peripheral status of the border region in their country, to a sustainable development of the cross-border region and improvement of the living conditions for the population.

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**KULTURNA PREKOGRANIČNA SARADNJA BALKANSKIH DRŽAVA
NA PRIMERU SRBIJE I BUGARSKE**

Prekogranična saradnja predstavlja jedan od ključnih faktora koji utiču na ostvarivanje ekonomske, socijalne i teritorijalne kohezije unutar Evrope, posebno u odnosu na granice između novih i starih zemlja članica, između novih članica, kao i između novih članica Evropske unije i susjedskih zemalja. Prekogranična saradnja se može definisati kao akcija usmerena ka izgradnji dobrih susjedskih odnosa, veza i interakcija. Ako želimo da poboljšamo nivo i kvalitet prekogranične saradnje prvo moramo ojačati veze i interakcije u oblasti kulture aktivizacijom kulturnih potencijala koji su na području Balkana raznovrsni i brojni.

Prekogranična saradnja u oblasti kulture deluje u okviru svakog aspekta prekogranične saradnje i stvara osnov za intenziviranje i jačanje veza i interakcija u okviru delovanja prekogranične saradnje. Ona je stalni proces suzbijanja nepoverenja i predrasuda, i jačanja poverenja u prekogranični region. Pomaže povećanju razumevanja i tolerancije između susjednih država, jačanju regionalnog identiteta i povećanju ekonomske privlačnosti regiona što ima značajan efekat na kvalitet života stanovništva sa obe strane granice. Takođe, igra suštinsku ulogu u nacionalnom i internacionalnom razvoju, toleranciji i harmonizaciji odnosa između kultura.

Danasnja situacija na Balkanu otkriva etnicku raznolikost regiona i teritorijalnu disperziju etnickih grupa. Ovo izražava, u isto vreme, veliku kulturnu raznolikost kao i širenje različitih nacionalnih kultura preko Balkanskih država. Prevazilaženje barijera koje su stvorene tokom istorije i koje su izazvale ozbiljne smetnje u interakciji stanovništva balkanskih pograničnih oblasti, jeste jedan od najvažnijih ciljeva prekogranične saradnje u oblasti kulture. Nepoverenje, psiholoske barijere i stereotipi, koji su se akumulirali vekovima, ne mogu se brzo i lako prevazići, ali, svakako, informisanjem i uključivanjem lokalnog stanovništva i institucija u projekte i aktivnosti u oblasti kulture možemo se približiti ispunjenju datog cilja. Sa intenziviranjem saradnje u oblasti kulture bolje ćemo poznavati naše susede i uočiti zajedničke osobine u svakodnevnom načinu života što će rezultirati jačanju bliskosti sa susjednim zemljama i time dobiti razvoj zajedničkog identiteta regiona, toleranciji i razumevanju između stanovništva i omogućiti da zajedničkim snagama prevaziđemo periferni status pograničnih oblasti čime ćemo značajno doprineti poboljšanju kvaliteta života stanovništva u prekograničnim područjima.