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BOOK REVIEW

IDENTITY ISSUES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS. THE CASE OF ALBANIA AND MONTENEGRO

Emilia SARNO, 2019, Aracne Editrice, Italy, 110 pages

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The book *Identity Issues in the Western Balkans. The case of Albania and Montenegro* is an interesting book unveiling a regional study of one of the most important region in South-Eastern Europe, the Balkans being a region in the spotlight of various scholars of different backgrounds.

Outstanding attention has been paid in recent decades with relevant studies highlighting the cultural complexity of the Balkan region. This was the starting point of the research for the author focusing on a specific in-depth study investigating two relevant countries in the region. Its complex identity is highlighted from the beginning with the first part of the book triggering some issues in the cultural background of the region on which a complex identity is debated. The local regional and national identities are uncovered through the lens of historical inquiries presenting the regional evolution of the investigated territories from the old tyranny to a pluralist system. Against such a background, the author discusses anthropological and environmental factors of the Balkans, the topics focusing on the old historical toponyms and on the key geographical factors that frame a specific cultural identity through the intersection of different communities, people and culture.

The first chapter of the book describes the regional mosaic between the East and the West, with important contributions to the regional cultural identity of Albania and Montenegro. It shaped particular forms in the current national, regional and local spatial planning within the territorial models of the region. Its pluralist formation based on the inherited planned construction in the region is now turning its face to the European model of cultural construction under the present umbrella of cultural internationalization.

To understand these questions the second chapter brings to the fore historical issues from the Ottoman Empire to the territorial composition of modern Turkey. To discuss the establishment of state borders in the region the author samples Albania as a



case in point. In doing so, the regional complexity is approached highlighting that in line with the complex territorial questions unsolved issues remain as part of a composite historical and cultural background always influenced by the geographical feature. In order to understand this problem, the author presents the historical region of Albania with special attention being paid to the Turkish domination and to the establishment of borders in the region.

The construction and the emergence of a state is the subject of the second part of this volume. Geographical and socio-demographic features of Montenegro are analyzed, the author presenting the main geographical aspects of Montenegro next to the main ongoing demographic changes generated by social, economic and political factors. Two relevant economic sectors are then described, agriculture and tourism. The author assesses the main economic shifts in this country. The research on the economic background concludes that local, regional and national tourism could represent a certain avenue for further development.

Since urban settlements remain important fertile backgrounds for research in different regional analyses, the author unveils the construction of the important capital city of Podgorica. Mapping the urban landscape of the city and investigating the key urban issue of an emerging city, the main characteristics of the contemporary urban formation of Podgorica are investigated in-depth. All through the study the cultural traits of the region are uncovered and the author focuses on the wine tradition and the regional identity with this question illustrating the cultural identity of both the people and their ways of living. The wine cultures, alongside tourism and a traditional form of modern could frame specific backgrounds for further development in Montenegro.

The Montenegrin identity is unveiled between traditional myths and future orientation. This is the subject of the fourth chapter. It reveals the double identity of the region and the present pathways in the regional development of the state. All-through the study the questions of local cultural identity, the place attachment of the people and the local cultural traits of Balkans are approached.

The volume therefore demonstrates the complex identity of the Western Balkans, both at the national and the regional scales. The geographical study included in the volume is clearly documented by old and new maps, pictures and figures. All these iconographic issues highlight the geographical identity of this region in Europe. This regional study is worthy since it completes both the current regional, geographical and historical studies, opening new avenues for further research on this European region bearing a specific cultural identity.
