



IMPACT OF CULTURAL CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDY: ROMANIA AND SERBIA

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Abstract: Nowadays, we are the witnesses of a phenomenon in which geographical space is shaped also by culture besides other factors. In a Europe of regions the willingness of understanding history, culture and society is of major importance. Sustainability is also about a cultural dimension, which has to do with cultural diversity, cultural vibrancy of a place, cooperation and with preserving and promoting cultural heritage. As a consequence, borders are constantly changing from barriers to bridges of cooperation, and here the emphasis is mostly on the relatively new members of the European Union from the Eastern Europe and those being now in the integration process. In this paper we intend to make a qualitative analysis of the impact of cultural cross-border cooperation between Romania and Serbia on sustainable development, at European and international level.

Key words: Cross-border Cooperation, culture, sustainable development, heritage, tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

The gradual enlargement of the European Union, as well as current political, social, economic and cultural events, requires a deeper integration of the member states. Identity disparities between the member states are a challenge for the EU. In this respect, cultural cross-border cooperation programs are a useful tool for reducing those disparities, prevent potential conflicts and increasing cooperation at European and international level. Through these programs, Romania and Serbia have the opportunity to increase the level of cross-border cooperation in several areas. Moreover, Romania's border with Serbia is of strategic importance to the European Union, being the external border of the Union. Cooperation through culture could be the answer to a Europe in search of its soul. Jean Monnet, one of the founders of the EU, once said about the economic organization they created, "If I had to do it again, I would begin with culture". The relevance of this research



consists in the impact which a sustainable cultural cooperation within a cross-border region has on its development. It generates a higher level of interaction between neighbouring countries, inside EU, in the world. Regional cultural programs promote culture and products within the region, and have a positive economic impact on regional development, tourism and labour market.

2. METHODOLOGY

The main hypothesis from which we have started in the present paper is that efficient and sustainable cultural cross-border cooperation practices generates a high level of interaction between the neighbouring countries (in this case between Romania and Serbia), which leads to the creation of a more secure and predictable regional space. Research methods used for this article are: qualitative analysis of the regional development strategies of both countries, European strategies regarding cultural cross-border cooperation, official documents from institutions responsible with cultural cross-border cooperation, global strategies regarding sustainable development through culture, relevant academic literature and field observation. The concept of cultural cross-border cooperation is presented in an evolving context, at regional, European and global level.

3. THE BORDER AND BORDER AREA

In the postmodern world, there has been a change of perception on the frontiers, from the classic way of looking at the frontiers as dividing lines, separating two entities, to the constructivist perception, which also takes into account the cultural, social, political and mental dimensions. Due to the major political events of the last 20-30 years, the fall of communism, the European integration, to which we can add the phenomena of globalization and migration, the frontiers have redefined their characteristics. We now understand that the borders are connected to the events and phenomena of the contemporary world and are therefore a reflection of the reality of the relations between states. As a result, ideological and political tendencies to create a Europe of regions, to diminish the role of the nation state in the context of globalization, have also been reflected in the construction of borders. The emergence of the European Union and its gradual enlargement through the accession of new member states, including Romania, again changed the way of approaching the borders in Europe. After half a century of communism, the East European countries sought to regain their lost identity in a Europe that sought the economic and social integration of its member states and those in the process of accession.

The study of socio-economic literature, on the different frontier concepts, led to the shaping of two opinions. The frontier has a double meaning: the first meaning is that of a demarcation line between two countries that affects anyone or whatever crosses it, and which, depending on the factors that act upon it, adjusts and forms a larger area of economic integration. The other meaning assumes a fixed representation of the border and territory near the line of separation of two countries, with some specific features, with peripheral, marginal position, where regional development is desired, in a specific context (Ratti, R., Baggi, M., 1990, p.78, p.102). The level of permeability of the border

(Ricq, C., 2000, p.12) is an indicator of the degree of cooperation between the two countries and it can be calculated according to the formula below:

Permeability = 100: (y km border /x number of border crossing points).

According to Dennis de Rougemont, the frontier is a challenge to the states, and the frontier region makes three references: first, to a more or less delimited space, the second to communities or groups, and the last, to relations that are established between them (Rougemont, D., 1977).

4. THE BORDER BETWEEN ROMANIA AND SERBIA

Since 1918, the political map of Europe has been changed as a result of the victory of the Triple Entente, the retreat of Russia and the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire. Thus, after the Great Unification of 1918, Romania has, practically, doubled its territory. The Commission led by Emmanuel de Martonne traces Romania's borders according to several criteria, the main being that of the nationalities: the presence of a majority of Romanian population, especially of rural population in the territory. The frontiers are officially established only with Yugoslavia and Hungary. Fixing the border between Romania and Serbia had been difficult (Deică, P., 2006, p. 13-19). The border with the Kingdom of Serbia was established by signing the Treaty of Peace with Austria in Saint Germaine, on September 10, 1919. The two countries concluded a protocol for border correction on November 24, 1923 in Belgrade and the actual correction took place on 10th of April 1924 (Petre, D., 2005, p. 206-207).

The official border between Romania and Serbia is specified by several international treaties, as well as by authors, such as Deică Petru, who used data from the Romanian Statistical Yearbook. The total length of the border is 546.4 km. There are two sectors: terrestrial border between Beba Veche (Timiș County) and Baziaș (Caraș-Severin County), having 256.8 km and river sector between Baziaș and Pristol (Mehedinți County), along the Danube River, having 289.6 km (see Figure 1). The predominance of the river border implies a relative disadvantage for the links with Serbia. The presence of the border crossing points in river areas requires the construction of bridges, while on land, crossing points can be opened anywhere. Related to the total length of the border (546.4 km), a crossing point is established at 49 km and the permeability level is 2.01. There are 11 crossing points along the border with Serbia, terrestrial, river and on railway. Among the factors favouring the relatively high permeability with Serbia, we can emphasize: historical legacy, border crossing tradition, Serbian communities in Romania, and Romanian communities in Serbia. The relatively high traffic of the border registered at major border points could have a positive effect on the high degree of permeability of the Romanian and Serbian border.

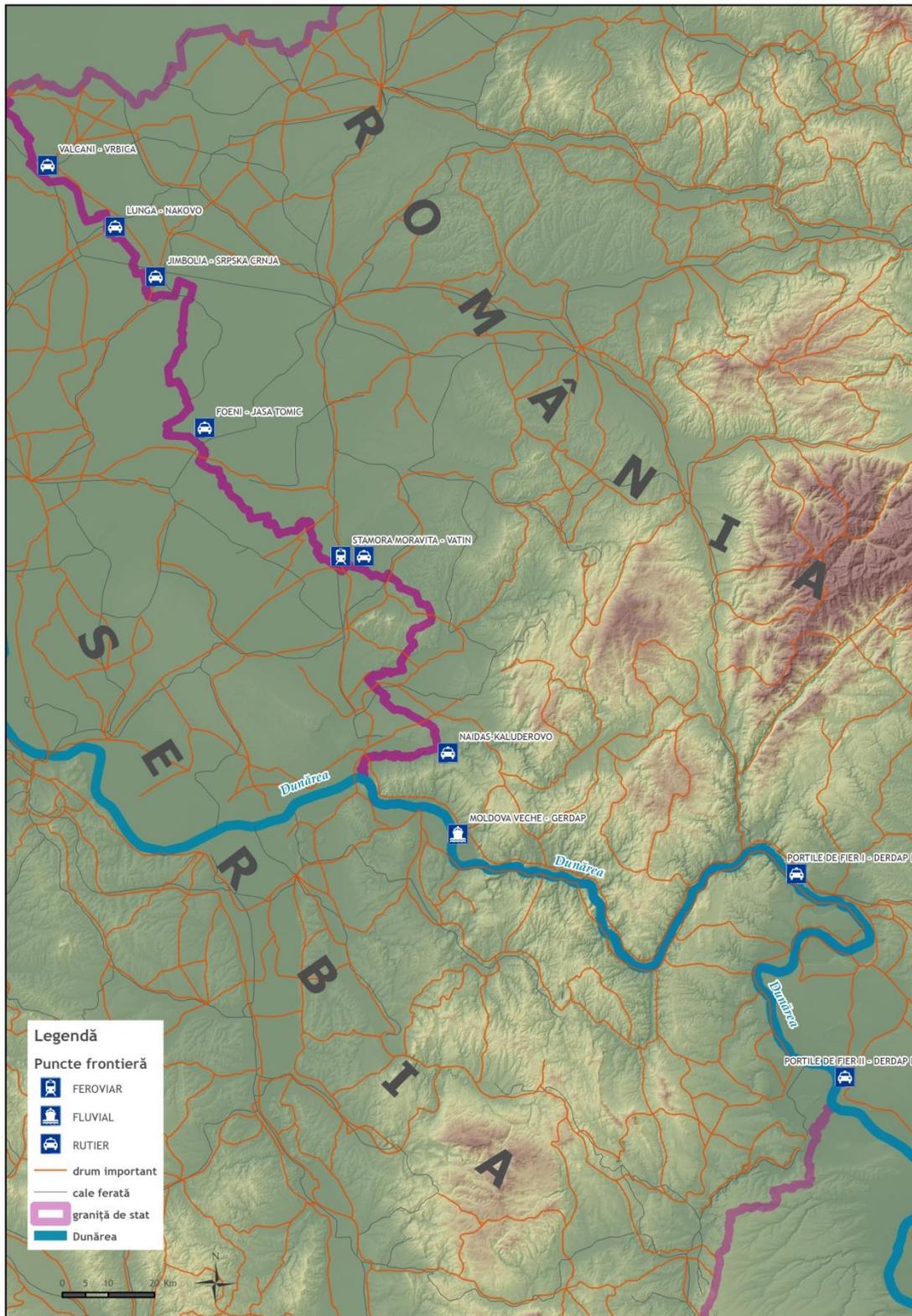


Figure 1. Border crossing points between Romania and Serbia

5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CULTURE

Culture has various purposes within society (social, economic, political) and, consequently, generates three types of value- intrinsic, instrumental and institutional (Holden, J., 2006, p.14-16). On social level, cultural cooperation practices increase access and boost participation. Cultural programs regarding inclusion target immigrants, the poor and the deprived. The educational programs deal with sensitive issues from the agenda of the society at large or from the local community. A cultural festival might bring visibility to the local community and the settlement, and, in the same time generates revenue. Cultural activities act as a mean of reconciliation between conflicting communities. Sometimes, a place might be assigned a different function within the local community, through becoming a place for cultural activities (an industrial site changing into a venue for artistic exhibitions). The intrinsic value of culture, in the same time less visible, has the greatest impact on individuals, local community and on society at large. It affects the minds of people and changes attitudes, and on long distance, culture's final goal is to change the society. Sustainability has also many understandings and functions. According to Moore, it is a "concept that speaks to the reconciliation of social justice, ecological integrity, and the wellbeing of all living systems on the planet. The goal is to create an ecologically and socially just world within the means of nature without compromising future generations" (Moore 2005, p.78). Sustainability has different dimensions. First, there is an ecological dimension, which is the basis for everything else and which has to do with natural resources and with living ecosystems around us. Secondly, social sustainability has to do with social justice (marginalized or oppressed groups). Thirdly, sustainability is also about a cultural dimension, which has to do with cultural diversity, with a vitality of artistic and cultural practices and with preserving cultural heritage. Fourthly, and finally, we have the economic dimension of sustainability.

Seventy two years ago, world leaders, in order to promote the values of peace, dialogue and international cooperation created the United Nations organization. Today, the United Nations 2030 Agenda regards sustainable development in its three dimensions: economic, social and environmental, addressing issues such as poverty eradication, education and health, creation of peaceful and inclusive societies. By 2030, among other goals, the Agenda sets the acknowledgment of the culture's contribution to sustainable development. Cross-border cooperation process is a useful tool for trans-national integration and conflict reduction, if we look at borders as places of exchange and cooperation instead of barriers (Popa, N., 2006). Cooperation between communities is the starting point for good-neighbourly policies and institutionalized cross-border cooperation.

6. CULTURAL CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION ROMANIA-SERBIA

Cross-border cooperation strategies between Romania and Serbia are part of the European Territorial Cooperation programs or INTEREG, which are carried out, both at the internal borders and at the external borders of the European Union. The need to intensify cross-border cooperation results also from the regional development strategies of the development agencies of the West and South-West regions, for the period 2014-2020. In Romania, there are eight development regions, which correspond statistically, at European level, to the NUTS-II level divisions. The regional development agencies

covering the Romanian territory near the border with Serbia are: West RDA and South-West RDA. Both were set up in 1998 to coordinate regional development in the area. In Serbia, a candidate country for the EU, we have the same system for regional development, through development agencies (5 in number), which are managing a particular development region, corresponding to the NUTS-II level divisions. On the Serbian part of the border there are two regional development agencies: Vojvodina RDA and South-East RDA.

Over the years, to celebrate cross-border cooperation taking place across the borders of different Member States, the European Commission has implemented the European Cooperation Day, celebrated on 21 September, each year. The celebration of the European Cooperation Day between Romania and Serbia began in 2012. In 2012, the events took place in Timisoara, the other year in the Serbian town of Vrsac, and in 2014, again in Romania, in Resita. The alternative organization of events in Serbia and Romania continued with the cities of Veliko Gradiste (2015) and Drobeta Turnu Severin (2016). For the year 2017, the celebration took place in Serbia at Kikinda. From a cultural point of view, there are other events organized to celebrate cross-border cooperation in the area and to promote inter-community exchange. Since 2003, communities living on the Danube bank have celebrated "Danube Day" at the suggestion of the countries along the river.

A series of cross-border festivals with annual organization also facilitates exchange between resident communities in the two areas on both sides of the border. A cultural event, which is the link between Romania and Serbia, where folk dances are presented in the Danube area, takes place in June-July. The festival brings together folk bands from all Danube countries and, for a few years, from all over the world. This festival has different names: Folklor in Plovdiv (Bulgaria), Orfeo in Majdanpek (Serbia), Hercules in Baile Herculane, Heart Festival in Timisoara, the last two organized in Romania. At present, the festival has reached a different level, that of the traditional folkloric dances, recording participating dance ensembles from Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica, India, Taiwan, USA, Ukraine, Serbia, Romania, Moldova, Armenia, etc. Distinct relationships between communities have developed in border area and they proved their effectiveness, beyond the institutional mechanisms, that regulates a certain type of cooperation. These models must be identified and multiplied within the EU, where implementation conditions are similar. These "patterns" might contribute to the natural development of the border regions. According to the number of cultural projects and the visibility in the media, cultural cooperation is greater on the terrestrial border, between Vojvodina Region and West Region. A positive influence on the high number of projects has the presence of universities in the area (in Timisoara and Novi Sad). One of the pillars of a creative and cultural city is the educational environment, besides the existent cultural vibrancy of the city and the creative economy. The morphology of relief in both countries favours different forms of cross-border cooperation, some of which are currently at the strategic level, not being valued at their true potential. The human settlements in this area, the cultural mosaic of the population, are other legitimate reasons for carrying out a broad spectrum of cultural cooperation activities. An opportunity for cooperation that is not harnessed to the real potential is tourism. Strategies of the cities from the bank of the Danube River on both countries include various forms of tourism, such as: scientific tourism (gradually developed as a result of the discovery of numerous sites with geological structures or fossil fauna on both sides of the Danube Delta, on the territory of several localities in the region); cultural tourism, leisure and recreation tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism, bird watching (it is a form of tourism that focuses on shooting and

pursuing the behavior, feeding, nesting and flying of bird species), forest visiting tourism, cave visiting tourism, or spa. Not all of the strategies are actually put into practice. In 2016, two major cities from Romania and Serbia, Timisoara and Novi Sad won the title of European Capital of Culture for 2021. The two cities are at a close distance, 146 km, twin cities, and part of the same Euro region, DKMT and share a common historical inheritance. It is a great opportunity for Romania and Serbia to shape together a region of culture for 2021, with a great cultural impact on the nearby regions, as well. The cultural program presented by Timisoara2021 in the bid book is also part of the present wider context of European integration through cross-border cooperation between Romania, Serbia and Hungary. The projects that will run in this area are trying not only to restore the infrastructure connections, but also the cultural ones. In this respect, the cultural region created by the context of the ECoC program is an opportunity for cooperation in the projects under the auspices of the Danube Strategy, which makes the connection with 10 other European fluvial countries (by extrapolation with almost the whole European continent).

7. CONCLUSIONS

The availability for cultural cooperation is greater on the terrestrial border, between Vojvodina Region and West Region. The degree of interaction between the two countries is lower on the river border, compared to the cross-border cooperation potential of the area. The potential for cooperation is given by a number of indicators, such as: cultural cross-border projects, results of cultural cross-border projects, treaties, agreements, media coverage, degree of border permeability, economic exchange, population's opinion on cultural cross-border cooperation, presence of Serbian community in Romanian border area and Romanian community in the Serbian border area, number of cultural events, presence of cultural institutions, number of higher education institutions. With the connection of the two countries by ferry boats, borders may become more dynamic. The title of ECoC won by Timisoara and Novi Sad for 2021 brings the cultural cross-border cooperation between the two countries to a whole different level.

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