

THE SPIRIT OF THE DANUBE

Although the Danube is considered as the largest and most important river in the European region that it crosses from the West to the East, from the Black Forest Mountains to its emptying into the Black Sea, its strategic importance has not been transferred onto the East and South-East European area, perceived not as a geographical area with a historical and cultural heritage“ of great complexity, plasticity, uniqueness”, but as “an antiworld resulting from “diachronic and spatial debilitation involved by the ghettoizing at the level of representation” (M.Todorova, 2006)

The cliché of a split Europe, still far from the “mirror image” on which the cohesion of the European area is pragmatically built, continues to inertly mark the social representation, the political and media discourse, the history and literature textbooks, deepening the socio-economic weaknesses of the cross-border area.

Far from unexpected, the recurrence of the negative stereotype even in the self-image of the peoples in the area, affected by the gaps between the local realities and the European and Western model, maintains the blocking of identification and perception of the other and its effects on the process of local and regional changing towards development and European integration through the three strategic directions: accessibility, environment and resources, economic and social development.

It is a challenge that Romania and Bulgaria, and in particular the Romanians and Bulgarians themselves, must face, especially during the recent years when the enlargement and integration took place, the free movement bringing them to a common “architecture” of gaps between the development scenarios and the everyday cross-border realities.

Although the progress made after January 1, 2007 exceed expectations, an prudent waiting attitude prevails, the regional integration representing a field of possibilities and opportunities still insufficiently capitalized in the context of a social, informational and economic polarization trend in both countries, the risk factors including the cultural risk as well in which both long-term influences of border strengthening during the Ceausescu regime, and the influence of globalisation, through the delay of the construction of a regional Danubian identity and the advantages thereof, can be traced.

If the study of social representations during the communist and post-communist era benefits from wide scientific coverage focusing on the long-term effects on the social memory of nationalist ideology (isolation and passivity, levelling of differences, the breaking of social conscience due to propaganda and the mechanism of permanent surveillance, xenophobia and ethnical intolerance, a.o.) could we possibly speak, two decades later and given the opening of the East and South-East European society, of a blocking generated by the logics of division of the type *we vs. them*, of images of otherness marked by inertial representations in the mutual perception of the communities located along the internal and external borders of the EU? Can the deficit of cross-border identification be correlated with the uneven development of these regions situated along the Danube? What are the effects of the changes in perception of the Danube area during the recent years following the cross-border and inter-regional development

programs carried out in the area concerned by our study and is there a persisting “void of identification images” revealed by studies and research on the Romania -Bulgaria cross-border area.

Is cross-border identity a strictly operative project identity generated exclusively by the will of the political and economic partners, or is it correlated with the European and Danubian concept and history and, therefore, it takes part in a unity of Europe through its two halves, an idea which crosses the multiplicity of the civilization levels to recover an overall image, a dynamics of changes and a re-capitalization of the convergence axes between the North and the South, the East and the West over the fracture lines promoted by the negative representation of the Balkans and by the versatile political frameworks of Central and South-Eastern Europe in general.

The “spirit of the Danube” has represented a type of experience that allowed us to notice the internal environment of a cross-border project through the core represented by the partners directly involved in the implementation, the projected environment interfering with that of the direct and indirect interactions stimulated by the project at the level of the team, the experts, the communities and local partners. It has revealed a “semantic region” thematically and intuitively articulated by the set of photographic images of the Danube river. The original combinations of photography and technology have allowed us to rediscover the spirituality of the Danubian area and a code of cross-border identification which combines the set of pragmatic meanings (economic problems, crises, underdevelopment) with the lyrical images and the feeling of nature.

The display of the Danubian heritage by capturing the specific elements *in and through* the individual expressiveness and through direct questioning of the observer in the communication through images, recompose the proximity as an image game: natural and industrial landscape, scenes of everyday life, craftsmanship and traditional trades, cultural events, articulate the symbols in structures which reflect not only the changes but also the high recurrence of the symbolism of water in the deep level of social and cultural representation resulting in an “awakening of the lyrical spirit” as well which mutually consolidates the cross-border identification and its practical stakes. Still a “secondary” region, occasionally reflected by the informational medium concerned with the political show, entertainment and the focusing of media interests on the national centres, the cross-border area is heading towards a reconsideration of its social visibility and the cultural project proves to be an educational medium capable to generate the change in the interpretation rules at the level of the local communities, a process underlying the development of synergic “waves”.

The “case” of the Danube river - natural border of several countries and peoples, spiritual centre of the cross-border region involves the mirror game - from mythology and religion to folk poetry and modern literatures, from contrastive studies to the dry language of figures which undoubtedly reflect the change in rules and paradigms.

As prof.dr. Penka Angelova claims, “education is the homeland”(the study “Discourses of identities Bulgaria and Romania. Comparative remarks) and the transfer of these efforts into textbooks and in the intercultural education is an imperative and compelling necessity.