

THE MODEL OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE ROMANIAN-BULGARIAN NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA BETWEEN DESIRE AND REALIZATION

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Abstract:

This paper develops some findings from the project entitled “Bulgarian-Romanian Area Identities: A Neighbourhood Study” (BRAINS), funded by the European Regional Development Fund under the auspices of the Romania-Bulgaria Trans-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013, Priority Axis 3 – Economic and Social Development. More precisely, it aims to explore the manner in which the cross-border cooperation model perceived by the Romanian and Bulgarian citizens living in the cooperation area responds the current economic and social challenges. The main issue investigated is: does the local population – as a main actor in the Romanian-Bulgarian Neighbourhood Area (ROBULNA) – connect its aspirations with the realities, possibilities and potential of this area? The correlation degree between these two aspects is established starting from the project sampled data connected with the official data from the Romanian and Bulgarian 2011 censuses. The analysis relates and comments upon aspects regarding human capital, unemployment, economic structure and their distribution in ROBULNA, revealing fields of both convergent and divergent opinions, which enhance or, on the contrary, create difficulties in constructing an integrated cross-border cooperation action.

Key words: ROBULNA, trans-border cooperation model, regional analysis, county analysis Romania, Bulgaria,

JEL classification: R19, R10, P48

1. INTRODUCTION

The new political and economic environment, characterized by the influences of globalisation, internationalisation and integration, has determined major changes in the structure of strategic relationships. Inter alia, they have transformed the functions of international borders, with new challenges and opportunities in terms of interconnections, cooperation between countries and regions (Clement, 1997; McMaster, 2013).

In this context various definitions and diverse types of border regions have been brought into discussion, as well as different spatial scales of corresponding analyses (van Geenhuizen et al., 1996). Thus, border regions can be addressed as “border areas as public authority regions and as functional economic spaces” (van Geenhuizen, 1996, .675). According to Ratti (Ratti, 1994) and

Greenhuizen(van Geenhuizen ,1996) four approaches are usually employed for border areas, as follows: *the functional activity approach*, focusing on the identification of the functional impact of the border on the development of the neighbor regions; *the core-periphery approach*, which considers the border areas as institutional and economic outskirts; *the regional system approach*, emphasizing the role played by the borders in the restructuring processes at regional level; *the strategic planning approach*, closely related to the strategic behavior of the actors involved in the economic planning and their perception of borders as separation lines.

At present the border areas are more and more subject to *territorial cooperation*, which creates appropriate conditions for functional cooperation between adjacent territorial units aiming at solving problems of common interest (McMaster, 2013).

Territorial cooperation can take the form of *cross-border* (when adjacent regions are envisaged), *transnational* (when regional and local authorities are involved) and *interregional* (characterized by information exchange and experience sharing at larger scale) cooperation (McMaster, 2013;Perkmann, 2003; Scott, 2002).

As far as the European Union is concerned, *European territorial cooperation* (ETC) is a clear objective of the Cohesion Policy. In the 2007-2013 programme period it counted 53 cross-border programmes, 13 transnational programmes and an interregional cooperation programme, affecting more than 500 million people. All these programmes were funded via the European Fund for Regional Development, the allocated budget representing approx. 8.7 billion euros.

A distinctive feature resulted from the European integration processes, leading to the free movement of services, capital and labour is the creation of two significantly different types of borders, namely *internal* – between EU member states and *external* – between EU member states and non-member states.

The accession to the EU of the new member states has brought about important changes in their transborder cooperation, particularly in the internal borderland areas: formal legal arrangements have been established and the shaping of connections between the actors of cooperation in these border areas – regional and local governments, local communities, business firms, education, cultural and scientific institutions, NGOs, etc. – has gained a considerable importance (Dolzblasz and Raczyk, 2010).

The impact of successful territorial cooperation is examined in terms of economic growth, job creation, quality of life, quality of natural environment, services provision, international trade, foreign direct investment, tourism, social commuting, migration, educational exchanges, etc. (Celinaka-Janowicz et al., 2013). A structural equation model measuring such impacts has been elaborated and tested within the ESPON project TERCO – European Territorial Cooperation as a Factor of Growth, Jobs and Quality of Life (ESPON – TERCO, 2013). The results with regard to the most important factors for the success of territorial cooperation point to those that initiate the cooperation – people, stakeholders and resources, highlighting the need of responsible involvement in this process from its early stages.

In the same register with the findings of the TERCO project, our paper points out the need to investigate the opinions of the involved actors about the fields of cooperation and correlate them considering the local identities in the participating regions as a part of the background for establishing realistic strategies for cooperation. It offers as case study the opinions expressed by the inhabitants from ROBULNA [1], demonstrating a variety of ideas and behaviours depending on the investigated aspect and local identity features. They can serve as a background in order to formulate policies able to contribute to surmounting the existing barriers and formulating a coherent cooperation model.

2. DATA AND METHODS

The starting point of our research has been a questionnaire aiming to study the inhabitants' opinions with regard to the potential cooperation opportunities, so as to define the most suitable

cross-border cooperation model, in accordance with the profile of the two sub-areas (Romanian and Bulgarian) involved.

The analysis is based on a mix of micro and macro-data related to ROBULNA, collected from different sources:

- a) Micro-data were collected during November and December 2012 from a sample of 1015 units, adult inhabitants living in the neighbourhood area, in the seven counties from the South of Romania, and 900 respondents interviewed during almost in the same period from the nine border districts of Bulgaria (see Map 1).

Map 1. Romanian-Bulgarian Neighborhood Area (ROBULNA)



Source: edited by the authors starting from the source available on the BRAINS project homepage <http://robulna.eu/en/>

The sample distribution by county and district is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample distribution by county

| County | Share(%) | District | Share (%) |
|-------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1 Mehedinti | 14.3 | 1.Vidin | 6.3 |
| 2 Dolj | 14.3 | 2.Veliko Trnovo | 16.1 |
| 3 Olt | 14.3 | 3.Vratsa | 11.3 |
| 4 Teleorman | 14.3 | 4.Dobric | 11.4 |
| 5 Giurgiu | 14.3 | 5.Montana | 9.1 |
| 6 Calarasi | 14.3 | 6.Plevna | 16.5 |
| 7 Constanta | 14.3 | 7.Razgrad | 7.6 |
| Total | 100.0 | 8.Ruse | 14.5 |
| | | 9.Silistra | 7.3 |
| | | Total | 100.0 |

The sample distribution by age and by gender is very close to the official data. Thus 55.6% of the respondents are females and the rest of 44.4 % are males. On the Bulgarian side a share of 51.4% is represented by females.

Regarding the distribution by age it can be mentioned that 44.9 % of the Romanian respondents are close to middle age (30-49 years), 37.6% are over 50 years and only 17.4% are youngers, aged below 30 years. 31.3% of the Bulgarian respondents are in the middle age, 18.6% are aged below 30 years and the rest of 50.2% are aged over 50 years old.

Most of the respondents have at least medium level of education, while 21.3 % of Romanians and 22.5 % of Bulgarians have higher education.

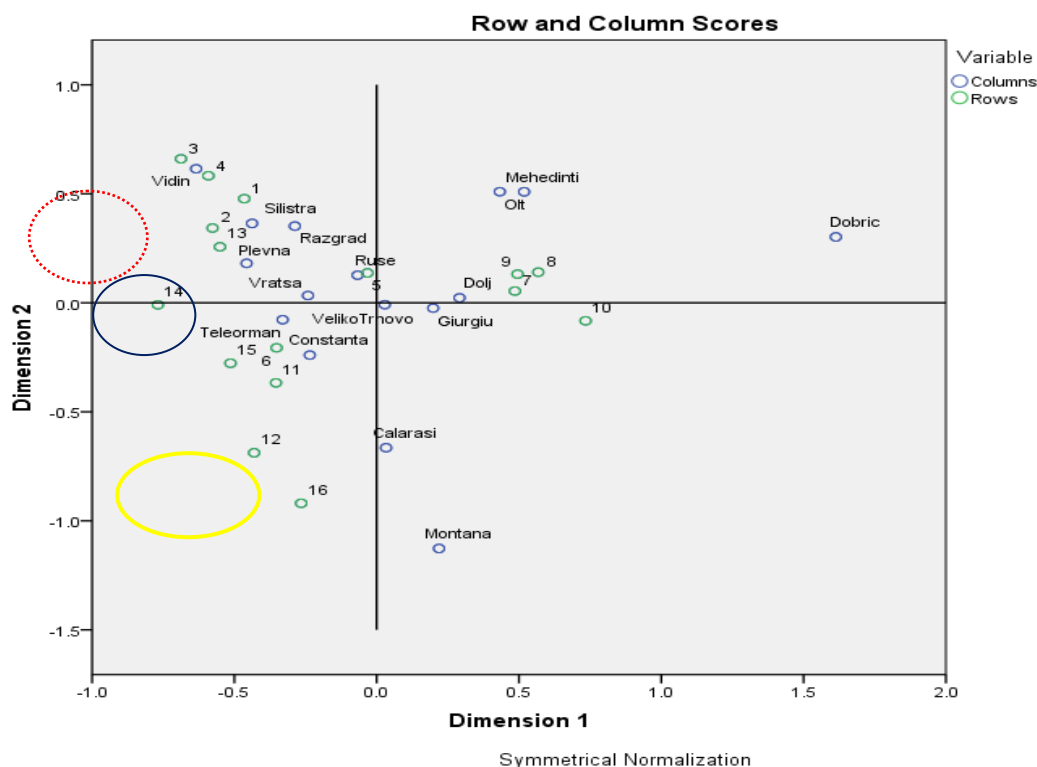
The question addressed to the target population described above was: "To what extent are you influenced by the following factors, when you maintain /intend to maintain relations with your Bulgarian/Romanian neighbours?" with the following predefined answers: "*Finding job*

opportunities”, “Finding business opportunities”, “Finding study opportunities in schools and universities”, “Finding opportunities to learn the neighbor language”, “Finding health care opportunities in hospitals, spa and wellness centres, etc.”, “Finding opportunities related to culture industries”, “Finding tourism opportunities”, “Finding holidays opportunities”, “Finding shopping opportunities”, “Finding entertainment opportunities”, “Finding opportunities to support civil society causes and goals”, “Finding opportunities to share my solidarity with interest/pressure groups”, “Finding opportunities to participate in EU cross-border projects”, “Finding a partner and creating a family”, “Getting acquainted with values, behaviors, traditions of my Bulgarian neighbors”, “Tasting dishes of the Bulgarian cuisine”.

- b) Macro-data were taken from official data sources provided by National Institute of Statistics (NSI) from Romania [2] and Bulgaria [3]. In order to explain the citizens’ behaviour socio-economic conditions were analysed at county/ district level. Thus unemployment rates, population structure by education, population structure by age and occupational status were taken into consideration.
- c) A special category of data - distance between residence center of the county/ district and cross-border point Giurgiu/Ruse - the only one available in 2012, were structured by authors taking into account basic information provided by three specialize web-sites, namely www.distanta.ro, [www. Jeka.ro](http://www.Jeka.ro) and <http://distante-rutiere.turism-zone.ro/>

The answers to the questionnaire have been processed using the multiple correspondences analysis, the results being presented in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. The results of multiple correspondences analysis



1 Finding job opportunities, 2 Finding business opportunities, 3 Finding study opportunities in schools and universities, 4 Finding opportunities to learn the neighbor language, 5 Finding health care opportunities in hospitals, spa and wellness centers, etc., 6 Finding opportunities related to culture industries, 7 Finding tourism opportunities, 8 Finding holidays opportunities, 9 Finding shopping opportunities, 10 Finding entertainment opportunities, 11 Finding opportunities to support civil society causes and goals, 12 Finding opportunities to share my solidarity with interest/pressure groups, 13 Finding opportunities to participate in EU cross-border projects, 14 Finding a partner and creating a family 15 Getting acquainted with values, behaviours, traditions of my Bulgarian neighbours, 16 Tasting dishes of the Bulgarian/Romanian cuisine

Source: authors computation and design

3. RESULTS

The first result which can be noticed from available data is the fact that there is no evidence of a common or specific opinion between Romanian and Bulgarians regarding the background of actual or future close cooperation.

The overall spread can be explained taking into account some general aspects also highlighted by other Romanian and Bulgarian studies and some particular aspects which are specific to each entity.

One of the general aspects which characterize this complex neighborhood area is related to high regional and county/district disparities. The problem of disparities was earlier underlined by many researches with regard to different aspects. Various Romanian studies are making discussion regarding the situation in the counties which now are included in the ROBULNA area. For example, Goschin et al. (2008) point out disparities between territorial units and also classify the 42 counties based on absolute level and trends of disparities. Three ROBULNA counties, namely Teleorman, Giurgiu and Calarasi are classified on this occasion in the poorest category, their main indicators showing high time-decline.

Ileanu (Ileanu et al., 2009) shows that in the counties from South of Romania the small and medium enterprises, as engine of the economy, form only small, fragile clusters, rather based on customer capital than on core-value such as human or organizational capital.

A more recent study (Constantin, 2013) Constantin reveals that the inequalities within NUTS2 regions (between counties) are more important than the interregional balances, the Romanian area situated alongside the Danube river being a relevant example in this context. Not least, as it was shown before in (Ileanu, 2013) some problems of communication or policy transmission between different levels of public or private management authorities might exist. In this case they may be counted on factor list which creates such distances between territorial areas.

The same aspects can be also remarked across the border, in Bulgaria, where Kirilova (Kirilova, 2013) noticed a high level of disparities between districts.

Beside the general aspects dominated by local disparities, particular aspects are highlighted starting from results revealed in the Figure 1.

The Romanian counties and Bulgarian districts are spread overall the standardized space, generally being in different quadrants and respondent's attributes are associated with only a few districts/counties.

The lowest standardized distance between Romanian and Bulgarians, as seen in the figure, is between Giurgiu-Ruse-Veliko-Trnovo, county which makes the connection with Bulgarian districts through the main road between counties.

The "distance" from the communities from Vidin and Dolj, which has multiple dimensions is pregnant. Despite the historical facts, at the moment of the research study the bridge between Danube towns Vidin and Calafat was not functional.

Some joint opinions could be seen between the administrative territories from the same country, rather based on neighborhood characteristics. Enhancing this idea can be mentioned that:

- Citizens from Vidin are more interested in "Finding study opportunities in schools and universities" or "Finding opportunities to learn the neighbor language" and it is the only district with significant wishes related to education purposes. One explanation might be represented by the fact that Vidin is at least twice closer to the Romanian city Craiova than to Sofia or Varna, as the most important university centers, taking into account that the new passage possibility, the bridge Vidin-Calafat will be finished soon [4].

- In Silistra district, people are more interested in job or business opportunities, mainly because according to official macro-data found at Bulgarian NSI, Silistra was ranking in 2012 on third place after Vidin and Razgrad by highest unemployment rate (16%). None of the Romanian counties from the cross-border has such huge unemployment rate. Moreover in this area there is one of the lowest shares of people with tertiary education from all Bulgarian districts. But the most

important issue is that Silistra has a ratio of retired to employed persons of 35% [5], the highest in Bulgaria, double as value compared for example with Sofia. In this case the worst conditions of the citizens determine them to seek any possibility of work.

-A special group of counties-districts is formed by Calarasi, Montana, Olt and Dobrich, where the inhabitants seem to have no expectancies about joint collaboration with neighbors.

-Citizens from Ruse are more likely to find health or other wealth benefits opportunities in Romania.

-Items 10,12,14,16 which refer to entertainment, solidarity, family/relationship and testing neighbor dishes are very far from the citizen's expectancies.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The quantitative analysis reveals a relative distance between Romanian and Bulgarians. Main opportunities which may be expected as joint activities should be created around education and work: find/offer job opportunities, find offer education opportunities. The absence of a common opinion regarding joy, feelings or solidarity opportunities warns about the difficulty of constructing an integrated cross-border cooperation action. The importance of opportunities based on work and education is an effect of the low socio-economic profile of the citizens around the border.

These differences might be also the consequences of an unstable economic situation, underlined by lack of different types of capital and high disparities between counties as researchers have shown, during a long period after 1990, in both countries, in areas alongside the Danube. Dominated by local problems (intra-counties or intra-districts) the citizens are not able even to think about potential cross-border cooperation.

Given these circumstances, in a broader perspective, future cooperation has to take into consideration regional and local identities as an important element for the economic and social development of ROBULNA, turning to good account the potential of the whole area. The changing status of the Romanian-Bulgarian border, which is now an internal border of the EU raises economic, cultural, administrative challenges in order to unite the border counties/districts: they have to identify variables that can be controlled by these border areas and, thus, to formulate adequate strategies for their joint economic, social and cultural development.

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5. ENDNOTES

[1] Within the BRAINS project besides the inhabitants' opinions about the fields of cooperation the opinions of the local administration and business firms have been also studied.

[2] www.insse.ro

[3] <http://www.nsi.bg/en/>

[4] At the moment of the survey Vidin-Calafat bridge was not finished.

[5] Authors calculations using 2011 Bulgarian census data.

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