

Culture and Regional Development in the Balkan's Post-war Era

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1 Introduction

The birth of the new Europe is generating a number of turmoils, most of them initiated by the national or ethnical ideology or the cultural essence of national communities. The intellectual or cultural elite is more than often delivering ideas that move people towards the "cul-de-sac" of their destiny. The climax of these turmoils generally depends on the level of cultural flexibility and national transparency where great European cultures, French and German above all, offer a historic example of powerful and active openness together with flexible behaviour, closing many circles of a strong union. The contemporary tendency of the European Union is towards the East and Southeast European countries where they are still coping with specific problems and fallacies of their economic and cultural features and still insurmountable borders, separating nations physically, administratively and psychologically, too.

The focal point of the Balkans is somewhere between the Danube, Balkan-Carpathian mountain ranges, the Dinaride mountain range and the Skopje valley, i.e. the hard core of the Balkan peninsula. Recent regional wars during the 1990s within former socialist republics of Yugoslavia have precisely delimited the focal point, an area now recovering in a new and still unstable young democratic framework, divided with impermeable state borders.

Several options can take place now in order to soften barriers and frontiers in this region but the most prominent one is the cultural option. The reason for this is multifaceted. Culture encompasses the horizontal (geographical) and vertical (historical) dimension; it has a character of unlimited spread in space and time, regardless of political and administrative limitations. The Balkans is a good example for this. In spite of numerous borders and conflicts around those borders to gain territory, regardless of religious, anthropological and ethnical differences, regardless of the variety of traditions and mentality, it is possible to determine common cultural denominators and codes

which point out the paths of future integration and cultural and economic co-operation.

After all, this was also established in the European Spatial Development Perspectives – ESDP (agreed in Potsdam 1999) which reflected this fact by supporting the idea with a clear statement such as: "It is important to spread cultural life (...) in particular by supporting the development of cultural facilities, upgrading public spaces and reviving commemorative sites, which are important for the identity of the population."¹

The most prominent role in the process of spatial, economic and political integration could be given to culture due to its spiritual powers, either as a matter of its history and tradition or as a matter of existing spiritual forces tending to a common goal but insisting on a regional identity. The existing countries on the Balkan Peninsula (Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, FYR Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina) have too much in common to be easily overlooked but also such an abundance of diversities not to be neglected for the future integrative scenario. "The Levantine world of Balkan towns (...) had its manner of thinking and of singing its particular way of everyday life, its virtues and sins, and a strange closeness in relations between people, despite their affiliation to different religions and ethnic groups. That world has been remembered as decadent, decaying, fraught with deep layers of inherited distinctive features, with something dark in its character and its fateful commitments"² That world is supported by the material achievements of specific advantages, forms and tastes, but declining in respect of the western cultural tides.

In spite of this authentic culture and cultural diversity, together with cultural links connecting Balkans with Europe through intrinsic connections and axes, open is a new and still neglected chance for the future development and co-operation of this last circle to the European Union.

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The countries of the Balkans

2 Cultural axes as spines from history to future integration

The historical overview of the Balkan Peninsula, and particularly the river Danube as the northern borderline and a connection to Central Europe give proof that this region is one of several cradles of European culture. Traces of the Neolithic culture along the left and right banks of Danube, on the Yugoslav and Romanian side, and numerous remnants of diverse cultures are testimonies that this space had always been very attractive for conquerors but very inspirational and creative as well. Numerous wars and conflicts have divided people in this region at least as much culture and its traces have connected them.

Culture of the Eastern Rome (Byzantine) has moved towards West Europe and Asia Minor and Central Asia, but, at the same time, there had been emerging and vanishing cultures of diverse ethnic groups such as Dacians, Illyrians, Thracians and Visigoths. Cultures of West Rome, Ottoman

Empire, Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy and Venice had all poured in this region, each leaving its material (cities, military fortresses, palaces, bridges, artifacts, etc.) as well as spiritual traces (folk tales, language, folk customs, art). Cultures that dominated for some time on the Balkans are today largely considered among the grand European cultures. Albeit this fact refers to the important link between the Balkans and Europe and the opportunity to bring together all Balkans' states. Great European cultures and their paths are today politically neutral and that is much more acceptable and suitable for the realization of the integration idea within the region and externally towards the West. Traces of grand European cultures and their broad paths do not recognize modern borderlines, but they spread freely along certain geographical and historical axes, such as

(1) European Commission: ESDP European Spatial Development Perspectives. – Luxembourg 1999, pp. 30

(2) Samardzic, Radomir: On Urban Civilization in the Balkans from XV to XIX Century. – Belgrade 1984, pp. 9

(3) A spinal Balkan axis, a valley of navigable potentials starting from the point where the river Velika Morava meets Danube, further to the South along rivers Juzna Morava, Vardar and Axios all the way to the Aegean Sea (part of the corridor X)

- the Danubian axis connecting Balkans with Mitteleuropa (Central Europe),
- the Adriatic axis connecting Balkans with Western Europe,
- the Central Balkans' axis (Morava-Vardar-Axios) as a central spine of Balkans, and
- the Black Sea axis connecting Balkans with Middle East.

We will deal here with only two of them: Danubian and Adriatic.

The Danubian Axis

The Danube river as the axis of "German-Hungarian - Slavic - Romanic - Hebraic-Mitteleuropa polemically confronted with the German Reich"⁴, the Danube as German, Austrian, Hungarian, Croatian, Serbian, Romanian, etc., the river belonging to everybody and nobody, absolutely and incrementally, creates a symbol of numerous cultural identities, often confronted and very rarely mutually defined. The cultural co-operation along the Danube axis is tightly connected with a collective feeling of territorial belonging to Mitteleuropa in a historic and geographic sense, where multiple historic processes and ethnic assimilation resulted in the ascent of similar identification patterns.

The awareness of specific landscapes, typical urbomorphology and abundant cultural and natural heritage is a sensible starting point for establishing stable relations among neighbouring countries stimulating their co-operation and future integration. It is the cultural co-operation based on the cultural diversity and regional identity, and above all, based on the historical cultural paths, which do not recognize today's borders, that represents first and unavoidable step towards spatial integration of Danubian countries.

The Danubian space represents the best example of cultural patterns impact on the spatial organization and development. In this respect we recognize two groups of cultural values:

- Values formed throughout the history in the context of long-standing European borders, states and nations, cultural paths neutral in relation to nowadays political and other divisions, which are in need of mutual nurture as a part of the universal significance and global cultural heritage, and which could increase the level of attractiveness i.e.

the cultural pedigree of the Danube region in a specific way

- Values created as an integral part and a product of social processes of modern times, new nations, political codes and borderlines, physical and spiritual patterns of a modern man experiencing and utilizing the Danube and its environment in the spirit of technical and technological achievements of modern civilization, contemplating all its ups and downs and idiosyncrasies, reflecting development, identity, spatial organization, landscapes, architecture, urban patterns, land use and cultural patterns in the Danube space.

Cultural values of the Danubian space, historical and modern, represent inevitable landmarks, this region's spatial planning, comprising mentality quintessence, and that what we call "genius loci". The common interest in identifying cultural values, however, represents a possibility of increasing attractiveness of the space as a whole and for the purpose of activating qualitative economic activities and tourism as a particular activity with immense commercial potentials.⁵

The Adriatic Axis

On the other hand the Adriatic axis designates a border belt between European Union and the Balkan Peninsula with its northern part (Slovenian coast) belonging more to the Central Europe. This is the area where Roman, Venetian, Ragusian⁶ and Viennese cultures crossed with modern Italian, Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian, Montenegrin and Albanian cultures.

The remnants of these great European cultures and their intersection with the contemporary ones are more than evident today, reflected in urban matrices and the architecture of Adriatic towns. Numerous similarities in urban identity of Ancona and Zadar, Pesaro and Split, Dubrovnik, Kotor and Trebinje, Durres and similar towns in Puglia, associate common historical roots with their military, merchant and cultural backgrounds. But more than remnants in stone, some serious remnants of common belongings exist in mentality, language, arts (especially music), food and drinks, folklore, etc., associating to linking elements among the nations living in the region today.

The great opportunity of the Balkans future integration will concentrate along axes such as Danubian, Adriatic, Moravsko-Vadarska and Black Sea axes, along which specific forms of intersected cultures are developing.

(4) Magris, Claudio: *The Danube*. – Zagreb 1989

(5) Stojkov, Borislav: *Cultural Values as a Basis for Spatial Integration of Danubian Countries*. – Belgrade 2000, pp. 3

(6) Ragusa (Dubrovnik today) used to be very influential trade and cultural generator between XVI–XVIII century, making a noticeable impact to Bosnian, Montenegrin and Serbian towns and their urban culture (well known Ragusian sculptors, churches, painters and architects, poets and troubadours).

**Share of rural population
in countries of the Balkan**

	In % of total population 1996
Albania	62.7
Bosnia and Herzegovina	51.0
Bulgaria	29.3
Croatia	35.6
Greece	41.3
Macedonia	40.1
Romania	44.9
Yugoslavia	43.5

Source: National yearbooks for
1996

The Mediterranean spirit, as a "spiritus communalis" with intrinsic marks on elite culture (music, paintings, architecture, lifestyle) and also on mass culture (fashion, popular music, sports, etc.), represents a field for serious research, encompassing urban and rural fringe of this region. Networking and a potential co-operation of towns in southern part of the Adriatic belt, connecting Dubrovnik (Croatia), Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Hercegnovi and Kotor (Montenegro), Durres and Skoder (Albania) and Bari (Italy), only in terms of cultural heritage and interwoven cultural traces and paths of Roman, Venetian and authentic local cultures, could open a prosperous perspective of cultural and all other kinds of co-operation along the Adriatic axis.

Connecting and comparing, in reference to culture but also functionally, the Danubian and the Adriatic axes, could be one of the major tasks for the future of the Balkans in the post-war era. This is emphasized by the fact that along the Danube and the Adriatic the same cultural powers had reigned in the past, leaving similar or same remnants and assets of material and spiritual culture, among which some have been basically incorporated in contemporary national cultural matrices of Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins, Bosnians or Albanians: a numerous words in their languages, similar motifs in national or regional ethno and popular music, recognizable style elements in architecture or town structure, common tradition in food culture or even in social behaviour. The recognition of these common or similar elements is a trend, especially amongst young people all around Balkans.

The after-war period in the Balkans, which is almost equivalent to the post communist period, in this region's countries denotes two evident trends in cultural sense, namely

- the trend of national recognition and identification, and
- the trend of distinctiveness of European affiliation and searching of European character and criteria.

These two trends are often confronted, especially in countries with younger and ephemeral civic background such as Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, to some extent Romania, Greece and Croatia. The feeble civic background represents the urbanization

level of 50-60 % of urban population but indicates a long period in the past where development of civil society and civil awareness was withhold or stopped by the domination of the great European forces such as Ottoman Empire (which, for example, was dominant in this region from the first half of the 15th century until the beginning of the 20th) or Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy and its domination since the first half of 18th until the beginning of the 20th century. The period of communist rule during the second half of the 20th century also meant restraining the civil values.

Only during the 1990s arises public awareness and revitalization of the civil tradition - there where it had existed before. Where civil tradition existed in lesser scope (part of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania) initial steps of the young democracies often envisage the searching for the civil identity, which can easily be transformed into raw nationalism, even chauvinism, as a protective impulse from the invasion of external cultural patterns.

The post-war era in the Balkans has several important cultural occurrences and patterns, which promise a perspective of good co-operation and integration into the European family of states and regions.

3 The levels of formulation of culture in Balkan area

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 Peninsula 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.⁷ 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

(7) Kurtovic-Folic, Nadja: The Cultural and Spiritual Status of the Danube Area in Serbia and Europe. - Belgrade 1998, pp. 14

Bulgarian and Macedonian ethnoses have their enclaves in neighbouring countries, and even mixing with Turkish ethnoses and cultures from the southeast. Albanian ethnoses is deeply infiltrated within Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija and dominant in the space with profound and vast traces of Serbian culture.⁸

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 centres, mainly those with the highest rank in the urban centres 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 centres of greater tradition and greater economic potentials.

But, urban centres 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 élite” are aggressively spreading, and they correspond to their cultural pattern. 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).

In this way, Croatian mass culture is very widely acclaimed in Serbia and vice versa, Serbian in Bulgaria, Greek in Macedonia and Serbia and vice versa, etc. These are directions of one-way or two-way communications but very narrowly directed, which point out the possibilities but also the fallacies of the mass culture of local character on the urban scenes of Balkan countries. Equal meaning and effects have also other, external cultural patterns, American above all.

Urban physical structure, as a manifestation of the cultural and style pattern in every society, today in Balkan countries shows a lack of defined and articulated style. Today, cities are developing without form and clear inner structure, 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, Montenegro or Bulgaria represents at the same time the decline of the regional tradition and endangers the regional integration 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.

The provocative term “autochthonous” (pure, native, indigenous) is used to enlighten the fact that in the Balkans still exist patches in high mountain zones of East Serbia and Northwest Bulgaria, Northern Montenegro and Northern Albania where people keep their very deep tribal tradition, in some cases as deep as from the X century⁹, in terms of their rituals, singing, social behaviour, tradition, carefully hidden and saved from all exogenous influences throughout the history. This Balkans’ phenomena known as Old Balkanic type has been elaborated in some studies but is still standing in shadows even in the particular countries.

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.

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,



**Balkans’ urban matrices
without form or style**

Source: B. Stojkov, *Obnova Pristine*, 1996, IAUS, Belgrade

(8) Krstic, Branislav: Kosovo izmedju istorijskog i etnickog prava. – Belgrade 1994

(9) Vlahovic, Petar: Srbija – stanovništvo, geografija. – Belgrade 2000

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 programmes, 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 neighbours.

4 The Iron Gate area as an example for cultural cross-border activities

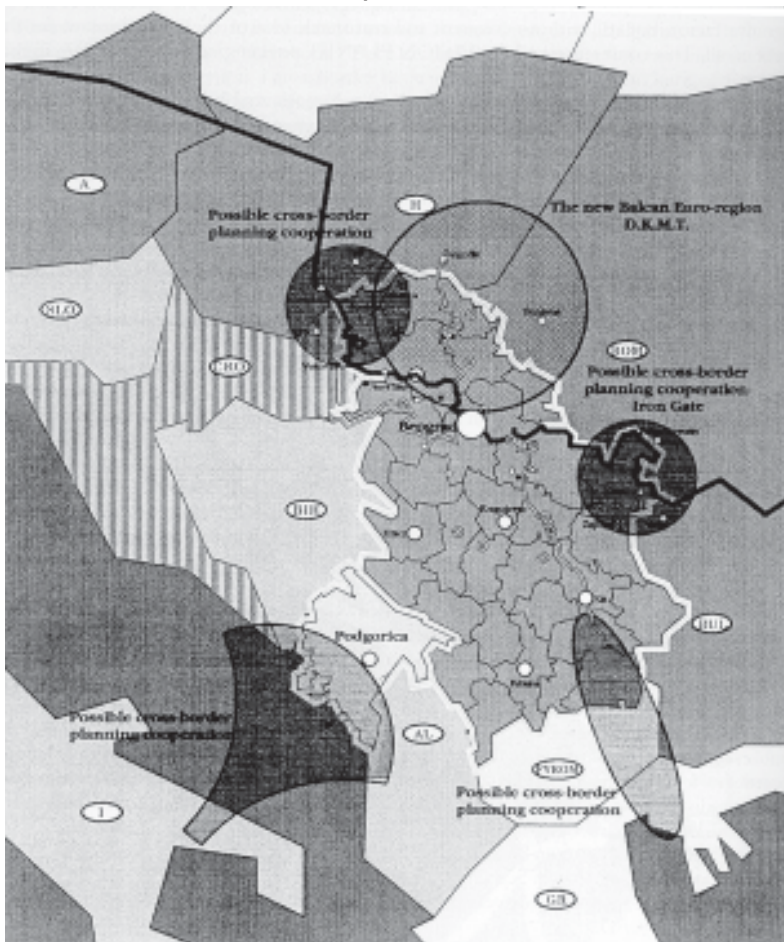
A typical example of culture and its potentials for connecting post-war-countries in the Balkans are several three-border zones, usually oriented around some grand geographical issue, river or mountain.

Among such examples is the three-border zone connecting regions of Eastern Serbia (part of Branicevo and Zajecar districts), Western Romania (Caras-Severin and Mehedinti counties) and Northwest Bulgaria (the Vidin county), all of them oriented around the Danube. The inter-connection of the Danubian regions through joint cultural activities and actions, beside all other activities, has been initiated by experts from Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, supported by European Union experts and the Pact for Stability of the South East Europe.

The Iron Gate idea is founded on many historical, ethnical and cultural links among the people from the three sides living now at the periphery of their countries, turning backs to each other instead of using their common cultural roots and tradition.

The Iron Gate Project has triggered the cultural co-operation between Kladovo (Serbia), Turnu-Severin (Romania) and Vidin (Bulgaria) as pivotal locations, enabling the exchange and the future flow of ideas and artistic and scientific capacities. This should be envisaged as a worthy initial effort to overcome the present hampered communication and interaction between the lagging border regions and communities of the three countries. The expected cultural park (ARCHEM – Archeology, Ethnology, Music) embedded in the exceptional and thrilling historical and archeological settings along the Danube with remnants of Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Austrian cultures, would represent the foundation for unfolding various cultural contents. This could denote the correlation of researches (seminars, workshops) with practical and artistic performances making it potential European tourist destination. The skeleton of the project is synthesized in the river Danube as a European grand axis and issue, and an organic bound between the Danube and the different cultures grouping around it from Neolithic ages up to today.

Possible cross-border cultural co-operation in Balkans



The practical problem for developing the Iron Gate Project is the inherited isolation of the local communities during five decades of communist regime and their inertia together with commands expected from the state centres instead of local initiatives.

5 Cultural heritage as an important element of an integrated strategy for the spatial integration of the post-war Balkans

The political, economical, social and cultural situation in the Balkans nowadays is determined in numerous ways. The main fact remains that this region has been an intersection point of many powerful empires and cultures, among them most important ones: Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian. This region is also a border between Eastern and Western Christian church and as such it has been a battlefield of many large conflicts throughout the history, some effects being felt even today. Wars and conquests have continuously caused demographic movements, reshaping the borders but also influencing the birth and decay of various cultural patterns. Today's structure in this region, consisting of seven states, and with a still present political and economical instability, strives for the model of the so-called spatial integration i.e. integration through the key spatial elements and resources among which cultural values have the equal key position along with infrastructure, traffic, economic development, settlement network and natural assets.

The expert team that elaborated "Strategies of Spatial Integration of the CADSES Countries"¹⁰ has concluded that cultural heritage includes monuments, groups of buildings (complexes) as well as locations of historical, archeological, artistic, scientific, societal or technological importance. At the same time, cultural heritage in this part of Europe should be understood as a concept beyond architectural heritage and should not be preoccupied only with the past. Cultural heritage (past and present) represents a corner stone of the regional, national and European identity, which means that spatial planning ought to approach this subject in a very complex and sensitive way.

The region encompassed by the VISION PLANET document represents one of the oldest scenes of the birth of the European culture. The central part of this region is the Balkan Peninsula with numerous traces and testimonies of creation, development and disappearance of many cultures since the Bronze and Iron Age, through Celtic, Illyric, Thracian and Dacian cultures. The Greek colonization had left many traces in South Italy and along the Black Sea coast. Southern and Western parts of this region were parts of the great Roman empire and later the great Byzantine empire leaving profound cultural traces in Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Romania. Christian orthodox and Ottoman culture have in their own ways inherited, developed and deformed Byzantine legacy.¹¹

At the other end of this region strong influences were made by the styles of Western Europe: Roman, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque. Italy, Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary, northern parts of Serbia are among those who accepted, developed and modulated these cultural influences. In these parts of Europe many traces of these influences are still present.

A particular meaning in this region is attributed to historical cities, i.e. cities preserved as a whole, although they may contain some traces of other cultures. Many centuries have left deep marks on these cities despite of many destructions, wars, fires and earthquakes.

Great and powerful empires who reigned in these regions during shorter or longer periods gave a relative meaning to borders between states, and thus many architectural and art schools that existed here had a cross border character, i.e. artists have worked in several countries transferring styles and shapes. Serbia is the best example for this transfer because it contains Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, or Baroque styles with some of its top displays.

The VISION PLANET team believed that this fact opens up serious possibilities for international co-operation in research, analysis, maintenance of the cultural heritage and its utilization for tourism.¹²

Beside the high appreciation for the urban values, great importance was given to the rural heritage due to the fact that villages and agriculture in this region have played an important role throughout the history.

(10) VISION PLANET Strategies for Integrated Spatial Development of the Central European, Danubian and Adriatic Area – Background Report. – Bonn 2000. This document was a result of the VISION PLANET Project, coordinated by the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung – BBR), Bonn.

(11) See VISION Planet Strategies; cit.

(12) Ibid.

Rural architecture, folklore arts and handicrafts in everyday life still represent the living trace of particular cultures that survived the longest, they are part of the economical basis as well as an instrument of the local and regional identification. Unfortunately, during communism the period of collectivization in the villages has significantly endangered these values, especially those of the religious origin in Romania or Bulgaria.

At the end, the intrinsic question of cultural heritage from the communist period remains open. It has left an enormous architectural stock with specific features. Mistakes from the past should not be repeated, therefore all values should be treated from the aesthetic and practical point of view, and not from the ideological. Subsequently, even new architectural values ought to be preserved because they become part of common historical inheritance.¹³

6 Cultural heritage in the future of the Balkans – next steps forward

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. For this 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 professional arrangements for preserving the collective memory of all nations and nationalities, ethnical and religious groups who created specific cultural 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 handicrafts, which can help improving the economic basis of rural communities and local / regional identity.¹⁴

Finally, the Strategies recommend that 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 contracts with improved systematic control and supervision.

Parallel to the elaboration of the Strategies, which encompassed twelve countries of the Central, East and Southeast Europe, a document "Spatial Planning Priorities for Southeast Europe", i.e. the Balkan Region¹⁵ was made. This document has emphasized the importance of culture and cultural policy as one of the priorities of the spatial development and of spatial integration of the Balkan countries. With a claim that "the cultural policy within the framework of the new Europe concentrates particularly on the exploitation of the cultural heritage as a factor of spatial development (...)", and further "the character of intergovernmental dimension, international cooperation and of spatial enlargement, sought through culture is evident".¹⁶

Among the general principles and objectives for cultural policies of the Balkan space, the ESTIA document emphasizes the spatial development of the area and the corresponding enlargement of the European space with the balanced cultural development and the provision of equal opportunities of access to the cultural goods, and also active strategies for the integrated conservation in areas where urban and rural cultural heritage is threatened or downgraded.¹⁷

(13)
Ibid.

(14)
Ibid.

(15)
This project was carried out under an acronym ESTIA (European Space and Territorial Integration Alternatives), coordinated by Aristotle University in Thessaloniki (Professor Grigoris Kafkalas) and Poseidon University in Athens (Professor Panagiotis Getimis).

(16)
Spatial Planning Priorities for Southeast Europe.– Thessaloniki 2000, pp. 91

(17)
Ibid., pp. 92

It is obvious that both documents, VISION PLANET and ESTIA, give a paramount role of culture and cultural heritage to the future regional development of the Balkan area and to possible ways of co-operation and integration. This also considers the cultural diversity as an important factor in the integration processes between countries¹⁸ but with some critical issues or fallacies in practical actions in the region.

The after-war period, or the post-communism period, is also the period of national reidentification and reaffirmation, where Balkan nations cope with some territorial problems using culture as an instrument. The conflict between Greece and FYR Macedonia is the conflict of identity for the Northern Greece using the same name, argued by history and culture. The harsh confrontation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija is basically grounded on the Serbian cultural standpoint and on the Albanian ethnical standpoint.¹⁹ Some of the tensions between Albanians and Macedonians are generated by cultural (linguistic) differences, etc. The issue of national identification is commanded by cultural circles which more than often misuse and abuse the culture and many facets as tool(s) for their objectives.

The history is also abused for similar reasons. For the future of expected co-operation and integration of the Balkan countries, oriented towards the European Union, and for the reasons of the present state in the whole region of the Southeast Europe, the most convenient starting point seems to be culture, i.e. cultural paths, assets and activities in spite of these obvious fallacies with present national cultures. The idea of parks of culture along the Danube might be one of positive guidelines for the future of the region.²⁰ The soft cultural tissue and its international orientation might be an initial trigger for other important projects in the future of the post-war Balkans in co-operation with already integrated European countries and their political, economic and cultural powers.

(18) Eser, Thiemo W.: The role of cultural diversity in the European Spatial Development Perspective". – Belgrade 2000, pp. 200

(19) Krstic, Branislav: Kosovo između istorijskog i etnickog prava; cit.

(20) Kulturparks, Erbe und Entertainment. – St. Pölten 2000

Cultural Monuments and Sites in the Balkans

AL1	Butrinti Ruins
BG1	Ivanovo Churches
BG2	Thracian Cemetery
BG3	Bojana Church
BG4	Thracian Tomb
BG5	"The Horseman" of Madara
BG6	Old City of Nesebar
BG7	Rila Monastery
GR1	Meteora Monasteries
GR10	Dephni Monastery
GR10	Nes Moni Monastery
GR10	Oslos Loukas Monastery
GR11	Archaeological Site of Delos
GR12	Archaeological Site of Pythagorion and Heraion
GR13	Medieval City of Rhodes
GR2	Byzantine & early-Christian Monuments of Thessaloniki
GR3	Mount Athos
GR4	Archaeological Site of Delphi
GR5	Temple of Epikourion Apollo
GR6	Archaeological Site of Olympia
GR7	Mystras Region
GR8	Archaeological Site of Epidaurous
GR9	Acropolis of Athens
MK1	Region & Lake of Ohrid
RO1	North Moldavia Monasteries
RO2	Church in Biertan

Natural Monuments and Sites	
BG8	Marshes of Srebarna
BG9	Pirin National Park
RO4	Danube Delta
YU1	Gulf and Region of Kotor
YU4	Durmitor National Park

