

**10th IACCM Annual Conference and 3rd CEMS CCM / IACCM Doctoral Workshop,
University of Ruse, Bulgaria – 29 June – 1 July 2011
CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

**ROMANIA – BULGARIA CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME 2007-2013.
A CASE STUDY OF THE RUSE-GIURGIU CROSS-BORDER REGION**

Heidi Fugunt, Strahil Karapchanski

Introduction

When Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007 both countries were identified by economic and social problems. The Romania-Bulgaria cross-border cooperation Programme 2007-2013²⁸ was set up as a mean of regional policy to assist especially cross-border areas to reduce substantial economic, social and territorial disparities deriving from its isolation from economic and decision-making centres. For the first time this cross-border area is addressed as a single entity and it is hoped that the region lacking a common identity will build up such by connecting people, organizations and institutions on both sides of the Danube in order to overcome common problems.

Bulgaria and Romania were already eligible for funding of the Phare Cross-border co-operation (Phare CBC) but the Program is the first 6-year-period program entirely managed by authorities of the two states now that they are full members of the European Union. By taking an actor-centred approach the paper examines inevitable implementation problems of the Program identified by project beneficiaries. In conclusion the paper suggests possible strategies for improving the performance of the Program. The cross-border region Ruse-Giurgiu was chosen as a case study for the whole Program area because of its special characteristic of being the only region directly connected by a bridge.

The paper starts with the description of data collection and data analysis. By conducting in-depth interviews with experts directly involved into the implementation of different projects and by studying the official documents of the program a system of categories was created covering all identified problem. The following chapter focuses on the Program in the case study area by describing the framework of the policy and reporting some findings of the regions performance and the program's achievements in the region so far. The system of categories is the basis for the analysis in which we explicate and reflect on the structural problems and deficits being encountered by the target communities. Deriving from the findings of the analysis we then identify possible strategies for strengthening the effectiveness and improving the performance of the Program. Therefore the paper contributes to the discussions, inter alia in the framework of the Romania – Bulgaria 2007-2013 Cross-Border Cooperation Programme's managing and steering organs, with respect to ensuring the sound functioning of the program in future. Moreover suggestions are made for setting up of future program lines in the scope of cross-border cooperation.

Methodology: in-depth expert interviews

Conducting the interviews

This paper examines the implementation problems of the Romania – Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 in the border region Ruse-Giurgiu. The analysis is twofold. Firstly, there will be a focus put on official documents and interim reports of the programme. Secondly, a closer look will be taken on in-depth interviews conducted with experts directly involved with the implementation of different projects co-

²⁸ In the following referred to as the "Program".

**10th IACCM Annual Conference and 3rd CEMS CCM / IACCM Doctoral Workshop,
University of Ruse, Bulgaria – 29 June – 1 July 2011
CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

funded by the programme. Expert interviews are the adequate method for data collection in this setting since it is a way of making latent knowledge more explicit. Most often the necessary knowledge about the implementation process lies in the hands of a few senior project managers within the staff (such as project leaders or spokespersons). Thus, an interview reveals not only the role of the expert within the project but at the same time provides personal judgement including reasons and conclusions.

The interviews were led according to an interview guideline that was approved in a pre-test with an administrative staff member of one of the projects. The guideline comprised questions about the project itself, the role and tasks of the expert within the project and problem areas of the implementation process.

The interview material derives from interviews with five experts within two different settings, one was an individual interview and the other was a group interview with four experts.

The expert individually interviewed was the Bulgarian project coordinator of the joint research project BRAINS (Bulgarian Romanian Area Identities Neighborhood Studies). The "soft" project is carried out in cooperation with the Academy of Economics in Bucharest, Romania whereby the Romanian university takes in the ruling part. Due to earlier acquaintance with the expert, the interview was conducted by the researcher herself. The 1-hour interview was recorded and completely transcribed using standard spelling excluding non-verbal statements.

The group interview took place within a regular meeting attended by nine project members such as managers, lawyers and assistants. Members of two projects were present – the one dealing with transport ("hard" project) and the other with tourism ("soft" project). The researcher presented the interview topic whereupon four experts of different institutions agreed to participate in the interview. They explicitly asked to treat their names and positions confidentially. The researcher took precise notes of the 90-minutes discussion.

Overall the interviewed experts represented the educational, public and non-governmental sector. Four have a Bulgarian passport, one a Romanian; three are women, two are men; two of the projects they deal with are "soft" and one is "hard".

Data analysis

The interview data is summarized by use of a structured qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 1995; Taylor 1998). For the present data a content centred approach was chosen (for example in comparison to syntactic approach). By this method first step is initial coding by compiling numerous categories while reading carefully through the material. The categories define which text belongs to a category. Next step is to find text exemplifying the categories followed by focused coding to combine or eliminate categories. The category system of central problem areas in the implementation process generated from the interview data looks as follows:

- Centralization
 - Capitals' distance from border region
 - no decision making powers on local level
- General management deficits
 - establishment of new managing structures
 - difficulties in establishing framework
 - lack of knowledge of staff
 - Finance
 - approval of budgets
 - financial capacity

**10th IACCM Annual Conference and 3rd CEMS CCM / IACCM Doctoral Workshop,
University of Ruse, Bulgaria – 29 June – 1 July 2011
CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

- co-financing
- Communication: English as lingua franca

The European Union's Cohesion Policy

The European Union's Cohesion Policy represents the keystone of the principle of solidarity which is one of the fundamentals of political and economic integration in Europe. It originates from the Treaty of Rome (1957) and aims at reducing the disparities in the development of different regions by strengthening the redistribution of financial resources from wealthier towards poorer regions with a focus to the harmonization of their economic performances and standards of living.

During the last several decades noticeable reforms and adjustments deriving from the European integration dynamics has been experienced, primarily as a consequence of the different enlargement stages adding up new member states and their regions to the EU construction. Despite this fact, the major objectives and visions of the Cohesion Policy have sustained. Article 174 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union which entered into force on 1 December 2009 states that "In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion. In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favored regions".

At present, the European Union's Cohesion Policy is based upon three pillars, respectively Convergence, Competitiveness & Employment and Territorial Cooperation, and for the current financial framework (2007 – 2013) it amounts to around 347 billion EUR (35.7% of the total EU budget) (European Commission 2008a).

Territorial Cooperation at EU level

An amount of 8.7 billion EUR (2.52% of the aforesaid allocation) provided by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is dedicated to territorial cooperation, including transnational, interregional and cross-border dimensions. The latter is directed to cross-border areas which are inhabited by 181.7 million people (37.5 % of the total EU population) and therefore 6.44 billion EUR are foreseen (European Commission 2008b). Cross-border cooperation within the EU context is organized upon 52 programs covering diverse policy sectors, such as:

- Encouraging entrepreneurship, especially the development of SMEs, tourism, culture and cross-border trade;
- Improving joint management of natural resources;
- Supporting links between urban and rural areas;
- Improving access to transport and communication networks;
- Developing joint use of infrastructure;
- Administrative, employment and equal opportunities work. (European Commission 2008c)

The Bulgarian-Romanian Cross-Border Area

One of the above mentioned 52 cross-border cooperation programs is the one covering the Bulgarian-Romanian border. The latter has a total length of 610 km, 470 of which coincide with the Danube River, and its population accounts to more than 5.1 million people (according to data from 2004), distributed 2/3 in the Romanian and 1/3 in the Bulgarian part

Due to its past as both countries' periphery the border area between Bulgaria and Romania has been faced up with considerable problems of structural, economical and

**CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

social nature. According Eurostat examining European regions' economic performance, two of the Bulgarian northern regions (North-West and North-Central) and three of the Romanian southern regions (South-West Oltenia, South-East and South-Muntenia) belong to the poorest 20 European areas with GDP per capita rates below 40% of the EU average. The GDP (Gross Domestic Product at market prices) is in 2008 6500 Euro in Romania and 4 700 Euro in Bulgaria (compared to 20800 Euro EU average) (Eurostat 2001a).

The districts of Ruse & Giurgiu

Starting from a very low GDP in 2003 (Ruse & Giurgiu: 2400 Euro), still both regions rank below the national average, but were able to improve their economic performance considerably. In 2008 Ruse had a GDP of 3800 Euro and Giurgiu 3500 Euro (Eurostat 2011a). The unemployment rate is directly linked to the economic performance of the regions. In Giurgiu the rates are remarkably low with only 9,1 % in 2009 while the Romanian average counts up to 20,0% unemployment rate. In the district of Ruse the unemployment rate shows a sharp decrease from 38,7% in 2004 to only 12,9% in 2008 (Eurostat 2011c). The economic structure of both regions is dominated by agriculture. Giurgiu and Ruse have small industrial sectors with light industries as tailoring, textiles and food processing. These are deteriorating industries and require restructuring. The share in Giurgiu is approximately 33% industry, 10% agriculture and 67% service, in Ruse it's 43% industry, 5% agriculture and 52% services (European Commission 2007: 31).

These factors are the fundament of the dramatic demographic problems, such as the declining and ageing population, which the Danube territories of both youngest EU members have been experiencing recently. The population density in the Program area is with an average of 71 persons/km² (European Commission 2007: 14) comparably low to the EU27 average (112,5 persons/km²). Ruse and Giurgiu rank among the other districts as urban centres. In Giurgiu the population density is a little higher than the average with 83,4 (Eurostat 2011b). The figures for Ruse show that the area suffers from a negative net migration rate. The population density went constantly down from 100,2 in 1998 to 89,9 in 2008. The worsening living and working conditions have been the reason for young people leaving their homes in the border regions and to seek for better jobs and higher standard of living in the larger cities.

Ruse and Giurgiu are by far the best connected border regions in the programme area. The only road and rail bridge connecting Romania and Bulgaria is the most used crossing point of the border for Bulgarian, Romanian and international traffic. Especially commuters complain that the high toll for crossing the bridge is obviously not only used to maintain the bridge. Means of public transport can serve only to a very limited extent as an alternative since there are only two buses and two trains running daily between Ruse and Bucharest via Giurgiu. The regional airport of Ruse is currently not operating but the government puts efforts in its reactivation. Giurgiu and Ruse both have ports on the Danube. The National Company for Danube River Port Administration in Giurgiu is responsible for all Romanian ports which are mostly in poor shape and should urgently be reconstructed or repaired.

Only very few Romanians live on the Bulgarian side and vice versa. Both districts have a share of approximately 4% Roma (Ruse 3,65, Giurgiu 3,89), in Ruse are also 13,92% of the population of Turkish origin. (European Commission 2007: 157). In the border regions Ruse-Giurgiu exists the only bilingual education centre acting on both sides of the border. The Bulgarian - Romanian Interuniversity Europe Centre (BRIE) offers Master programs in Ruse and Giurgiu in European Studies and Public Administration.

The Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Programme (2007-2013)

**10th IACCM Annual Conference and 3rd CEMS CCM / IACCM Doctoral Workshop,
University of Ruse, Bulgaria – 29 June – 1 July 2011
CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

Because of these alarming developments, the need for a new approach for tackling these common issues has emerged. As a result, the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Programme (2007-2013) has been elaborated focusing on "diversifying the economic activities on the border, on increasing accessibility to labour and linking areas of opportunity, on multicultural activities for ethnic minorities, aiming to provide alternative job opportunities and improving services for special target groups (e.g. elderly people – health and domestic services, youth – bilingual educational and attractive job creation)", thus "enhanc[ing] the Programme area's attractiveness and make it a better place for living" (European Commission 2007: 15).

Illustration 1: Map of the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Programme (2007-2013) eligible area



Source: http://www.cbcrromaniabulgaria.eu/user/file/harta_finala.pdf

Priority Axes

The Program focuses on special areas of activities called priority axes.

Priority Axis 1: Accessibility - Improved mobility and access to transport, information and communication infrastructure in the cross-border area. The main objectives are to "improve cross-border mobility through improving existing conditions and developing new facilities for transport in the eligible area" (European Commission 2007: 79) and to "enable efficient regular exchange of information and data of cross-border relevance" (European Commission 2007: 79).

Priority Axis 2: Environment - Sustainable use and protection of natural resources and environment and promotion of efficient risk management in the cross-border area. The main objectives are:

- ensuring effective protection and use of the area's natural assets by coordinated joint management systems
- increasing the awareness on the environmental protection and management in the cross-border area
- protecting local population, businesses, environment and infrastructure from the potentially disastrous consequences of natural and man-made crises, by joint preventative actions and emergency response services throughout the border area. (European Commission 2007: 83).

Priority axis 3: Economic and Social Development - Economic development and social cohesion by joint identification and enhancement of the area's comparative advantages. The main objectives are:

- developing cross-border business infrastructure and services
- promoting the image of the cross-border area internally and externally
- supporting development of joint integrated tourism products

**10th IACCM Annual Conference and 3rd CEMS CCM / IACCM Doctoral Workshop,
University of Ruse, Bulgaria – 29 June – 1 July 2011**

**CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

- stimulating cross-border cooperation between universities, research institutes and businesses
- supporting a common labor market by sharing information on employment opportunities
- developing cross-border training services for employment, in connection with the integrated market needs
- developing cross-border linkages and exchanges between education/training centers
- strengthening social and cultural coherence and co-operation among local people and communities in the program area. (European Commission 2007: 90).

Priority axis 4: Technical assistance. Main objective is to "provide support for the transparent and efficient implementation of the Programme" (European Commission 2007: 100).

Calls for Project and Project Implementation

The Program was approved by the European Commission in December 2007 and was introduced six months after the first Joint Monitoring Committee. The first call for projects was announced in July 2008 only for "soft" projects²⁹. The next call for proposals in October 2008 focused on both, soft and hard projects and was followed by a first call for strategic projects in December 2008. The second call for proposals was launched in 2009 with five intermediary deadlines. Since 2010 there were no further calls for projects launched and there are no plans to launch any new ones within the time span of the program.

According to the website of the Programme until now 392 projects were submitted in total, 158 projects are currently under evaluation, 132 projects were approved, 80 projects are contracted, 3 are already finalized and there were 128 reimbursement requests. The district Ruse is the lead partner of 12 approved projects of which 3 are in the pre-contracting phase and 9 are in implementation. Giurgiu is the lead partner of 7 approved projects, 4 are in the pre-contracting stage and 3 are already contracted (Joint Technical Secretariat 2011).

These are the figures published on the official website, but actually there is no sign how current these figures are. It has to be doubted that the figures are up-to-date because the authors got acquainted with at least two members of projects submitted by the district Ruse which are already contracted.

Key findings

Centralization

A major problem with respect to the proper functioning of the Program is the strong political and administrative centralization in both countries which is to a great extent a remnant of their communist past. Even though both capital cities of Sofia and Bucharest are not part of the Program's eligible area and therefore are not acquainted with the local problems and potentials, they have to be consulted upon each project implementation

²⁹ The term "soft" means those projects that don't produce a tangible asset in the end (as studies, strategies, seminars, know-how exchanges), therefore they are mostly referred to as people-to-people projects. On the opposite "hard" projects have as a final result a product, such as a building or a "utility" (investment projects or projects having more than 50% of the total eligible expenditure spent on the purchase of goods).

**CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

step. Especially in the Bulgarian case the regional level is claimed to be strongly deprived of any autonomy in terms of decision-making, so there are several ministries in Sofia which need to agree upon diverse procedures in the framework of the project implementation. According to one of our respondents “both capital cities are too much self-focused”; therefore it appears quite unrealistic to expect from them being constructive when it comes to agenda-setting at a local level. The paradox here is the central authorities being too far away from the priorities and problems of the regions, and at the same time insisting on having a say on issues concerning the sub-national units. concerning the sub-national units.

In one of our Bulgarian experts' opinion, the central government has monopolized the management of all cross-border measures and programs the country is part of, namely the ones with Greece, Turkey, Serbia and Macedonia. Due to the lack of financial and administrative autonomy at regional level, central authorities claim to decide on practical matters, such as opening-up and managing of beneficiaries' bank accounts for the project's purposes, co-funding, etc. An example therefore has been given by one of the interview partners who pointed out the fact that his institution had to bear considerable losses because of not being allowed to open-up a separate bank account in the home currency. Therefore it has been making all project transfers in EUR and that has imposed bank fees and currency exchange differences, which are actually non-eligible expenditures within the Program, so they must remain at its expenses.

Having a look at these deliberations, one can thoroughly recognize the interviewees' overall apprehension of all these practices being in contradiction to the Program's motto “Common borders – common solutions”. In this sense their aspiration towards more initiative and decision-making competences at local level appears to be entirely justified.

General management deficits

The interviews with the experts revealed two major problem areas arising from deficits in the general management of the Program. Firstly, lacking routines of the completely new established Program structures led to slow project implementation. Secondly, the Program's financial framework and regulations is claimed to be a risk factor for some of the projects.

People involved in the projects feel more and more frustrated by the slow implementation process. The projects' starts were often delayed by long application procedures. Sometimes it took almost two years from the submission of the projects to its actual start. This problem mainly arises out of the fact that the Program is the first of its kind in the Romanian Bulgarian border region. "We have to firstly be aware of the fact that the common structures of management of the program are in process of establishment." (Interview1 2011) one of the experts said. Persons and authorities had no experience in managing structural funds but faced the task to establish a reliable regulatory framework meeting the special demands of the region without relying on a former model. Bulgaria and Romania established several bodies responsible for implementing and monitoring the Program such as Managing Authority, Certifying Authority, Audit Authority, National Authority and Info Point in Bulgaria, Joint Technical Secretariat, Joint Steering Committee, Joint Monitoring Committee and First Level Control Unit. But the lack of transparency regarding the decision-making process generated confusion among the project participants. Why the Joint Technical Secretariat is situated in Calarasi, a place by no means in the centre of the Program area, is one example for the questions. The most thrilling issue regarding the framework of the Program is the fact that the regulations finally entering into force were found to facilitate the approval of soft projects. The experts

**10th IACCM Annual Conference and 3rd CEMS CCM / IACCM Doctoral Workshop,
University of Ruse, Bulgaria – 29 June – 1 July 2011
CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

wondered if the Program could ensure sustainability opposing many hard projects in favour of soft ones.

Not only the regulation framework but also the human resources of the Program causes trouble. After the first call for applications in 2008 the evaluation of projects was delayed because of too less hired staff (Annual 2010: 24). In the following a lot jobs were created for both Bulgarian and Romanian employees. The experts appreciate the Program providing employment for highly qualified people in the border region. But at the same time they claim that the activities of the staff often don't meet the demands of potential applicants. The presentation of the Program at promotion events organized by the Joint Technical Secretariat at local level tends to be always the same: no concrete answers were given, no cooperativeness and understanding for the beneficiaries' needs and problems was demonstrated. One of the experts exemplified the slow processing of correspondence by showing how he was made waiting a couple of weeks for a simple approval of an identity template. Moreover the experts worried if regional interests are well enough represented due to the fact that no representatives of the regions work in the office in Calarasi.

Problems concerning the financial framework raised by the experts are related to the approval of budgets, financing the projects in advance with later reimbursement and co-financing. Approval of projects was often delayed because of necessary budget revisions. The Annual Reports of the Program stated repeatedly that from the questions received at the Joint Technical Secretariat it was concluded, "that the specificities of the programme were not sufficiently understood by potential applicants" (Annual 2010: 24; Annual 2009: 16). The interviewed experts also said that some regulations were mistaken but underline that according to their experience it is difficult and time consuming to get reliable information and advice to overcome the lack of clarity. The first level controllers dealing with the financial aspects of the projects were always different, so they had to spend a lot of time working themselves into the projects and getting to know what their predecessors had done. If the start of the projects was delayed, the initial time frame could not be kept and eventually won't follow the calendar year creating financial insecurities. Another point that was mentioned by the interviewees was their disappointment that they were not allowed to include the catering costs for the visits of the partners into the project budget. They feel unable to cover the costs all by themselves but fear to appear not hospitable enough to the partners.

A major concern in the program's financial procedures, however, concerns the financing in advance with later reimbursement. It poses a serious challenge especially for smaller institutions and NGOs not having the relevant financial capacity to advance the expenditures. Moreover, experience shows that the period of time between the reimbursement claim and the actual reception of the reimbursement amount sometimes counts up to six months causing difficulties especially for those organizations dealing with several projects and already struggling to finance the 3-months periods. This is considered to be rather discriminative for small organizations.

Another requirement hard to meet is providing co-financing by each partner due to poor financial capacity of some institutions, primarily the smaller ones. Even if the share of co-financing is declared to be reasonable it is found that it is hard to ensure this share from other sources. One of the experts raised the issue of the state double financing if providing state funds for the institution and co-financing the project at the same time. There is a need to come up with creative ideas for private co-financing, but in times of financial crisis this seems almost impossible to achieve.

Above all the Bulgarian experts emphasized the huge discrepancy in the amounts being absorbed by Romanian and Bulgarian partners. Due to differences in the organizational

**CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

structure as well as in the financial capacity Bulgarians cannot afford to be lead partners. In financial matters the Bulgarian partners are often unable to ensure the co-financing, in organizational matters they often lack experience in managing large scale projects. The smaller partners have face the fact that they rely heavily on the project leader's information spreading competencies. This circumstance discourages Bulgarian project applicants because the lead partner has the advantage to manage the budget, communicate with the partners and managing bodies and supervise the project implementation.

Communication

The fact that English is determined as Program's lingua franca appears to be anything but facilitation for beneficiaries. Even though good neighborhood is positioned in the forefront of the concept of cross-border cooperation, none of both languages Bulgarian and Romanian is used for the official correspondence on projects co-funded by the Program; letters which are sent, be it to the project partner from the other country or even to authorities in the home country, are written in English and this seems extraordinarily demanding for the participating, primarily for the smaller ones which have no English speaking staff and cannot afford to cover the translation costs. Our interviewees agreed upon the fact that communication in English often leads to misunderstandings, not least due to the fact that people tend to use applications such as Google Translate for transmitting messages to their partners. Especially for technical terms, e.g. legal ones, is this practice beyond doubt not efficient at all. What allegedly causes even more trouble and frustration to project partners is the need for them to maintain written correspondence with their fellow countrymen which are appointed in central states authorities, such as the Bulgarian Ministry for Regional Development and Public Works, in English language. This is nothing but an example of poor efficiency and even senselessness, according to one of our respondents.

Considering all these circumstances, we could easily ascertain that these deficits at the level of communication among the project partners represent a substantial risk for them with a view of the proper functioning of their projects.

Implications for the future

Basing on all the aspects referred to in the previous chapter, particularly on the problems which have been identified while assessing the Romania – Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013, a range of implications occur with a view to strengthening the Program's efficiency in future.

Firstly, concerted efforts have to be done towards decentralization of decision-making powers at sub-national level. In order for local problems to be successfully met, the local institutions need to be provided with the relevant competences to autonomously perform their own agenda-setting. The same goes for financial capacity of the local and regional bodies; preparing and managing good development projects means above all being entitled to conduct own budgetary policies and, respectively, to individually decide on the spheres which are worth investing financial resources in, inter alia in the form of project co-funding.

The second point corresponds to the need for more effective and sounder general management of the cross-border cooperation program. In order to safeguard beneficiaries' trust and interest, the Program's managing authorities are expected to streamline its rules of functioning by accelerating the application and project selection procedures, thus achieving greater predictability for participating institutions as well as transparency for the local communities in general. Another issue of major importance is the orientation towards

**10th IACCM Annual Conference and 3rd CEMS CCM / IACCM Doctoral Workshop,
University of Ruse, Bulgaria – 29 June – 1 July 2011
CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

stronger balance between Bulgarian and Romanian partners' involvement in the projects realized.

Last but not least, effective communication stays in the core of cross-border cooperation. What has to be taken into consideration here is that communication means by far more than just literally translating your thoughts and messages in a language the knowledge of which is shared by you and your counterpart. Observing our interviewees' points of view, the introduction of a Program's lingua franca, such as English, appears to be a rather artificial measure which jeopardizes the proper functioning of bilateral projects. Therefore, alternative solutions have to be sought for, e.g. promoting the neighbour's language learning. The added value of this approach would be tremendous, bearing in mind the idea that cooperation and communication go hand in hand. In fact, in the light of experience, precisely cross-border areas evolve as places where multilingualism triumphs.

To sum up, assuming that the Romania – Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 is aimed at helping both, on the one hand, existing partnerships to sustain, and, on the other hand, new ones to be established, it needs further impetus with a view to keeping partners' motivation to take advantage of the funding opportunities it offers. This could be achieved primarily by developing a new, beneficiaries-centred approach of the Program's management which would encourage local solutions and synergies.

Conclusion

After more than four years of the Program's functioning, it appears to be quite successful in attracting target institutions' interest to be part of it and to submit project proposals with the idea of solving major development problems in the Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border area. As it has been found out in the present article, there are diverse points stated by our respondents in their function as project beneficiaries' representatives, which hadn't been taken into account when designing the Program's guidelines. Issues such as strong centralization, communication barriers and shortcomings regarding difficulties in establishing an appropriate framework as well as financial capacity, seem to substantially complicate the projects' implementation. Therefore, as regards the future programs devoted to strengthening the cross-border cooperation, stronger focus on the local specifics is required. Moreover, a more intensive involvement of the local communities into the programming process would guarantee their greater identification with the Program's mission and objectives. With a view to streamlining the Program's functioning, delegating general program management competences by the central administrative bodies towards the sub-national units directly faced up with cross-border matters is crucial. Nevertheless, communication difficulties could be diminished by enforcing both neighbours' languages, Romanian and Bulgarian, as common tool for understanding, instead of using a third language such as English. In other words, what needs to be done is just adhering to the general concept of finding common solutions to common problems, an indispensable prerequisite for which occur to be stable and sustainable bilateral partnerships emerging in the Bulgarian-Romania cross-border area.

References

- [1] European Commission, "Romania - Bulgaria Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 (RBCBC). Revised official proposal," 2007; <http://www.cbcrromaniabulgaria.eu/user/file/RO-BG%20CBC%20Programme%202007-2013%20revised%20official%20proposal%20EN.doc>.
- [2] European Commission, "Funds available," 2008a; http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/fonds/index_en.htm.
- [3] European Commission, "Key objectives," 2008b; http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/object/index_en.htm.

**10th IACCM Annual Conference and 3rd CEMS CCM / IACCM Doctoral Workshop,
University of Ruse, Bulgaria – 29 June – 1 July 2011**

**CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:
Cometences and Capabilities**

- [4] European Commission, "Cooperation across borders," 2008c; http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/crossborder/index_en.htm.
- [5] Eurostat, "Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices at NUTS level 3[nama_re3gdp]," 2011a; <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>.
- [6] Eurostat, "Population density," *Book Population density*, Series Population density, 18.02.2011 ed., Editor ed.^eds., Eurostat, 2011b, pp.
- [7] Eurostat, "Unemployment rates by sex and age, at NUTS levels 1, 2 and 3 (%)," 2011c; <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/setupModifyTableLayout.do>.
- [8] Institutul National de Statistica (INS), "Monthly statistical bulletin," *Monthly statistical bulletin* 2011; http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/arhiva_buletine2011/bsl_2.pdf.
- [9] Interview 1, "Interview," *Book Interview*, Series Interview, conducted by the author ed., Editor ed.^eds., 2011, pp.
- [10] Interview 2, "Interview," *Book Interview*, Series Interview, conducted by the author ed., Editor ed.^eds., 2011, pp.
- [11] Joint Technical Secretariat, "Homepage," 2011; <http://www.cbromaniabulgaria.eu/index.php?page=prima-pagina>.
- [12] P. Mayring, *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse Grundlagen und Techniken*, Dt. Studien-Verl., 1995.
- [13] Romania - Bulgaria Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 (RBCBC), "Annual Implementation Report 2009 for the Romania-Bulgaria CBC Programme 2007-2013," 2010; <http://www.cbromaniabulgaria.eu/user/file/AIR2009.doc>.
- [14] S.J. Taylor, *Introduction to qualitative research methods a guidebook and resource*, Wiley, 1998.

Authors:

Assist. Prof. Heidi Fugunt, Department of Business and Management, Faculty for European Studies, University of Ruse, Email: hfugunt@uni-ruse.bg

Assist. Prof. Strahil Karapchanski, Department of Business and Management, Faculty for European Studies, University of Ruse, Email: skarapchanski@uni-ruse.bg