

The Role of Cultural Diplomacy for Intensifying the Cross Border Cooperation within Danube Region

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Abstract: Objectives: The main objective of the paper is to highlight the role of cultural diplomacy for strengthening the international cooperation within the Danube macro-region. Prior Work: Some leading points of view in the field of cultural diplomacy serve as a theoretical background of the paper. In order to prove the theses of the research, existing empirical results are discussed and analyzed. Approach: The research uses interdisciplinary approach to conceptualization of cultural diplomacy and applies the methods of observation and systematic analysis and synthesis. Results: The presented empirical data indicate that some measures and actions are needed in the Danube macro-region in order to enhance the culture-based awareness of its citizens and intensify the intercultural cooperation. The establishment of a University Centre for Cultural Diplomacy in the Danube Region (UCDR) is presented as a possible tool for the achievement of this goal. Implications: The results of the study can be interesting for public authorities and academics. Value: the promotion of the idea for UCDR is the first of its kind.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy; Danube Macro-region; European Danube identity

1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, diplomacy plays a crucial role in the efforts of the countries to achieve their political goals and to promote their image in the international arena. In contrast to traditional diplomacy, which involves interactions between governments, public diplomacy is targeted at people. It can be defined as "an international actor's attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public"². Central aspect of the public diplomacy is cultural diplomacy, i.e. the use of a country's culture to reach out to foreign audiences and to project a positive international image. (Gilboa, 2006, pp. 715-718)

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² Cull, Retrieved from http://www.annenberg.usc.edu/images/pdfs/pubd/cull_pd_report_for_fco_final_version.pdf.

This paper will focus on the important role of cultural diplomacy for the intensification of international cooperation in the Danube macro-region and formation of a Danube identity. It will be argued that cultural diplomacy and cultural relations is the best tool for transforming stereotypes, prejudices and mistrust into curiosity, tolerance and mutual understanding between people from the Danube countries.

2. Theoretical Considerations about Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural Diplomacy (or Diplomacy between Cultures) is a comparatively new concept, but is very old as a phenomenon in international relations. It has existed as a practice for centuries but has been considered as a periphery of the international relations subject area. Today cultural diplomacy is an innovative academic field of research and has successfully established itself as a stand-alone theory and practice.

Sometimes the terms public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are used interchangeably. However, most of the scholars generally views cultural diplomacy as a subset of public diplomacy (Signitzer, 2008; Leonard et al., 2002; Schneider, 2003). There are numerous points of view about the conceptualization of cultural diplomacy. On the one hand it can be defined as “an exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding”. (Cummins, 2009, p. 1) Similar point of view is shared by Signitzer (2008), who underline the role of cultural diplomacy in producing positive attitudes towards one’s own country with the hope that this may be beneficial to over-all diplomatic goal achievement. Dr. **Emil Constantinescu** - President of the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy (2011 – current) describes cultural Diplomacy as a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, in order to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation or promote national interests¹. Above mentioned definitions underline the exchange of cultural artifacts and values as a main tool of cultural diplomacy. In this sense cultural diplomacy includes the study of another country’s language, values, traditions, and lifestyle. This first view about cultural diplomacy is related to the topic area of cultural anthropology and intercultural communication.

The second point of view is related mainly to the concepts of social constructivism. Its followers argue that political reality is not based on material forces but depends on minds, values and ideas. According to this Joseph Nye defines cultural diplomacy as mobilization of the “soft power” of a country (Nye, 2004, p. 5) which rests primarily on three sources: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policies”. By enabling a country to expose people of other nationalities to its

¹ <http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org>.

culture, society and people and by increasing personal connections between people of different countries, cultural diplomacy makes the country's political ideas and policies more attractive in the eyes of the foreign audiences. (ibid)

Channik separates the work of governments from the contribution of non-state actors in the field of cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy is not "government-to-government communication but communication between governments and foreign audiences. (Channik, 2005) It is a tool through which governments can increase respect and understanding of themselves amongst other countries in the world. (Appel et al, 2008) In connection to the latter point of view Richard T. Arndt, a former State Department cultural diplomacy practitioner, argues that cultural relations grow naturally and organically without government intervention and gives examples with the transactions of trade and tourism, student flows, communications, book circulation, migration, media access, inter-marriage and other daily cross-cultural encounters. According to him, "cultural diplomacy takes place when formal diplomats, serving national governments, try to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests." (Cultural Diplomacy, Political Influence, and Integrated Strategy, 2009, pp. 74-75) He also underlines an important characteristic of cultural diplomacy as an approach of conducting international relations without expecting anything in return in the way that traditional diplomacy typically expects. (Ibid, p. 89)

Generally, cultural diplomacy is more focused on the longer term and less on specific policy matters. Its implications are ranging from national security to increasing tourism and commercial opportunities. (Leonard, 2002, p. 51)

All scholars in the field of cultural diplomacy point out its main characteristics and benefits, as follows:

- It allows the governments to create a "foundation of trust" and mutual understanding that is neutral and built on people-to-people contact¹. Policy makers can build on this trust to create political, economic, and military agreements.
- Cultural diplomacy has the ability to reach youth, non-elites and other audiences outside of the traditional embassy circuit. The role of education in the cultural exchange is very important for the success of cultural diplomacy.
- It can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society.
- Its programs which expose people in one country to the culture and lifestyle of people in other countries around the world can also have positive impacts on businesses with international orientation.

¹ <http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/inside/StateCommitteeReport.pdf>.

- Cultural diplomacy programs are able to counter misunderstandings, ignorance, stereotypes and baseless hatred that people in other countries may bear toward a certain country.
- Cultural diplomacy has the potential to serve as nation branding.
- Last but not least, cultural diplomacy programs which serve to increase the people-to-people interaction can contribute to the intensification of international civil cooperation.

3. The Necessity for Stronger Development of Cultural Diplomacy in the EU and Danube Region

Due to its cultural diversity, the European Union enables a peculiar environment for the development of cultural diplomacy. The EU cultural diplomacy activities are focused mainly in the fields of education, sports, culture, youth and citizenship. One of the main challenges faced by the actors of cultural diplomacy in the EU is that the European citizens often know too little about the cultures of other European Union countries. As a result, it seems nearly impossible for the European public to have an appreciation of the large diversity within the Union. The leaders of the European Union have identified the need for overcoming these gaps of knowledge about the Other and have acted accordingly by dedicating the 2008 year to intercultural dialogue. The latter can be considered as one of the most important dimensions of cultural diplomacy as says Mr. Paulo Coelho, the Brazilian author of best-selling novels and ambassador of the European Union for the year of Intercultural Dialogue: “In these difficult moments in which the world is in danger, culture is the base to establish a dialogue”.

The European policy for territorial cooperation also focuses on culture as one of the key elements of the cohesion within concrete territory. The goal of this territorial cohesion is to encourage the harmonious and sustainable development of a given area by building on its territorial characteristics and resources. The three basic elements proposed to achieve this goal are: concentration, connection and cooperation. (Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council- Sixth progress report on economic and social cohesion, 2009)

In the context of the European policy for territorial cooperation European macro-regions are perceived as generators of new communication and identity spaces that provide both the diversification and the enrichment of the European identity. The development of the concept of macro-regional territorial cooperation offers an opportunity for transformation of the existing Danube Region into a more specific, concrete and comprehensive cooperation framework and for the integration of all the relevant actors and initiatives in a more visible and transparent space of cooperation and coexistence. (Busek & Gjoreska, 2010)

It is well known that the Danube region covers about one fifth of the European Union's area and population. Extending beyond the EU, a quarter of the region lies in the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova and incorporates a population of about 115 millions. In order to develop the under-utilized potential of the Danube region and reduce its disparities, the European Union established the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in December 2009. The EUSDR is unique in its inclusion of a strong external dimension. Incorporating nine EU member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovak Republic and Slovenia) and five non-EU member states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Ukraine and Serbia) the EUSDR represents an ambitious project aimed at enhancing cross-regional cooperation in a diverse ethnic region. (Busek & Gjoreska, 2010) Another external significance of the integrated EU Danube strategy is that the Danube represents a corridor for supporting and promoting European values outside EU borders. In this context, the three key-words, composing the theme of the Danube Strategy might be partnership, commitment and sustainability.

As was mentioned above, cultural diplomacy is one of the main tools for disseminating the European values. The most significant European values are visible in the principles of cultural diplomacy, formulated by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, ICD, as follows:

- Respect and Recognition of Cultural Diversity & Heritage
- Global Intercultural Dialogue
- Justice, Equality & Interdependence
- The Protection of International Human Rights
- Global Peace & Stability¹

In order to identify the most important values for the citizens of the Danube macro-region we will present the data from Standard Eurobarometer 77 – Spring 2012 on the topic “The values of Europeans”. (Standard Eurobarometer 77, Spring 2012 – TNS Opinion & Social² From all empirical results on the question “Which are the three most important values for you personally” are selected the data for the countries in the Danube region. The empirical results can be seen in the table below:

¹ <http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org>

² http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb77/eb77_value_en.pdf.

Table 1. Empirical Results on the Question “Which Are the Three Most Important Values for You Personally?”

	Respect for human life	Human rights	Peace	Democracy	Individual freedom	The rule of law	Equality	Solidarity	Tolerance	Self-fulfilment	Respect for other cultures	Religion
EU 27	43 %	43 %	40 %	28 %	23 %	21 %	20 %	15 %	15 %	11 %	9 %	5 %
BG	52	51	32	15	41	24	15	20	13	10	5	6
CZ	43	41	39	26	41	19	12	13	15	16	4	4
DE	36	50	55	39	23	24	10	11	16	9	11	3
HR	49	56	37	18	31	28	16	22	14	4	6	7
HU	49	35	42	27	28	14	21	14	10	20	4	6
AT	39	36	48	30	53	15	20	11	12	12	5	5
RO	51	48	31	23	30	22	15	18	5	23	3	15
SE	37	65	42	51	17	11	19	19	11	6	11	2
SL	37	41	51	13	26	38	19	17	19	8	6	2
SK	33	38	39	24	26	25	18	19	17	18	6	10

The data indicate that the three most significant values for the citizens from the Danube countries are **respect for human life, human rights and peace**.

- Respect for human life is the most important value for the citizens of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania;
- Respect for human rights is the most important value for the citizens of Croatia, and Serbia /In 2012 Serbia participated in EB survey for the first time/;
- Peace is the most important value for the citizens of Germany, Slovenia and Slovak Republic;
- Among the three most important values are also democracy which is valued by the Germans and Serbs, individual freedom which is the most significant value for the Austrians and is evaluated highly by Bulgarians and Czechs, and the rule of law indicated by the Slovenians.

It is evident from the table that the first three most important values for the citizens of the Danube countries fully comply with the preferences of the citizens from the EU 27. These three values are also general principles of cultural diplomacy. But according to one of the main goals of cultural diplomacy – to stimulate the cultural exchange between countries in order to bridge the differences and to shorten the

cultural distances between people – we have to say that the empirical data indicate some unfavourable trends in relation to the appreciation of other cultures. The percentage of the people from the Danube countries who evaluate highly the respect for other cultures is comparatively low, except in Germany and Serbia where the topic of multiculturalism is very sensitive. The indicated results for the Danube countries are lower than the average percentage for the EU 27 which means respectively low level of interest and curiosity towards the cultural heritage and values of the other countries within the Danube region. The reasons for this could be the following:

- High level of ethnocentrism among the citizens of the Danube countries which means that they are focused mainly on their own cultural context. As it is well known, the strong ethnocentrism can result in stereotyping, prejudging and other negative consequences like nationalism and xenophobia;
- Strong level of identification with their own culture. On the one hand this characteristic brings benefits for a country in relation to the collective consciousness of pride and unification around its cultural values and traditions. But on the other hand, if the identification is too strong, it can cause encapsulation within the own culture, mistrust towards the Others and avoiding them.
- Lack of long tradition of multiculturalism in some countries. In the data above we can see that in the countries like Germany where the multiculturalism is an object of debate in the society the citizens have demonstrated much more sensitiveness and respect towards other cultures;

Regardless of the reasons for the negative trends in relation to the recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity, valid for the citizens from the Danube countries, we can say that some actions should be undertaken in order to enhance the interest towards the cultures within the Danube region. One of the ways to do this is through the means of cultural diplomacy. It can rely on the Danube River as the main symbol for legitimation of a new macro-regional identity space with two directions of cultural consolidation - unity and diversity. Unity can be realized through a “powerful river and the nature, which does not recognise the man-made physical borders, and diversity through a growing number of layers of varying affiliations, commitments and responsibilities that the countries and other interest groups assumed along with their own development, growth and maturity”. (Busek & Gjoreska, 2010)

Using the Danube as a symbol of integration, the Danube region has the potential for becoming a brand. The “Danube brand” refers to a conglomerate of specificities, a package of folklore and arts and a taste of eclectic elements, all of which contribute to the diversity and specificity of this unique European space¹.

¹ drcsummerschool.eu/.../getFile.jsp?...

The actors of cultural diplomacy in each Danube country region can elaborate the educational programs aiming at acquisition of culture-based awareness about the region among its citizens. Through the large-scale programs of cultural diplomacy within the Danube region the following benefits for its citizens can be achieved:

- A deeper knowledge about the culture, values and traditions of the unknown Other in the region;
- A stronger interpersonal and group cohesion in the joint work for the region;
- A common sense for belonging to the region and an integrated identity as a whole;
- A better mutual understanding and desire for cooperation;
- Engagement and efforts to work for the economic prosperity of the region and for its branding as a unique territory.

Through the means of cultural diplomacy one more identity can be added to the spectrum of identities in the Danube macro-region - the European Danube identity. Driving force for the establishment of such type of identity can be a UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE DANUBE REGION with branches in each Danube country. Through popularization of the cultures within the region and their promotion as part of the world cultural heritage this centre can achieve the following goals:

- Decreasing the level of cultural distance between the people from the Danube region;
- Overcoming some of the existing stereotypes;
- Increasing the level of trust and mutual understanding among the citizens of the Danube region;
- Encouraging the frequency of intercultural contacts and intercultural cooperation.

This centre has its main symbol of an integrated identity – the Danube River. It has also its capital – the cultural heritage, values and traditions of each Danube country. The European strategy for the Danube macro-region can provide a financial framework for the functioning of this centre through project activities. The separate branches of this University Centre for Cultural diplomacy can be located at the universities in the Danube region which have the necessary educational and scientific potential for its functioning. Working in a network for the purposes of cultural diplomacy, the Danube universities will follow their mission for social responsibility and will serve as driving forces for the prosperity of the region.

4. Conclusions

As was indicated in the paper, among the citizens of the Danube countries there is insufficient level of sensitiveness towards the other cultures. The most possible reason for this is the strong ethnocentrism leading to focusing on the own cultural context. Having in mind the goals of the European Strategy for the Danube macro-region, there is a need for consolidation of the people from the region around common values and symbols of identity. With promotion of the common cultural heritage and cultural achievements of each country of the region, cultural diplomacy can increase the intensity of intercultural cooperation and contribute to the cohesion as a long-term objective of the Danube strategy.

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