Local Communities – Diachrony and Synchrony

An Innovative Implication of the Atlas of European Values for Bridging Cultural Differences within the Danube Region

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to discuss the positioning of the Danube countries in the Atlas of European Values and to outline the possibility for the establishment of a common identity among the inhabitants of the Danube region on the basis of shared values and attitudes. Exploration of the prerequisites for an integrated cultural identity within the Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border region along the Danube river. Comparative study of the empirical data about the Danube countries, extracted from all data in the Atlas of European Values.: Identified similarities among the citizens of the Danube countries in relation to the components of their cultural identity. Outlined necessity for increasing the intercultural awareness of the inhabitants of the Danube region in order to overcome the existing cultural barriers and to create prerequisites for common cultural identity. The paper presents the applicability of the Atlas of European Values for wide range of studies in the area of cultural, societal and political sciences. The comparative study of the cultural similarities and differences of the Danube countries is the first of its kind and can serve as a basis of multilayer research of the values within the Danube region.

Keywords: Danube Region; Atlas of European Values

JEL Classification: Z1 Cultural Economics; Economic Sociology; Economic Anthropology

1. Introduction

The Atlas of European Values /AoEV/ is an intellectual product of the European Values Study /EVS/, initiated in the late 1970s and conducted since then in four waves. The aim of the EVS was to give answer to the following questions: *Do Europeans share common values? Are values changing in Europe and, if so, in which directions? What are the implications of European unity? Do Christian values continue to permeate European life and culture?, etc.*

From 2008 to 2010, the fourth wave of the European Values Study took place with 46 participating countries from Europe in broadest sense: from Norway to Italy and

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from Iceland to Georgia. The results of the fourth survey were published by the University of Tilburg, Netherlands in "Atlas of European Values: Trends and Traditions at the turn of the Century" /Halman et al., 2011/, which includes chapters about Europe, family, work, religion, politics, society and well-being.

The Atlas, together with the accompanying website **www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu** provides a unique insight into the values and attitudes of today's 800 million Europeans. The main observations about their values, reported on the basis of the fourth wave of the study, are as follows:

- Stabilization of values in Western Europe;
- Modernization tendencies in Southern and (Central) Eastern Countries;
- Tendency of increasing religiosity in (Central) Eastern Europe. /Halman et al., 2011/

The data from the EVS support the conclusion that there is no significant change in **family values**. Family remains of the utmost importance to people. 97 percent of Europeans say that family is very important or quite important. Almost the same percentage is indicated about the importance of friends – 91 % /46 % – very important; 45 % - quite important/.

58 per cent of Europeans say that **work** is very important in their life. An interesting correlation is observed in the EVS - in the wealthier countries work is considered of less importance. It keeps its position as a virtue in some countries of Eastern Europe like Kosovo, Bulgaria, Turkey.

There is a North-West/South-East division in regard to the **trust** that Europeans have in other people. In congruence with the observation of Francis Fukuyama that economic development and government performance are linked with levels of trust, the highest degrees of such levels are observed in the prosperous countries.

According to the EVS, **attitudes to immigrants** vary significantly across Europen countries. Many Europeans consider the immigrants as a threat for their jobs. Only the Scandinavians and Luxembourgers disagree with this view. In relation to the assimilation of immigrants, people from Western Europe and Scandinavia generally feel that they should adapt to the host culture. In contrast, in South-Eastern Europe /Cyprus, Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Serbia and Albania/, people think that migrants should preserve their customs and traditions.

Support for democracy as the best form of government is strong in Western Europe and not so strong to the East. A majority of citizens are in favour of establishing a technocracy: a rule of experts instead of a government coloured by parties. In the non-EU countries almost 60% of people favoured a "strong man" in charge but only a quarter of EU27 respondents support this idea.

In relation to the religion many European countries are becoming increasingly secularized. In spite of the fact that the majority of Europeans continue to consider

themselves members of a church we can observe the phenomenon of "believing without belonging". Many people say they are religious but they do not practice their religion in any traditional sense.[1]

As was indicated in the results from the fourth wave of the European Values Study, the shared values of the Europeans from the first decade of 21 century continue to serve as a ground for the development of common European identity.

The objective of this paper is, on the basis of the data in the AoEV, to search for arguments about shared regional identity within the frames of the Danube Macro-region, where the Danube River, crossing or passing by the territory of 10 Danube countries and unifying other 9 in the Danube drainage basin, can be perceived as a criterion for identification of the citizens from 19 Danube countries.

2. The Concept "Regional Identity" – Theoretical Considerations

The acquisition of regional identity means identification of the population of a given region with its social, political and cultural system and with its people, traditions and environment. (Häuszer & Frey, 1987)

In his model Paasi (Paasi, 1986, pp. 105-146) presents 4 stages in the formation of the regional identity: establishment of territorial shape; establishment of symbolic shape; establishment of institutional shape; appearance of socio-spatial consciousness among the regional citizens.

Through the **territorial shape** the region outlines its boundaries and identifies itself as a territorial unit in the space (Paasi, 1986). The existence of borders of some kind is a fundamental requirement for the appearance of regional consciousness among the citizens (Kosonen, 1996). The **symbolic or conceptual shape** is established on the territorial basis. Here the most important symbols of the region should be considered, i.e. name, languages, sights, holidays etc. (Paasi, 1986). The **institutional shape** encompasses the established practices and formal organizations in the region: public administrations, business organizations, NGOs, schools, social networks, etc. The institutional sphere is responsible for maintaining the regional image and for determining the criteria of citizens' identification with it, e.g. establishment of common values, formation of social capital, establishment of trust etc.

The establishment of **consciousness of identity** among the regional citizens is a result of continuous process of institutionalization and transformation. Paasi (1996) underlines the importance of the historical and social processes, which form the

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[1] /http://europeanmission.redcliffe.org/vista-communicating-research-and-innovation/the-values-of-europe-family-work-society-politics-and-religion/

past experience of the region and have an impact on its contemporary development. This part of the regional identity can be determined as its individuality or its spiritual space. It is the deepest layer of the self-consciousness of the regional citizens. (Crang, 1998)

If we apply the indicated above 4 stages to the formation of regional identity within the Danube region, we can argue that so far there are evidences for the realization of the phases establishment of territorial shape and establishment of institutional shape. The European strategy for the Danube Macro-region clearly outlines the territorial shape of the region and envisages a complex of measures for its sustainable development. The institutional shape of the region is also well-developed through functioning of a number of regional organizations which are engaged with an institutional debate about the prosperity of the region as well as with regional projects funded by the EU. However to the current moment is not still created sufficiently good coordination between the regional and local authorities in each of the Danube countries for undertaking of common actions towards the further development of the region. The regional image and the perspectives for region's branding depend on the well-functioning institutional framework of the region through formulation of common identificational criteria for its population.

The formation of the symbolic shape of the region, i.e. sharing the common symbols within its territory, is not a difficult task. Here the Danube River is sufficiently strong symbol of unification, connected with the ancient history of the region, its unique landscape, lifestyle and livelihood of the population and mostly the cultural traditions of the region.

A task, whose solution requires the longest time as well as engagement of all inhabitants of the Danube Region, is the establishment of a consciousness of regional identity among the population. This means formation of self-consciousness for belonging and connectivity with the region which can happen only through clear institutional policy, directed towards communicating the common symbols, traditions and values of the regional identity.

Self-consciousness for regional identity can be achieved as a result of a long process of re-negotiation of identities in compliance with the theory for identity management (Cupach & Imahori, 1993). This process is linked with the establishment of a collective identity which satisfies all citizens of the region. The following conditions should be comleted for the development of the collective regional identity:

- highlighting of a set of shared symbols;

- establishment of feeling of belonging to the territory and territorial communities;

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- acquiring knowledge about the shared territory;

- a continuous affirmation and encouragement of the positive experience from the shared existence in the region;

- awareness about the basic identification features of the communities within the region;

- familiarizing with the Other in the region as well as intensification of interpersonal and intergroup contacts;

- shared and briefly communicated cultural practices;

- development of specific intercultural competences, as respect and sensitivity towards the otherness, ability for empathy and change of the perspective;

- mutual adaptation of the motivational structures and value orientations of the individuals which can serve as a catalyst for the personal development of the people from the region. (Popova, 2013, pp. 258-269)

3. Empirical Data in the Atlas of European Values for the Danube Countries

As was indicated above, the AoEV provides representative empirical data for the values and attitudes of the European citizens in relation to a number of topics, connected with their daily lives and their social commitment, like: family, religion, professional realization, attitude to authority and its institutions and others.

For the purposes of the current work some data about the 10 Danube countries are extracted from the results of the fourth wave of the EVS, included in the AoEV. These data, presented in the Table 1 bellow, aim to illustrate the opinions of the inhabitants of the Danube region about key topics of their collective identity, like: connectivity with and belonging to a given territory, basic cultural values, reflected in their attitudes to the family, friends, work, religion and others.

Table 1. Values and attitudes of the citizens from the 10 countries in the Danube space

Percentage of people that rank Europe as the first or second most important group to which they belong									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
7	2	3	6	3	6	1	5	2	2
Percentage of people that rank the locality or town in which they live as the first or second most important group to which they belong									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
27	48	56	44	56	47	59	50	56	39
Percentage of people that rank the country in which they live as the first or second most important group to which they belong									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
29	44	34	15	35	34	20	40	35	46
Percentage of people that rank the region of the country in which they live as the first or second most important group to which they belong									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
38	5	7	35	6	14	20	6	7	13
Percentage of people that say they are very or quite proud of being a citizen of their country									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
89	80	90	75	85	82	86	86	91	74
Percentage of people that say family is very or quite important in their lives									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
99	95	96	100	96	96	96	95	96	97
Percentage of people that say friends and acquaintances are very or quite important in their lives									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
80	82	79	79	92	92	95	84	82	86
Percentage of people that say, generally speaking, most people can be trusted									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
45	63	61	41	60	69	63	69	68	53
Percentage of people that say work is very or quite important in their lives									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
81	80	78	88	79	79	79	77	79	88
Percentage of people that say leisure time is very or quite important in their lives									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
62	67	62	63	64	74	61	60	65	70
Degree to which God is important in one's life									
Austria	Bulgaria	Croatia	Germany	Hungary	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
73	73	58	82	73	42	41	61	65	57

The data in the first four rows of the table illustrate the level of connectivity and belonging of the inhabitants of the Danube space to a given territory, namely: Europe as a whole, the home town, home country or concrete region. In all Danube countries, except Austria and Ukraine, almost half of the citizens demonstrate the highest level of connectivity with the home town. Ukrainians indicate a stronger connectivity with the native country and Austrians – with the region where they live.

The home country is the second territorial unit, with which the citizens of the Danube countries identify. The belonging to the region is the strongest among the citizens of Austria and Germany as federal countries. The observation for the Romanians is about a uniform rate of connectivity both with the country and the region. The lowest level of connectivity, declared by the citizens of the Danube countries, is with Europe.

We can see that despite the efforts of supra-national integration within the EU, nation states still play a dominant role. But we have to point out that the territorial identity should not be perceived as "*or.. or*" but as "*and.. and*", because identity is *multiple*, *layered* and always *context dependent*. (Sen, 2006) This means that the citizens of the Danube countries can identify simultaneously with several territorial units but with different degree of their belonging, as was indicated in the example.

Smith and Kim (2006) stated that national identity keeps nation states together and provides cohesion among the citizens. Their national pride is the positive effect of the declared collective identity. There are evidences in the data of the AoEV that all citizens of the Danube countries demonstrate a strong feeling of national pride which can be interpreted as a high national esteem or high personal self-esteem derived from the national identity.

Smith and Kim (2006) argue that the results for national pride are quite stable and are mostly influenced by the change of generations, as national pride is strongly related to age. National pride is linked to patriotism and nationalism, but being proud of one's country is not the same as being nationalist. The national pride, expressed in positive feelings towards national accomplishments in specific areas, has to be separated from general national pride, which is about feelings of superiority to other countries. The latter is strongly correlated with 'ethnic' identity, consisting of components like ancestry, place of birth and a long residence in the country. In contrast of this cultural identity is related to aspects as speaking the national language and respecting national laws.

In the map bellow we can see the division among the European countries in relation to the ethnic and cultural view about national identity. Some conclusions can be drawn about the most spread view among the Danube countries.
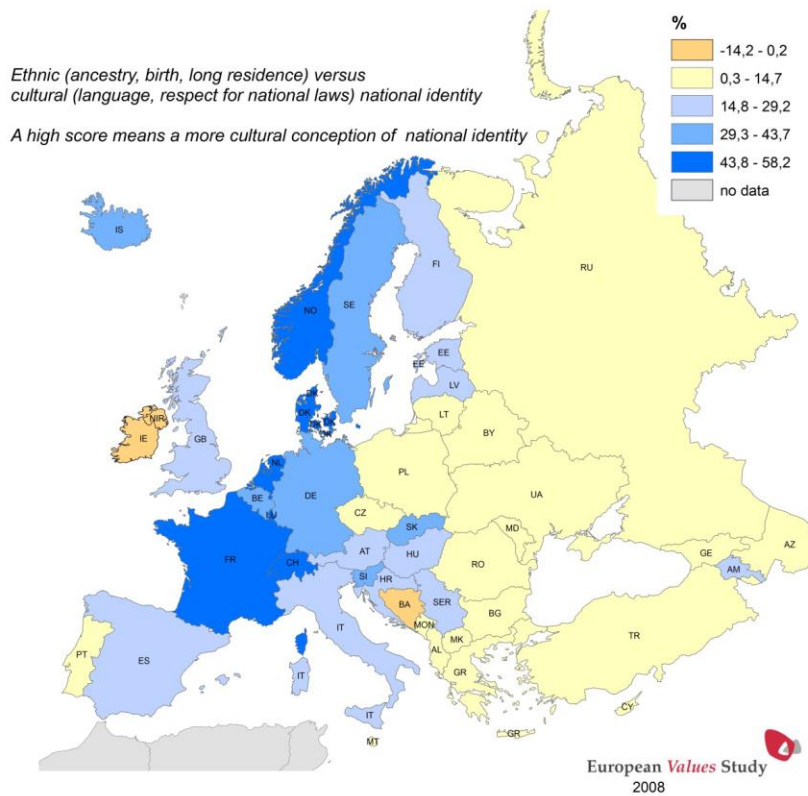
The citizens of Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Moldova share more ethnic view about national identity, i.e. they put the stress on their family roots and their place of long residence. For the citizens from the other Danube the main identificational criteria are culture and language. The strongest expression of this view is observed among the citizens of Germany and Slovakia. These data prove that the national identity could not be accepted as a uniting principle in a future policy for the establishment of regional identity among the citizens of the Danube countries. It is necessary to look for other mechanisms for bridging differences within the Danube space. The outlining of the similarity in values can play a role of such integrating factor. There are many evidences in the data of the AoEV that the citizens of the Danube countries share common cultural values such as attachment to the family and friends, importance of the work in their lives, faith in God.

The family is a primary value for the inhabitants of the Danube region. The demonstrated levels of agreement with this statement among the respondents are extremely high – between 95 and 100 per cent. In similar way the respondents

evaluate the significant role of the friends in their life. Here the highest scores are observed among the citizens of Romania, Moldova and Hungary. In connection with the priority of these two basic values we can comment the Atlas results about the trust in people. The data allow drawing the conclusion that in the old member states of the EU, like Germany and Austria, the levels of trust in people are not so high in comparison with other Danube countries. May be the main reason for the observed difference is the individualization of the Western societies where the main focus is placed on the individuals and their goals and aspirations. (Hagenaars et al., 2003) (Inglehart 1997)

The results in the AoEV indicate that work is also a basic value for the inhabitants of the Danube space. We haven't any significant variety in the respondents' opinions in relation to this issue. The highest levels of attachment to work are demonstrated by Germans and Ukrainians. Here we can put the question if the respondents perceive the work as a virtue, as inner impulse or it is a way to survive. When we turn to the results about the importance of leisure time for the citizens of the Danube countries, we can conclude that the work is rather a means of survival, i.e. most people in the Danube region, especially those from Eastern Europe, work to live and not live to work.

The last evidence for the similarity of cultural values within the Danube space is the unanimity of respondents regarding the importance of faith in God in their lives, with the highest levels of agreement about this, declared by Germans.

4. Conclusions

The results, presented in the AoEV, demonstrate a significant similarity in the basic cultural values of the citizens of the Danube countries. This favourable prerequisite can be used by the decision-makers within the Danube region for undertaking the steps and actions towards the establishment of a common identity among the inhabitants of the region.

According to the theoretical grounds of regional identity, the preliminary conditions for its creation are already in place, namely: well-established territorial and institutional frameworks. Undoubtedly the Danube river can serve as a symbol of the region, i.e. the third condition for the establishment of the regional identity is also accomplished. What remains to be done is to focus all efforts on formation of a consciousness of identity among the inhabitants of the Danube region. This is a difficult task because of the strong influence of the national identity valid for the citizens of each of the Danube countries. But the identified similarity in the cultural values within the Danube space can serve as a starting point of these efforts. It is necessary to underline and communicate the cultural closeness as well as to stimulate the intercultural dialogue between the citizens of the Danube countries. In relation to this we can be optimistic as the European strategy for the Danube

macro-region is to be implemented through common activities and projects whose main indicators for success are concentrated in people to people contacts.

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