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## PERCEPTION OF THE BORDERLANDS IN SERBIA

*“Neighbor is determined by the destiny, and the friend is chosen freely, friendship between neighbors is converting of destiny in to personal choice.”*

Cross-border cooperation in Europe, Anđelko Šimić (2005)

### INTRODUCTION

Present paper<sup>1</sup> aims at enhancing understanding of perceptions of borders in cross-border regions of Serbia and to evaluate influences of these perceptions on cross-border policies and cross-border cooperation (hereafter CBC). The study relevance is rooted in fact that only a small number of CBC projects and initiatives exist in Serbia<sup>2</sup>. Problems of utilizing funds available for CBC in the regions of Republic of Serbia which are eligible for CBC under the IPA Programme are well known and already analyzed in literature (CESS-Vojvodina, 2010). Still, this instrument of European territorial cooperation that also serve as developing instrument of local self-governments is not used to its maximum.

Study of citizen's perceptions on borders and CBC programs will try to provide deeper insights in this area of analysis and will strive to find out how people in whole territory of Serbia and especially in border areas look at regions from other side of border and if these regions or states are close or distant in their perceptions. Furthermore, this study will examine how close they feel with the neighbors in terms of mental distance and culture and if there is a chance for number of CBC projects to be increased if population from both side is closed in they own territory and tradition, weighted by recent isolation and wars.

From the personal point of view of the author, Crossborder Cooperation is of great importance. The studies conducted on Join European Master for Comparative Local Development show that community driven development is extremely efficient in bringing solutions for local difficulties and that there is a number of difficulties regarding sustainability of CBC projects and evaluation of their effects in Serbia. Hence, research of perceptions of regions involved in CBC should provide the author with new insight in the matter of managing CB projects and answer this fundamental question: what is the biggest obstacle in minds of citizens that lives in CBR to be more involved in CB programs and initiatives, beside those already analyzed in literature? Have already conducted projects changed perception of citizens, and if yes, in what way and extent? What cities or regions in the future will be most suitable for even setting up an EGTC?

## BACKGROUND

*Regions have come to be seen as meaningful places, which individuals construct, as well as select, as reference points. Identification with a region is identification with one kind of "imagined community."*

(Johnstone 2004:69)

Local development is an academic discipline that combines elements of many social science fields and concepts. As part of public policy, it is distinct from political science or economics in general because it is focused on the application of theory to practice. For this reasons, the study will apply mix of qualitative and quantitative methodology and mental mapping as research method. It will combine science disciplines that are essential for the research, such as: local economic development, public administration, regional studies, psychology, geography and policy impact analysis. In fact, "CBC deals with issues that include social affairs, economic development, minority rights, cross-border employment and trade, the environment, etc. CBC, however, has also been about attempts to use the border as a resource for economic and cultural exchange as well as for building political coalitions for regional development purposes." (Scott & Matzeit, 2006, p. 3) For this reason the research will be conducted on whole territory of Serbia and specially focused on border regions<sup>3</sup>. Study use Computer Assisted On-line Interviews<sup>4</sup> (CAOI) and limited number of personal interviews will be conducted with people working on local and regional development issues and managing CBC projects in Serbia.

Main objectives of CBC as EU policy instrument are to erase the borders and to bring economic development to regions that stay behind the average development of national state:

"Nowhere is the need to overcome obstacles and barriers created by borders, which can then reoccur due to national laws despite the existence of the EU, more apparent than in the border regions of neighboring countries... In the framework of Europe-wide disparities, in addition to territorial cohesion, CBC is helping in particular to eliminate economic imbalances and obstacles in neighboring border regions in a regionally manageable framework, in partnership with national governments and European authorities." (European Charter for Border and Cross-Border Regions 2004, pp. 7, 8)

Research is looking at both of above-mentioned goals. First hypothesis is that borders are perceived as less important in regions with higher CBC. Second hypothesis is that more developed regions (higher GDP, more local institutions and actors, more CBC project) are already working (consciously or by chance) on creation of CB territory (well organized spatial and urban policies, good CB communication, cooperation between entrepreneurs, better infrastructure and cultural exchange

project). This is due to the fact that in globalized world local governments in bordering territories want to make resource out of borders and not an obstacle. In addition, national governments guided by principles of democracy, inclusion and subsidiarity are searching the models and methods to bring equal regional development on whole territory of a country. In the end, conclusion will try to argument what border regions are best prepared for future establishing of EGTC once legal basis are set and Serbia become candidate country for EU. Mr. Herwig van Staa<sup>5</sup> indicate in his speech in the international conference "New Regional Policies and European Experience" held in Belgrade on 2nd of February 2012 that Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 will be amended in April of the same year allowing the members of Council of Europe to establish EGTC.<sup>6</sup>

Serbia has had numerous transformations of borders during last 20 years. There is no other country in the world that witnessed this phenomenon in such a short period of time: from two types of federation to unitary state; from Self-governing Socialism dominated by single party to the authoritarian regime of Milosevic; finally, the most recent transition democracy. The phenomenon was followed by wars and strong media propaganda under which different territorial aspiration was present to the majority of the population<sup>7</sup>. An illustrative example of these changes can be the following: if you were born in Serbia in the end of 1980's and did not travel out of Serbia yet, you would have already changed 4 countries – considering, of course, just the name of the country. Presently, because of Kosovo independence<sup>8</sup> issue, Serbia still has open debate and problems about its state borders. In December 2011, during the negotiation of Belgrade and Pristina, we saw how great problems can arise just about name or connotation the border will have: is it going to be state or administrative border? What uniforms will carry custom officers and how border is going to be managed, unilaterally or jointly? At this regard, it is necessary to remember that because of failing to achieve a compromise with Kosovo, the Council of Ministers of EU postponed to March 2012 the decision of granting candidate status to Serbia.

Furthermore, from biggest country in Former Yugoslavia and status of central power in the Balkans, Serbia has become a small country with still problematic definition of its territory. Also, Yugoslavia as Non-Aligned country was for a long time first free country after the Iron Curtain<sup>9</sup> and the sense of bordering country is emphasized in dominant interpretation of History<sup>10</sup>. (See appendix 1) Presently Serbia is land-lock country bordering with 3 EU member States, 3 EU candidate countries, BIH with whom Serbia has a special relation agreement due to border with Republika Srpska, and with Kosovo, where border issue are highly problematic.

After the fall of Communist regime and following wars in 1990's, on territory of Former Yugoslavia, concluding with fall of Milosevic in October 2000, Serbia started the process of democratic transition and membership in the EU is set as one of priorities of all governments since that time. Serbia is presently involved in EU Programmes for CBC (ENPI and IPA) with all bordering countries except Kosovo.

Debate about boundaries is intensified because EU's will to become a "continent without borders" and refer to borders as "scars of history." On the other hand, we must be aware of role that borders play for all nation states. They have been considered as fundamental elements of state which represents security and serve as protection, distinction between eternal political division on "us and them" and boundaries of legal jurisdiction and sovereignty.

Local development must be bottom-up driven and supported by project proposals created from local population. For CBC in Serbia there is a chance for more actors to be involved in creating project proposals so the projects could be addressed to burning problems and increase development of these economically backward regions. This is possible, of course, if proposals *per se* are written to comply with EU standards. To this aim, involvement of state and regional government professionals are a necessity. Still, because of lack of evaluation of sustainability of projects, we do not know whether CBC initiatives and conducted projects have satisfied one of their main goals, such as promotion of local cross-border "people to people" actions and "of economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders." (ENPI CBC Strategy paper 2006, p. 5)

## CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

*A hundred years may pass until we have achieved our desired goal; or it may never happen at all. Nevertheless, sometimes we can also dream. Looking into the future, I see such a unity of forces which will bring peace and justice to the world, and I cannot but think that, even if nobody can openly stand for it as of yet, one day those who are yet to come will maybe live to see it . . .*

Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, 1935-1937

European Charter for Border and Cross-border regions states in its preamble that cross-border cooperation helps to diminish the disadvantages of national borders, overcome the marginal status of the border regions in their country, and improve the overall existence of the people living in these areas. "It encompasses all cultural, social, economic and infrastructural spheres of life. Having both knowledge and an understanding of a neighbor's distinctive social, cultural, linguistic and economic characteristics - ultimately the well-spring of mutual trust - is a prerequisite for any successful cross-border cooperation." (European Charter for Border and Cross-Border Regions, 2004)

In the phase of institutionalization of CBC the biggest attention must be paid towards developing demands of all involved sides, as well that mutual and equal representation of all actors from both side of border is guaranteed. The process of setting up CBC can traced over three phase:

- a) Initial cooperation;
- b) Strategic planning of development and cooperation and

c) Management and implementation of cooperation programmes. (Knezevic et al. 2011, p. 34)

This general definition is an adequate assemblage of what we find at different authors. For example Parkmann (2003) on page 4 is operationalizing the term of CBC through four criteria:

1. Main protagonists of CBC are always public authorities and CBC must be located in the realm of public agency.
2. CBC refers to collaboration between sub-national authorities in different countries whereby these actors are normally not legal subjects according to international law. They are therefore not allowed to conclude international treaties with foreign authorities, and, consequently, CBC involves so-called “low politics”. This is why CBC is often based on informal or “quasi-juridical” arrangements among the participating authorities.
3. In substantive terms, CBC is foremost concerned with practical problem-solving in a broad range of fields of everyday administrative life.
4. CBC involves a certain stabilization of cross-border contacts, i.e. institution-building, over time. (Emphasis mine)

Serbian Constitution adopted in 2006 represents the legal foundation for the principle of guaranteeing the right of citizens to provincial autonomy and local self-government. Serbia has in total 123 municipalities (without Kosovo) and 46 of which are bordering.

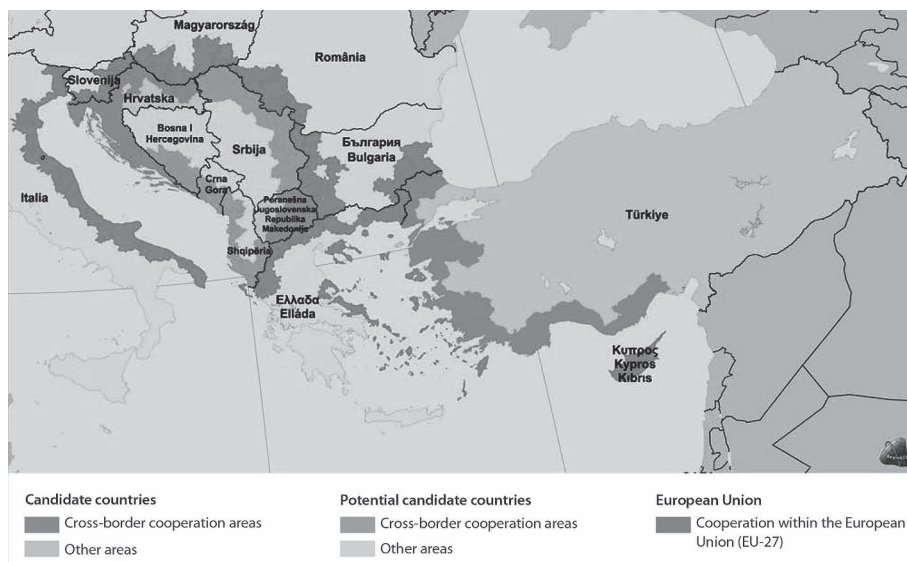


Figure 2 Source: *Cohesion Policy 2007-13 Commentaries and official texts 2007*, p. 137

At the moment Serbia is involved in six IPA CBC Programmes and two transnational Programme<sup>11</sup>. To clarify how important is IPA as an instrument of local development we must scrutinize the EC decision on multi-annual indicative planning documents in which creation Serbian government actively participated.

Cross border co-operation is crucially important for stability, cooperation and economic development in Serbia's border regions. The aim of EC assistance will be to develop local capacity in relation to cross border co-operation in all of Serbia's border regions while also targeting specific local development projects. Development of cross-border cooperation is dependent on general capacity building activities of the local and central authorities responsible for development policy. (MIPD 2009, p. 14, 18) (Emphasis mine)

## EGTC

*We have learnt from our experience that borders shouldn't be lines dividing people but places where people come together. For that reason alone cross-border cooperation is indispensable as "cement of the European House" and key element of the European integration.*

Association of European Border Regions:  
White Paper on European Border Regions, 2006

European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) was created on July 5<sup>th</sup> 2006 European Union<sup>12</sup> as an opportunity for member states to establish a crossborder institution. EGTC, in one word, are non-profit organizations with legal personality which are to facilitate the efficient use of Union resources and supporting establishment of successful cooperation of the municipalities, local and regional authorities of two or more member states.

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) has highlighted the added value of the EGTC:

- Territorial cohesion: It helps to achieve the objectives of the EU as stated in the Treaty of Lisbon.
- Europe 2020: It can be a a tool to implement the Europe 2020 Strategy, boosting competitiveness and sustainability in Europe's regions.
- Multilevel governance: The EGTC offers „the possibility of involving different institutional levels in a single cooperative structure”, and thus „opens up the prospect of new forms of multilevel governance, enabling European regional and local authorities to become driving forces in drawing up and implementing EU policy, helping to make European governance more open, participatory, democratic, accountable and transparent”. (<http://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/en-US/whatis/Pages/welcome.aspx>)

## BORDERS

This part of paper emphasis dynamic character of borders in contemporary world and focus on complex influences of borders on people perception of space providing a definition of cross-border region and different notion of borders.

Borders are not some fixed lines of state sovereignty but rather mutually constitutive dynamic practice of "bordering" and "de-bordering." Moreover bordering processes are "often implicit, latent, meaningful, and contextual strategies." (Berg & Houtum, 2003) Therefore, the border is not regarded as being at one side and them at the other, but as an area open to co-operation and not an abyss which divides people, but a community with its own energy, direction and future. (Oda-Angel, 2003) (Emphasis mine)

Just by ordinary contemplation we could outline many different types of borders that would go from the political-administrative, traditional, historical, linguistic, cultural, economic, maritime, fluvial, "to those borders which are more intimate and refer to thought, collective imagination or mentality." (Oda-Angel 2003, p. 2) Borders can both serve as bridges and barriers, as demarcation lines for country sovereignty and safety and lines that serve as excuse to wage a war. That is why border areas were always specific from different socio-economical aspects. „Conditions in borderlands worldwide vary considerably because of profound differences in the size of nation states, their political relationships, their level of development, and their ethnic, cultural and linguistic configurations." (Martinez 1994, p. 1) However, the need for overcoming obstacles created by borders is not more obvious then in border regions. Even in the EU, due to different legal frameworks, these obstacles for cooperation are still present. There is no need after what was said before to point out at Serbia where "border issues" were used for mobilization of fear, rising of nationalistic prejudice and war propaganda just 20 years ago. Nowadays this agenda is also the focal question in Serbian media and political discourse due to problems with Kosovo independence declaration in 2008.

Today globalization and Europeanization are permanently contesting the power of nation state. Increasing integration, interdependence and mobility of people, goods and services are testing the significance of the borders more than ever before. Still we must stay aware that consumption of the advantages that comes from globalized world or united Europe is just a fortunate happening for the privilege group of people. Not everyone can use the benefits of borderless Europe. Therefore the people in developing countries or economically backward regions have numerous differences in perceptions of the border regions. This is because the existence of the border had and still has a significant influence on them. The biggest proof is that some of the least developed municipalities in Serbia are placed along the national border<sup>13</sup>.

From spatial divisions on center and periphery over constantly shifting EU internal and external borders (due to enlargement policy) to religious and language obstacles for communication and trading, people who live in border areas must pay attention

to this factors usually caused by the negative consequences that vicinity to the border present. Negative because it limits the services and movements and also hinder the economical activity. Thus, CBC is not only a developing instrument for the LSG and state in general but moreover it's a tool for the people that live in the border areas to realize their rights to equal standard of living and freedom of movements and better mobility in general. We must always have in mind that the result and sustainability of the CBC is directly dependent from the will of national, regional and local authorities, EU regulations, as well as from the quality for programs, projects and contracts signed by all mentioned actors. Hardi Tamas (2010) in his study on Trans-border mobility is noticing well on the page 5 and 6 that:

[B]orders and border areas are all unique, individual phenomena. The, birth, change and character of the spatial borders depend to a large extent on the spatial unit (in this case: state) they surround, but this is a mutual relationship: states, border regions, and the characteristics of the state border all influence each other...This differences is true in the neighborhood of central area of the state just like in areas more distant from that, and it is a question where we can draw the boundary of the zone where the proximity of the border has a strong impact on the socio-economic processes than the distance from the centre does. The proximity of the border can increase the features that get worse and worse as we approach the periphery (e.g. isolation, bad accessibility, worse economic indices), but the border may as well have positive impact on economy and society, effects that can even turn around this tendency (a nearby traffic junction of neighbor country may alleviate the isolation, capital may find the border region more attractive as a result of geographical proximity or cultural similarity. (Emphasis mine)

We must have some kind of a gain or profit which motivate us to ignore the barrier coming from the reality of state border and diverse socio-cultural context. Movements between border regions are different in a way because advantages arising from the differences of systems are more available if one has the residence close to the border region. "All people who cross international borders must negotiate not only the structures of state power that they encounter, and new realtions and conditions of work, exchange and consumption, but also new frameworks of social status and organization, with their concomitant cultural ideals and value." (Donnan & Wilson, 2001, p. 108)

We can sum up above mentioned arguments by quoting the professor Hardi once more:

[M]ovements, migrations between two states occur as a result of differences that have involved between socio-economic developments levels (and accordingly the realisable incomes) and the national systems (e.g. taxation, healthcare, educational etc.) Naturally, this motivation can also appear in case of movements between border regions; in fact, the probability of movements is greatly promoted by the spatial proximity of the neighbour system. Fro example, between Slovakia and Hungary, it is espacialy the inhabitants on the Hungarian towns and cities near the border who establish businesses and buy cars in slovakia, motivated by the differences in the taxation systems. (Hardi, 2010, pp. 12-13)



## MENTAL MAPPING

*Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequence of events leading up to it, the memory of past experience.*

(Lynch 1960: p. 1)

*Perception of one's immediately surrounding residential environment is directly affected by the communication infrastructure. This perception is encapsulated in mental images and maps that often tell residents what areas of the social space in which they live should be avoided or frequented—are friendly or not to neighborly discourse. These maps and perceptions are the product of social interaction, which develops within the storytelling communicative infrastructure. The quality of the exchanges and the linkages between storytelling systems components directly reflect on the perception of space.*

(Matei, 2001 p. 431)

We are all aware of the fact that time is a subjective category and that sometimes, usually when we are feeling good, it flies. On the contrary, when we are feeling bad, it seems that every second is like a minute and a minute is like an hour. One of the first to observe this interesting phenomenon was Hudson Hoagland who conducted an experiment with his wife once he realized that she had totally distorted perception of time due to her fever. She was complaining that her husband took too much time to get to her and that he too often went away. Hoagland then proposed to his wife quite an interesting experiment. She would count off 60 seconds while he was timing her with his watch. The result of this simple experiment was amazing. When her minute was up, his clock showed 37 seconds, almost double faster than the real time. In subsequent experiments he showed that his wife's mental clock ran faster the higher her temperature became.

The obvious connection between time and space reminds us of the connection, often neglected by majority of people, between space and territory. In fact, a person with different experiences and feelings may perceive the same space differently: "Border people do not perceive the border in the same conditions as those at each side who do not hold such a condition." (Oda-Angel 2003, p. 2) Other researches on correlated subjects have shown that variety of factors are influencing perception<sup>14</sup> of space, as for example frequency of travel, media reports, fear from being attacked, being adult or a child, communication networks, distance, signalization, territories separated by border lines or not, various travel modes, neighborhood, demographic characteristic, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, socio-economic status, education level etc. The biggest obstacles, especially in post-conflict countries, are still in the minds: for example, in Serbia one would think that Serbian citizens maybe think that it is easier to travel to Russia than to Albania due to the cultural proximity to Russia and, of course, its influence on our personal value system; this is exactly one of the questions this research is trying to scrutinize. Therefore, we should not be surprised if this comes up as a true hypothesis after all conflicts Serbia witnessed in last 20 years.

Some of the researches on the Austro-Hungarian border region have already shown that perceptions of the people who are living in the border regions are significantly different than those from inland parts of the country. The object of study was “to reconstruct the “mental map” of residents in the border region, with a special emphasis on their construction of a mental border and the use they make of for their daily activities.” (Hintermann 2001, p. 269) Perfect example was the perception of the Austrian citizens towards the EU enlargement process in 2004. Those one living close to Hungarian border by majority supported the enlargement, while citizens from the central parts by majority did not support enlargement, probably frightened by newcomers, criminality and mass migration. Therefore, the results of above-mentioned research in the border region “show that the perception of the people residing in the respective region is far more differentiated: in their perspective, with the opening of the border after 1989, a first step of the enlargement of the European Union has already taken place” (Hintermann, 2001, p. 269).

In other research of the Northern Greek CB zone authors focused on “the type and level of interaction, the perception and policies occur across the border between Albania, FYROM and Bulgaria” which is by their words “most fragmented economic, social and political space in Europe.” (Topaloglou, 2008) This study is an example on how perception of border regions can be changed over time with cross-border cooperation policies leading socio-economic changes in Central and Eastern Europe, turning these backward regions into areas of cooperation with neighboring countries.

Directly correlated questions from above-mentioned studies with this research are: “Whether or not the map of geographic borders is associated with the map of perception and what are effects of the borders as dividing lines between two countries on their overall interaction and economical cooperation?” (Topaloglou, 2008)

[H]owever, the border line in terms of its intellectual and geographic dimension contributes significantly in the formation of the “us” vis-à-vis “others” identity. In fact, one could claim that the definition of “us” in relation to the boundaries presupposes the existence of the “others” in the opposite side of the borders. The manner that the people of these two countries perceive the concept of borders is not simply a matter of lines drawn on a map or on the ground but something rather more complex and dynamic. The issue lends itself to further complexity when borders divide large geographic territories such as the EU-25 with neighboring countries. In such cases, the grouping of characteristics that form integrated perceptions like religion, language, historical and cultural affairs all lead to an intellectual hierarchy in space. It is obvious that this “intellectual” special hierarchy is not always associated with the “geographic” spatial hierarchy.

(Topaloglou, 2008: p. 63) Emphasis mine

Furthermore it is rather interesting how Blatter (1997) interpreted CBC: a group process “where the willingness to solve a problem was seen as determined by the specific interests with respect to a problem and by the perception of the problem ... However, the willingness of collective participants (e.g. sub-regions) to act was not

determined by the “objective” focus of interests. Culturally normative and cognitive factors also influence the perception of problems and the definitions of self-interest and preferences.” (p. 152) A little bit further, the author discusses the importance of different factors for CBC, emphasizing the importance of intangible ones by stating that:

[I]nterests, values and capacities within the relevant subregions are important for policy outputs but they do not play a decisive role for CBC. For cooperation the crucial matter is the constellation among subregions, as well as the possibly different perceptions of the problem in the subregions... Also, differences in the problem solving capacity and the compatibility of the administration systems are important factors. Not surprising, but nevertheless very central, is the conclusion that situations with symmetrical interests and values make cooperation easier and that asymmetrical constellations are much more difficult to handle. However, it is also important to recognise that the interests are seldom totally asymmetrical ... scale of social and economic linkages and a common CB regional identity play a minor role in a specific environmental problem-solving processes. In contrast, history, language, and institutional aspects seems to have major influence on the cooperation outcome. (Blatter, 1997, p. 153-154) (Emphasis mine)

This means that a common language permits a better communication and the social capital to flourish in the form of trust and understanding.

Complexity and interdependence of relationships between different political arenas in the context of cross-border cooperation is witnessed on the next figure

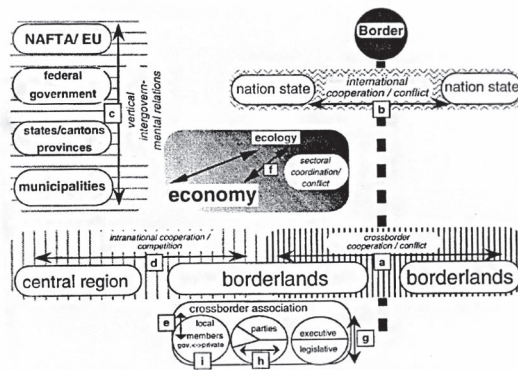


Figure 5: Political Arenas in the Context of CBC; Source: Blatter, 1997

When it comes to mental mapping as a research instrument, when we especially measure discrepancies of mental and physical distance in space, we must notice as Montello (1997) that it is “difficult in naturalistic settings to disentangle which characteristics of the environment provide distance information (pathway slope, aesthetic appeal, number of trees and curves, etc.)” This is because “naturalistic research on subjective intra- and interurban distance is difficult to interpret because the relative influence of locomotion-based and symbolic-based distance knowledge is uncontrolled and un-assessed.” (p. 2)

Mental mapping as a research instrument applies mental picture of different individuals within groups with specific characteristics. In this way we can measure perceptions of city identity and the general functioning of a territory inhabited with specific groups. As a specific method mental mapping, as Sluster explain, is used in the following way: "All individuals construct their own map based upon a questionnaire using different tools for answering such as different line types, icons or symbols. After the exercise people are asked to comment their own results." (Slusters 2005, p. 1) The added value of MM as a research method results from the fact that MM

[S]eeks to give insight in different, interrelated levels of mapping. The different mental maps are thematically grouped, super positioned and compared. Synthesis or conclusive maps can then be created upon specific combinations or series of individual maps. Similarities might appear between maps of people with a comparable lifestyle, age, interest or grade of experience with the area. In this way, the meaning of specific parts of the area for specific groups can be revealed. (Sulsters, 2005, p. 1)

Researches on connections between cognitive mapping and urban planning started with Lynch (1960) who picked Los Angeles, Boston and Jersey City and asked their citizens to draw maps of environment they live in and later describe it.

On the other hand, Kitchin and Freundschuh (2000) speak about closely related notion of cognitive mapping "as a process composed of a series of psychological transformations by which an individual acquires, stores, recalls, and decodes information about the relative locations and attributes of the phenomena in everyday spatial environment." (p. 1)

In addition, Fenster (2009) explains how he became aware of great possibilities cognitive temporal (CT) maps as a method offered through the drawings of a 19-years-old girl; an Ethiopian Jewish immigrant who came to Israel. He asked her to draw the map of her childhood environment back in Ethiopia. Her map is simple but it also shows a clear distinction regarding valuable, close and pleasant places in her life and how human cognition is functioning.

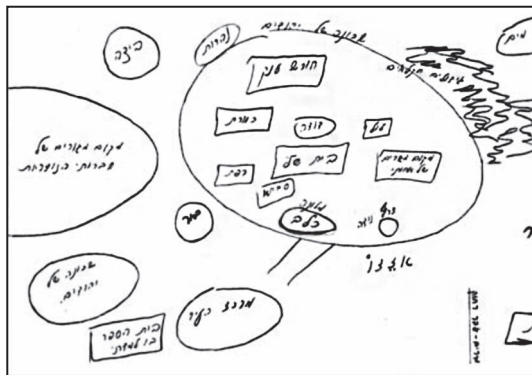


Figure 7 Fenster 2009, Miriam Mental map of her childhood environment, p. 480

She illustrated the shapes and then marked them with meaning she attached to them: "my home", "my aunt's home", "my sister's place of living", "menstruation hut", "dog shed", "cow shed", "big forest". "Then she drew a circle around this central area and wrote on it "Jewish neighborhood" and in the upper right hand side of the sketch she wrote "areas for vegetable growing". On the circle in the left-hand side of the sketch she wrote "living area of my Christian friends". (Fenster, 2009, p. 479)

Fenster used three steps methods which includes in-depth interviews, drawing CT maps and dialogue between the researcher/planner and the interviewee/resident as a method which helps to expose the local spatial knowledge necessary for effective planning. (Fenster, 2009)

We can conclude that MM is used as a valuable tool both for orientation, judging of distance, importance and therefore motivation of people. Moreover, mental maps are used, in a different form, as a scientific method for gaining information about interior cognitive representation of the outside world. The connection point between all mentioned studies with this one, which is focused on influences of perceptions to CBC and image of BR, can be find in fact that mental maps are generally regarded as way-finding tools and psychological "controllers" of our decisions: "Should we stay or should we go?" Thus, the way we perceive the space we live in can improve communication with others and help us to use the opportunities. We all know that information are scattered all around our living environment and several above-mentioned studies showed how spatial cognition shapes access to opportunity in complex environments, such as BR. Entrepreneurs and project planers could consequently utilize this information for their activities in these areas.

As Mondshein (2005) said, "to a careless job seeker, job opportunities not easily reached by transit are effectively out of reach and even transparent. Modally constructed cognitive maps, in other words, are key to understanding both travel behavior and accessibility in cities." Follow by valuable insight of Montello (1997) that mental maps assist us in using resources like time, money and food more efficiently. As a result, "knowledge of distances in the environment affects the decision to stay or go, the decision of where to go and the decision of which route to take. It therefore seems likely that an understanding of the perception and cognition of distance will prove fundamental to the prediction and explanation of spatial behavior." (p. 297) (Emphasis mine)

## RESEARCH

*Anthropologists have increasingly probed new ways of theorizing the conditions and practice of modernity and post-modernity. Much of this theorizing has sought to liberate notions of space, place and time from assumptions about their connection to the supposedly natural units of nation, state, identity and culture. These new theories regard space as the conceptual map which orders social life. Space is the general idea people have of where things should be in physical and cultural relation to each other.*

*In these sense, space is the conceptualization of the imagined physical relationships which give meaning to society.*

(Donnan & Wilson 2001, p. 9)

I realized a series of interviews and on-line survey is to gather data that will serve to evaluate the process of borders perception of citizens living in Serbia and to measure influence of these perceptions on managing of CBC projects<sup>15</sup>. Data gathered from questionnaires provided material for constructing of conclusive mental map that would reflect the “image within” of borders of Serbia. During the making of map and the results of the research we compared all data and try to weighted results with official information, for instance about: demographic, standard of living, project structure and size, money that local governments manage to allocate being a part of the CBC Programme, export-import, workforce migrations between countries etc. and hopefully provide an evidence about the region/s in the territory of Serbia where it would be most feasible to built EGTC once legal basis for this instrument are created.

## HOW CITIZENS OF SERBIA PERCEIVE BORDERS?

Based on our on-line questionnaires, mental distance that the biggest positive difference between perception and physical distance is regarding capital of Hungary (-135km): this mean that majority of people who answered our questionnaires saw Budapest 135km closer than it actually is. Next is capital of Croatia with smallest negative difference (+5km) and interestingly when it comes to first bigger city after national border the discrepancy is the highest among all results (+63km). This mean that Serbians perceived Zagreb in almost exact distance as in reality but the border region and the city Osijek, that was the place of war during the '90, as twice more further than it really is<sup>16</sup>. Small negative difference is noted regarding Sarajevo (+18); what is strange is that our respondents saw Pristina (+25) twenty-five kilometers more distant than it really is and information about distance of this city can be find on road signalization in Serbia and in elementary schools Kosovo geography is learned as integral part of Serbian territory. This mean that war which occur 13 years ago, present conflicts on northern Kosovo and on weekly basis closing and opening of “administrative border” with Kosovo, shifted the perception of Serbian population towards this territory in negative manner, as to say it is perceive further

than it actually is. First bigger city after national border with Montenegro is perceived 11km farther than in reality. Absolute record is notice regarding capital of Bulgaria (+84km) and also regarding Vidin (+11) which is first bigger city after national border<sup>17</sup>.

## WHICH REGIONS ARE MOST ACTIVES IN CROSS BORDER COOPERATION?

Another on-line questionnaire with focus on perception of borders and cross-border regions provide us with similar conclusions. More than half (51%) of people that create our sample have more than 10 friends living in countries bordering Serbia; 53% cross national border in average once a year and 34% from 1 to 3 time a month while 12.5% do it rare or never<sup>18</sup>; furthermore 85.7% respondents do not find cultures and languages of neighboring countries that different that it would be an obstacle for cooperation. Yet asked to name one of the countries they find most distant from Serbia in socio-cultural aspects<sup>19</sup> they named Albania (and Kosovo) together with Hungary in first place with 33.3%; in second is Romania (23%) and third place is shared by Croatia and Bulgaria with 5.1%. Finally asked if they think Serbian border is safe 54% answered positively, 25% said no and 21% did not have any opinion; asked what they think about "rigidness"<sup>20</sup> of national border 42.3% said no and 40.4% said they find some difficulties while crossing the border and 17.3% did not have any opinion.

Analyzing perception of the CBC and related projects we reached next conclusions: 44.2% people think that involvement of Serbia in CBC initiatives has contribute to the living standard, 23% do not agree with this claim and 32.7% do not have any opinion. In addition 54.7% evaluate positively influence of CBC on the perception of borders while only 1.9% said that CBC do make any influence on their perception of borders and 45.3% do not have any opinion at all. Asked to specify one project of CBC their heard about, majority named projects related to students exchange, natural environment protection, employment of youth, legal regional cooperation or just wrote different IPA CBC frameworks mainly with Hungary and Croatia. Still half of the answers on this question are skipped and some individuals specified they do not live in region that is eligible for CBC.

Finally even the analyses of related studies clearly indicate that contacts, networks and projects are concentrating in specific areas. Professor Nagy analysis of CARDS and IPA projects from 2011 come to conclusion regarding cooperative networks in Vojvodina. Nagy say that these networks are most often formed by institutions and centers in charge for local development established within the EU CARDS program. These projects significantly contributed to "multi-polar (active) and uni-polar (passive) networking"<sup>21</sup>. (Nagy, 2011, p. 9)

Presented below, figure 13 is providing us clear insight in the territory dispersion of IPA CBC realized on the territory of Vojvodina. In the 2009 - 2011 call for proposals under HU-SER IPA Programme 70 projects were approved with total value

of €18.2 mill. In the same time the ROM-SER IPA CBC withdraw €15.5 mill. In 41 approved projects; BIH-SER IPA CBC realized 15 projects<sup>22</sup>; for same period 11 projects were realized in IPA CBC with Croatia in value of €2.7 mill<sup>23</sup>. (CESS-Vojvodina 2011, pp. 31-42) Last but not the least BUL-SER IPA CBC contracted 32 projects<sup>24</sup>.

Other Serbian regions or municipalities, eligible for CBC did not conduct similar research, comparable data or data that could be used for secondary data analysis though the request for this kind of data was sent to 6 RDA's (in Nis, Novi Pazar, Zajecar, Uzice and Kragujevac). This fact can be taken as proof of lesser and worst cross-border cooperation in other areas of Serbia. Maybe this is the influence of significantly lower financial funds for other IPA programmes, namely with Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina because they are not member states of EU but activist example of Croatia exclude this opportunity. Maybe it is the consequence of actual border with Montenegro which is mainly mountainous and relatively inaccessible, with the economic centers located in the larger towns, at some distance from the border. (IPA CBC, 2007, p. 5) All this stay in the field of speculation and it will need to wait another more comprehensive study.



Figure 13 Territorial arrangements of IPA CBC project applications from Vojvodina, Source: CESS-Vojvodina 2011

One of the possible explanations why it is easier to reach all necessary data for past and present CBC Programmes from Vojvodina is that this is the only autonomous province in Serbia with regional Government. Furthermore it is most culturally diverse and heterogeneous region in Serbia regarding number of national minorities. Vojvodina has also in 2011 opened the office under the Mission of Serbia in the EU for advance to regional funds and increasing of foreign investments. Vojvodina also has three RDA's, Provincial Government Offices for International Cooperation and



numerous institutes and centers that are dealing with trans-national cooperation and development issues. Not one similar study (absorption capacities, evaluation of sustainability of CBC projects) is done for any other region except Vojvodina. Exceptions are studies and strategies of development of some RDA's (like RARIS in Zajecar) but only for municipalities that are founders of RDA's not on the NUTS 2 level like in case of Vojvodina.

## CONCLUSIONS

Perceptions as process of becoming aware of something are indisputable related with our senses and cognition. As utterly subjective representations of reality they tend to be formed under a great deal of factors. Therefore, perceptions of borders are usually part of bigger mental maps we have about physical space that we live in. What is near, well known and easy to accomplish for one person can be far, mysterious and impossible for other.

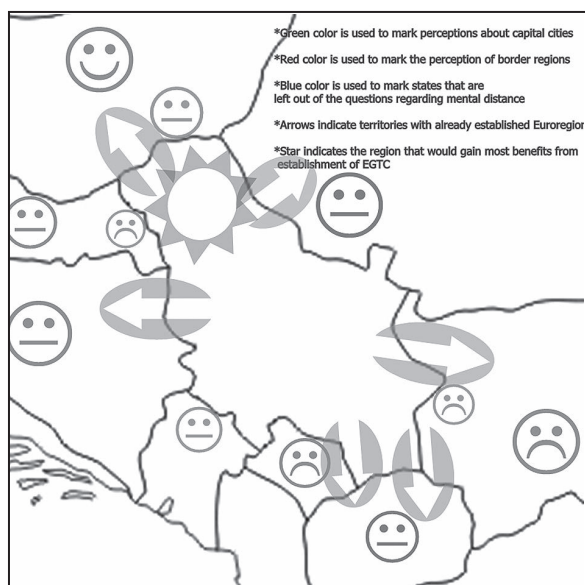


Figure 14 Conclusive map of perception of the borders in Serbia,  
 Creation of author

By checking the correlation between perceptions and borders and between borders and cross-border cooperation, as additional developing instrument of LSG in Serbia, we realize that it is going to be hard to define it in a proper manner. Still, we know that these kinds of validity are hard to be found outside the controlled environment of experiment.

Having in mind all restrictions and limitations (questionnaires interface, time and money, lacking of support from a bigger academic network and researcher centers in Serbia) in conducting the thorough use of mental maps as research method, our research serves in creation of general mental map that represents the sum of all gathered data both through literature review, interviews and questionnaire. In below presented straightforward map we can locate positive and negative perceptions of Serbian national border.

Assumed correlations between positive perception and higher number of CBC projects are apparent. We do not know what came first in this relation. Did perception of borders as less significant constraining factor created good cooperation networks and contacts, and then did this collaboration generate a will for mutual aid that resulted in good and relevant project proposals? It is a matter of discussion which reminds irresistibly on the eternal riddle: what came first a hun or an egg.

In this place we can just identify that in case of Hungary results of measured mental distance are positive while towards Croatia, Romania and Montenegro they are ordinary, as to say, do not varied too much from reality. On other side negative perception in mentioned category is expressed towards Bulgaria and Kosovo. This claim finds justification in fact that even the available funds for CBC are reasonably same for Hungary and Bulgaria, previous state realized more than double more projects during the same time. Moreover, bordering territories between Kosovo, FYR Macedonia and Serbia are not eligible for IPA CBC. Nevertheless by the answers in the on-line questionnaires we saw that Kosovo and Albania are perceived as socio-culturally most separate from Serbia.

Formation of EGTC on territory of Serbia or membership of Serbian regions in EGTC created in macro-region level is just a matter of time. All interviewed professionals speak in favor of EGTC and in a way they are looking forward to this opportunity emphasized by chance that Serbia will soon get status of candidate country for EU membership or the relevant regulation will be amended regarding the areas eligible for establishing of EGTC. Therefore the establishing of EGTC seems most feasible in territories experienced in CBC programs where given national and supra-national funds are utilized to its maximum; where established contacts create a sense of mutual trust and further efforts are expected towards development of region. AP Vojvodina is the region that provides best additional support to LSG from the area; people and institutions from this region are already working for more than 10 years on mitigation of borders, thus transforming them into axis of friendship and entrepreneurship.

In the end lets highlight that it is not important what will be the name of EGTC and where it will be sated but more important questions is will it work in current constellations and with present competencies of LSG's in Serbia. EGTC is not just a European trend but possibly useful instrument for solving mutual problems of particular area in the suitable socio-economical framework.

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## LIST INTERVIEWS

**Target group:** Experience professionals who were for a number of years involved in managing CBC programs and projects.

**First group:** personal interviews conducted before the research:

Mrs. Danica Lale who is Program Manager in Joint Technical Secretariat Hungary-Serbia IPA Cross-border Co-operation Programme (dlale@vati.hu)

Mr. Ivan Knezevic who at the time of interviewing was Program Manager for CBC in CESS-Vojvodina.

**Second group:** personal interviews conducted during the research:

Mr. Djula Ribar who is expert advisor for project activities in Center for Strategic Economic Studies – Vojvodina (dj.ribar@vojvodina-cess.org)

Mr. Jovan Komsic who is professor of European studies on the master program in the Faculty of economy, University of Novi Sad (jovankom@eunet.rs)

Mr. Aleksandar Popov who is director of the Center for regionalism and founder of the Igman Initiative (centreg@nscable.net)

Mr. Srdjan Vezmar who is director of Regional development agency Backa (srdjan.vezmar@rda-backa.rs)

## DATA SOURCES

Absorption Capacity of Autonomous Province Vojvodina for using the EU funds (2011), CESS- Vojvodina; methodology used: Desk analysis of CARDS and IPA CBC Programmes and surveys about perception of AC in LSG's. (40 interviewees from 40 municipalities from Vojvodina)

Nagy I. and Kicosev S. (2011), Geographical characteristics of the distribution of the INTERREG and IPA funds, and their effects on the development of the border regions of Vojvodina/Serbia, University of Novi Sad/Serbia, Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management

## NOTES

1. Project Work has been realized in 2012 in charge of Joint European CoDe Master Programme, as a part of internship research objective in the Center for Regional Studies in Pecs.
2. Less than 40 per cent of EU funds available for CBC were allocated in 2010. (CESS-Vojvodina)
3. Definitions of border regions and other definitions important for gathering data are provided in the section that deals with research methodology and questions for questionnaires and interviews.
4. Computer Assisted On-line Interviews (CAOI) are special kind of Computer assisted self-interviewing (CASI) which is a method for data collection in which the respondent uses

a computer to complete the survey questionnaire without an interviewer administering it to the respondent.

5. President of Board of Regions for local and regional governments of Council of Europe

6. Serbia is member of CoE from April 3rd 2003

7. Influence of media on people perception of territory and orientation in space is conducted in several studies, such as: Montelo, 1997;

8. Before 1999 Kosovo was autonomous province of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. After 10th of June 1999, with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 Kosovo is placed under interim of UN administration (UNMIK). On 17th February 2008 Kosovo has unilaterally declared independence and till this moment 85 members of the UN recognized it as sovereign state.

9. The concept of the Iron Curtain symbolized the ideological fighting and physical boundary dividing Europe into two separate areas from the end of World War II in 1945 until the end of the Cold War in 1989.

10. In historical books and touristic brochures Serbia is referred as crossroads of east and west because it was positioned on the border between Turkish Empire and Austro-Hungarian monarchy; Former Yugoslavia was considered till end of Cold War as first free country after Iron Curtain which ideologically divided Europe.

11. In 2012. Through its Component II, IPA will support Cross Border Cooperation by proposing joint programmes at the borders with Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as financing participation of Serbia in the two ERDF trans-national programme „South-East Europe” and “Adriatic programme”.

12. Founded by Article 159 of the Lisbon Treaty

13. Emblematically by the 2011 census the poorest municipality in Serbia is Trgoviste on the border with FYR Macedonia and its followed by Municipalities on the border with Bulgaria, Kosovo, Romania, Montenegro, Romania namely Bor, Bela Palanka, Kikinda, Novi Pazar, Knjazevac, Sombor.

14. It is evident from quoted paragraphs before and in this chapter. For more look at Kitchin & Freundschun 2000, pp. 197-215

15. 100 questionnaires were sent to border settlements that are located not more than 50 km from State border; we received 63 answers for evaluation of mental distances and 54 answers on questionnaire regarding perception of CBC and BR; 4 personal structured interviews were conducted (one via Skype) with representatives of local government or regional development agencies that are in charge of managing cross-border project in their regions under the IPA CBC Programme. Interview lists see on the Annex No. 1.

16. The physical road distance from Sombor to Osijek is 68km while average answer of our sample was 131km.

17. Interesting is the data that Vidin is the only city where our respondents skipped 4 questions and in 3 answers indicate they do not have idea where Vidin is located.

18. NGO “484” from Belgrade conducted a research about traveling habits of Serbian citizens in 2009 and reach the conclusion that 85% of young people to 25 years never traveled outside the Serbia and only 11% of citizens has the passport.

19. Some clearly stated that religious and national differences and struggle with Kosovo are reasons for they answer; other named all Islamic countries putting the religion in the first place while other explained that Hungarian language is too hard and Romania is too big competitor for Serbia or Bulgaria is very similar to Serbia but we never understand each other etc.

20. The entire question reads: Do you consider that the border of Republic of Serbia is to "rigid", as to say do you think that during the transport of people and goods there are certain obstruction factors?

21. In multi-polar networks, once the project work is completed new partners join the leading partner in order to continue and improve the work initiated by the original project. In the uni-polar network projects are implemented only in one of the participating countries without any cooperation with the foreign partner, yet it has significant national networking capacity. (Nagy 2011)

22. No information about total value of withdrawal money.

23. It is important to note that total available funds for IPA CBC CRO-SER are much lower, precisely 5.4 million EURO for the first three years (2007-2009), due to fact that Croatia is not the member of EU but candidate country.

24. This data is taken from "The updated list of the subsidy contracts under the first Call for proposals as of 16.12.2011. available at: <http://www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu/eng/announcements/view/6>