

# **Cross Border Cooperation in Higher Education: The Case of the Carpathian Region**

## **Kozma Tamás**

Cross border cooperation (CBC) involves activities of the (local, regional) societies that connect them at the common borders. If those activities are forceful in socio-economic terms they may strengthen political cooperation and weaken political tensions. CBC is a phenomenon that may fall into the category of "grassroot" politics in case state politics in open to create accessible borders.

Tertiary education is the dynamic sector of education in Central and Eastern Europe. It involves, therefore, social activities and political wills. It is a sector where social groups are represented with strong socio-economic, political and cultural interests.

The Carpathian Region is cooperation among local and regional authorities of Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine, Romania and Hungary. It is a model cooperation that is supported by the European Union (the PHARE Program). The cooperation involves cultural and educational activities, like cooperations among higher education institutions in the Region.

This preliminary study looks at the supporting forces and the conflicting interests in the Region. It points out some of the conflicts between the PHARE Program expectations and the local realities of ethnic and educational policies.

### **Aims**

- a) to explore and describe existing cooperations among higher education institutions in border areas of the Carpathian Region
- b) to analyze the conditions (socio-economic, political and cultural) under which cooperations prove to be successful
- c) to compare the existing cooperations with the hypothesis of the Phare CBC (Cross Border Cooperation) project.

### **Approaches**

- a) scope of the research: applied social research in higher education
- b) framework for interpretation: social ecology
- c) method 1: content analysis of the referred Phare project documentations
- d) method 2: case studies of the City University of Komarno (Slovakia), the College of Education of Beregovo (Ukraine) and the College of the Reformed Church in Oradea (Romania)
- e) method 3: comparative analysis of the case studies

### **Findings**

- a) CBC type A: The local society living in the border area prevails the present state border. The ties of the local society come from a traditional culture. It is expressed in the common local heritage. The border area is mostly rural without urban centre. Symbolic goods are more important than modernization drives. The political elite of the local society stabilizes the population, by creating and disseminating a local identity. Education is considered as one of the main representations of that identity.

Education for traditional careers (teachers, ministers, local leaders etc) are highly demanded.

- b) CBC type B: The border area is in the catchment area of a powerful urban centre. The influence of that centre is stronger than the impact of the existing state border. The once existing local society is already on the move and its members are tempted to migrate into the centre. It is a selective rather than a equalizing process where young males with convertible skills and knowledges are changing their geographical places and social statuses. Education is more a service organization than a conveyor of traditional values. „Market orientation” in education has already been developed together with relevant organizational features in the higher educational institutions.

#### Policy Initiations

- a) Phare CBC Project (1994-96) aims to initiate cooperations in border areas to perpetuate modernization processes while saving the political identities of the states in both sides of the border. It acts in a top-down direction that is, it contributes to state government initiatives for cross-border cooperation. Those cooperations however are by definition grass-root cooperations which cannot be organized from the centre.
- b) New Phare initiatives for the Carpathian Region have to encourage central governments to deconcentrate their educational systems, including higher education institutions.
- c) It has to contribute to the development of the local (higher) education markets in order to meet the real demands of the (local) societies in the border areas.