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SOCIAL PLANNING AND EUROPEAN CONTACT AREAS: POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY IN PLACE

Abstract

The article deals with the issue of planning social and spatial integration in the so-called contact areas, where different political and cultural units meet and interlace. The study of such areas copes both with the persistent and immanent forms of territoriality in human beings and increasing quests for functional social, economic and spatial (re)integration. Both trends lead towards a multi-level and often contradictory relationship between different territories and borders, which emerge from the simultaneously developing processes of social and spatial convergence and divergence. For this reason, both theory and practice of political geography are permanently challenged by shifting policies of integration and/or separation, and social and spatial planning in European multicultural and border regions appears to be a difficult, almost Sisyphean task. Yet, it is central to the creation of more stable opportunities for both coexistence and development. This article provides a review of author's considerations of political geographical transformations and issues related to European contact areas in the pre-modern, modern and post-modern period, with special emphasis on minorities and cross-border cooperation, suggesting to promote an integrative and multilevel approach that could somehow replace the classic "national" policies in relation to border areas development and minority protection.

Key words: *spatial planning, spatial integration, contact areas*

1. Introduction

The modern problems of social and cultural contact areas as well as questions referring to further possibilities of social integration within the European continent are based in our opinion on three fundamental elements: (1) persistent territoriality or the attachment to an original cultural environment, (2) the necessity for functional social and economic connections, and (3) the multi-level and often discordant existence of different borders that are formed around existing social and cultural areas. All the mentioned elements at the same time reflect the simultaneous ongoing processes of social and spatial convergence and

divergence which create the changing relations among socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political systems, thus affecting the transformation of the scope and the quality characteristics of the so-called contact areas where these systems meet and intertwine.

As was already emphasised by Poulantzas, the European cultural and political space in the pre-capitalist period was relatively loose and open since it was founded on locally oriented, mostly self-sufficient rural economies and joint religion and civilisation which enabled fairly intensive mutual communication to European cultural elites (Poulantzas 1978). Quite oppositely, the capitalist, modern social space determines the emergence of borders, since the territorialisation of cultural, economic and political processes is the precondition for the development of modern territorial (national) states (Sack 1980), which currently merge the preliminarily diversely dimensioned cultural, political and economic areas into one uniform system. State sovereignty is for this purpose built via socio-cultural homogenisation, socio-economic standardisation and socio-political centralisation (Bufon 2004). National borders therefore also become the borders of exclusive cultural and economic systems, thus simultaneously accelerating internal convergence and external divergence, increasing the social distance between "us" and "others" as well as the potential and actual conflict between states and nations, between dominant social groups and minorities. The adaptation of socio-cultural spaces to socio-political ones and vice versa, the identification of "*demos*" and "*ethnos*", the tendency for ethnocentric and nationalistic domination and assimilation, segregation and exclusion of "aliens" and therefore obviously the "inferior" from social life; these are events that pushed the European continent in quite a short period in two catastrophic wars, and which got their final and most clearest form through the "invention" of concentration camps and ethnic "cleansing".

The main characteristic of post-war European integration processes, which in many aspects strived to represent an alternative model to state nationalistic exclusivism, is that they firstly, and not without problems, started to expand in democratically fairly stable western European countries. Certainly, these processes were also, or mostly, the reflection of wider geopolitical situations and the need for post-war restoration of the political and socio-economic order (Bufon 2006a). However, we should not neglect the fact that in the 1970s, the era of traditional industrialisation characterised by non-flexible regulation as well as capital and work concentration in state centres, in some way ended in western European countries. This also ended the depopulation of peripheral or marginalised areas, which therefore gained new development opportunities, and also the possibility for a "revival" of cultural and mostly ethno-linguistic specifics which seemed to have been completely "eliminated" by state assimilation or homogenisation pressure. This regional "awakening" then in turn produced the search for new balances between state centres and peripheral areas as well as between centripetal and centrifugal societal movements that many

times resulted in conflicts, but nevertheless eventually led to the transformation of the previous centralised unitary (national) states into more regionalised political and territorial formations and the transfer of many competences to the local or regional levels.

The social and cultural organisation and communication in the developed part of Europe became quite complex at the end of the 20th century, not only *within* individual national systems, but also *between* national systems, since the deepening of the European integration also contributed to transform the classical forms of state sovereignty and the transfer of an increasing part of state powers and policies to a higher, communitarian level. The uniform traditional state system founded on the *culture-politics-economy* triad and its exclusive management thus changed significantly: *cultural space* partially moved from the state level to the local or regional level, and at the same time, mostly due to greater mobility and the development of electronic forms of communication, assumed various new elements at a global level; the *economic space* moved from the state level to the macro-regional and global level, "detaching" itself from state supervision and governance; the *political space* tries to adapt to these changes and moves in some kind of continuum between decentralisation (local) and internationalisation (global), although its primary attachment is to the state level, due to which the EU emerged and developed in greater conformity with confederal than with the federal socio-political model.

2. The “dilemma” of the European social space: between integration and globalisation, territory and identity

An additional problem of the European continent was that up until the sudden decay of the eastern communist "block" it had remained divided in two strictly separate parts that barely communicated with each other. After 1990, we witnessed two simultaneous and contradictory processes. The *first* offers Europe unimagined possibilities of opening to democratic ideas, spreads Western European, social-democratic version of capitalism to the East, increasing thus its market area. This development has caused deep transformations of the socio-political and socio-economic organisation in the former Eastern European countries, enabling them to entry into the "club of the developed", represented by the EU, and into the “Western geopolitical and security sphere”, represented by the NATO (Bufon 2001). The fall of expressively centralistically managed and closed state systems in the East brought new development opportunities, in particular to their border areas, which are now opening to cross-border communication and cooperation (Bufon 2011). Many of these previously marginalised border areas, especially those that connect the two parts of Europe that used to be separated, are developing into new nodal centres for transport and trade

exchange, and prove how geography and space are periodically re-created and re-interpreted.

The *second* process does not lead to social convergence, but rather in the opposite direction. This is a conservative reaction to "opening" and international connection, which strives to preserve and protect the "national" character of states before the "invasion" of everything foreign and different, and most allegedly "non-autochthonous", and often meets and fights with the tendency for the equality of the socially and culturally marginalised. This process causes various social and inter-ethnic tensions, aggravates free movement of people, ideas and goods, and it also reflects the way ethnicity is used for constructing various "policies", which most frequently demagogically and instrumentally "defend" the general European civilisation and individual national integrity (Armstrong and Anderson 2007). It is no coincidence that such "policies" usually occur and gain support in economic crises and that they refer to neo-fascist nationalist ideological schemes.

Both processes express the changing political, economic and social relations in the European area, provided by integration and globalisation trends. But these processes have also a quite distinctive impact on the cultural relations. One of the main cultural components of these trends is a very implicit predomination of English language as the primary language of economic and other intercultural communication, and also the increasingly distinctive predomination of global cultural models and communication systems (Williams 1997). It had seemed until 2004 that the EU was able to somehow "manage" its cultural and linguistic diversity, support equality and equal representation of its "official" languages and with appropriate programmes and policies develop other "lesser used languages". After the major EU enlargement, when the number of member states increased from 15 to 27 and the number of official languages from 12 to 23, it seems that the need for a joint communicational and linguistic instrument, which sets alongside the "real" English a new "Esperanto-like" European version, is becoming more and more necessary. But in this perspective, the socio-cultural implementation of the European paradigm of "unity in diversity" is becoming increasingly remote, highlighted by the reduction of total grants for preserving and promoting lesser used minority languages, which was previously quite successfully managed by the EBLUL (European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages).

Globalisation thus also impacts cultural patterns, the ways of thinking and living. As a kind of constant interactive process, it tends to eliminate everything special, unique and traditional or to reconstruct this in the sense of the local version of generally spread and adopted patterns (Held et al. 1999). In this sense, we shall emphasise the effects of deterritorisation of society and culture, which are mostly pointed out by cultural conservatives and activists for the protection of ethnic peculiarities. Although tertiarisation and globalisation of social relations may provide to previously peripheral and minority-inhabited areas new

development opportunities on the economic level, as in the case of Alpine regions which today show an above average gross domestic product per capita, it is also true that the "opening" of such formerly closed socio-cultural and socio-economic "mini-systems" brings new challenges and new potential threats. In the past, the process of industrialisation unilaterally "forced" minority communities to modernisation and deprived the non-dominant cultural areas of their original development instruments, thus assimilating them into the dominant social and economic pattern. However, the socio-spatial selectivity and hierarchy, typical of industrial societies, "cut" the most peripheral areas from the "modern" development flows and marginalised them, thus transforming the latter into safe "refuges" for some minority cultural communities. But a post-modern non-hierarchical tertialised socio-spatial organisation, is now re-introducing even the most marginal areas into a new, open social and economic system, challenging the so-far preserved minority identity. The reduction of social distance between dominant and minority groups increases social and spatial mobility and creates wider ethnically and linguistically mixed structures, which radically change both the traditional concepts of identity and affiliation, and the traditional territorial concepts of minority protection (Bufon 2003, 2010).

If, in the period of classic nationalism, autochthonous national minorities were perceived as some kind of a "foreign matter" or "fifth column" which needed to be physically removed or in any other way "disabled" (assimilated), the same communities were comprehended in the post-war "modern" time as a potential conflict factor in developing the increasing and more stable inter-state cooperation. Instead of "internal" homogenisation measures, diplomacy and international law were emphasised since they tried to award special status and, possibly, bilateral recognition to these communities. In the contemporary, "post-modern" period, there is a trend within the EU of eliminating internal border barriers and therefore to create conditions for social re-integration of previously partitioned social and spatial regions. In such a situation, both ethnic and political borders are losing their once distinctive social and territorial delimitation function. They can hardly still define the actual minority "limits" or provide obstacles to (re)integration policies in border and ethnically mixed areas that assume a character of "contact" rather than of "division". This new situation somehow *de facto* eliminates the "special" and separate status of minorities, and they therefore meet completely new challenges of social and cultural "mediation" and "connection" within an increasingly integrated society, both *within* and *between* individual EU members. Thus minority protection policies should be now embedded in wider social and spatial integration policies and can no longer be based just on the wording and practice of "ethnic identification" and "territorial determination". Yet, whilst territoriality seems to be less important in the creation of an open, post-modern society, it still plays a key role in the process of state decentralisation and autonomy recognition to minority groups.

In fact, social integration and devolution, as can be enforced in still prevalently nationally organised state systems, only affects European autochthonous territorial minorities and not the "new" minorities or immigrant communities that were not able to develop appropriate forms of social control over their settlement area and thus create their own distinctive territory.

We may say that spatial determination or territoriality, which most frequently refers to the relation of both individuals and social groups to space, enables them to "materialise" their cultural and social "horizon", thus building a system of different layers of socio-spatial "homeliness" and "foreignness" (Bufon 1999). Due to this feature, human territoriality is actually the reflection of collective identity and learned values; these, after many years of living in a certain environment, are transferred in the space and contribute to transform it in a particular "cultural landscape". Again, the features of cultural landscape, as a special *genius loci*, can be transferred or assimilated by people, who decide to settle there, thus assuming the traditional local or regional culture and living habits. Diversity, represented by various European cultural landscapes, can be now perceived at the same time as a mythicised original "small homeland", to which the nostalgic antimodernists refer, or a trendy "boutique niche", where postmodernists run to escape the monotony of the "globalised village". *Place* and locality therefore refers to specificity, cultural diversity and *ethnos*, whilst *space* is associated to functionality, community and *demos*, which assumes the existence of two completely different philosophies or systems of social and spatial perception and projection (Casey 1997).

Both aspects are noticeable in discussions regarding the nature and political organisation of the EU, in accordance with which both critics and supporters dealt with its apparent remoteness from both fundamental categories of social convergence: *ethnos* as the space of identity and the cultural community, and *demos* as the space of planning and the political community. Due to this "democratic deficit", the EU remains mostly a bureaucratic and "technical" body and has weak connections with the European population. Although the European institutions in the past did try to overcome this objective problem by enforcing the policy of the so called "subsidiarity", member states did not show much interest in re-shaping themselves into simple administration sub-units of a wider polity. The debate about the European political organisation is therefore still fairly free moving between the poles of "liberalism" and "communitarianism" (Entrikin 2003). The first emphasises rational planning and modernisation, the latter emphasises social attachment and solidarity. On one hand we get a spatial economy and tendency to eliminate all obstacles to free movement and flow of capital, services, goods and people, which is evident from various European Commission documents, which should result in a common European "citizenship" with a modifying and flexible identity and weak attachment to original areas and regional cultures. On the other hand, we get a culturally pluralist model that considers ethnic, regional and national communities as the primary

environment of individual and group affiliation, and political identity. In this perspective, Europe is an organisation of various areas and territories that relate to special original cultures of different dimensions, extending from local communities to nations (Smith 1995). Therefore, the goal of a united and integrated Europe, in this vision, is secondary to the goal of ethnic, regional and national autonomy or is linear to this goal. The result of this process is a confederal joint future or the formation of the so-called "Europe of Nations" that subordinates state affiliation to cultural as well as ethnic-linguistic affiliation.

The differences between both social and spatial concepts become even more evident in the relation to borders. The "market" or liberal model favours the abolition of internal borders and transfers all functions of securing the internal common market to the external EU borders, while in the culturally pluralistic model the territories of "homeliness" and "foreignness", "inclusion" and "exclusion" remain quite clear, since they are the expression of a strong cultural affiliation to the original environment. Once again we have to cope with the dilemma caused by the relation between *ethnos* and *demos*: borders help create and maintain diversity on one hand and common affiliation on the other hand; however, their abolition is perceived by many as a threat to cultural diversity, as the many European cultural regions would be "levelled" in a unified, monotone social area with deterritorialised common citizenry. Many researchers and planners see the solution to this dilemma in enforcing *regions* as areas, where cultural, social and functional spaces, which are closest to people, overlap and intertwine.

3. Regions, minorities and border areas: where convergence and divergence meet

Modern forms of regionalisation of social life are multi-layered and complex. The process of European integration undoubtedly creates the basis for the emergence of a common transnational functional area or some kind of an operative macro-region, which deals with other comparable socio-economic systems in the globalised economic environment. To a certain extent, one can claim that processes of social and economic standardisation which evolve within the frame of the European macro-region, i.e. the EU, are similar to processes that were experienced by individual European countries during their modernisation period, when individual regional units had to be "glued" into a single national "body". The consequence of this process was that internal differences among regions or previously separate territories and societies within the state system were reduced, whilst differences between individual state systems were increased, thus somewhat turning upside down the traditional European image, where the fundamental diversity was mostly related to local or regional levels.

As a result of globalisation, *socio-economic* processes move away from the state level to reach global and macro-regional scales, while *socio-cultural* processes, instead, are moving back to the regional level. In this context, the simple "projection" of the classic nationalist paradigm to the European level, in the sense of creating a supra-state common European identity and "civic" affiliation (Calhoun 2003), seems completely unreal and non-realizable, especially because the European central apparatuses by far do not dispose of such strong instruments of socio-cultural homogenisation that were available to nation-states. It is also no coincidence that the very area of culture and language is perhaps the last area that EU member states would be prepared to transpose to the communitarian decision-making level, and is thus still under their exclusive and autonomous control. As classic state-centred management of social life loses power, mostly due to functional integration processes within the EU, the potential common "supranationalism" on the EU level, which should be enforced by increasing internal cohesion and differentiation to the "external" world, also seems to be unable to replace alone the traditional European territoriality. Thus the regional dimension is by many researchers and politicians considered as a possible alternative (Paasi 2002). On that level, the relations of socio-cultural affiliation and identity, which are immanent to humans when expressing their own territoriality, could evolve in the easiest way as they lean on traditional historical and functional forms of social and spatial organisation. On the other hand, states are expected to perform an increasingly important function as political mediators between the local or regional level of social life, and the wider socio-economic system which is operating on the macro-regional and global levels.

As Keating pointed out in one of his works (Keating 1996), new forms of regionalism and regions are the result of the decay and new composition of territorial systems or systems of social life. This process is constantly evolving upon the continuum between the local and global due to various effects, caused by enforcing new socio-economic paradigms in the political organisation of space. Keating believes that regions are not some "natural" units, but social "constructs" which in a certain conditions, as nation-states have done in the modern period, manage to connect *cultural*, *political* and *economic* social components into a rational whole. In this sense, regional space can be simultaneously a cultural landscape, a functional area and a political territory. He also emphasises the fact that Europe currently does not have a developed system of regional social and political management, and therefore regions in most situations remain on the level of "imaginary" communities, which in the "real" world have difficulties to compete not only with state central apparatuses that hold the levers of power, but also with large cities, which manage, with their specific "weight" and dynamics, to "curve" the regional and wider European social space, and thus to transform the traditional or assumed regional structure to which regionalists like to refer.

Regardless of this, it is also true that the European integration process significantly changed the so-called *Westphalian system*, which was in many of its neglected or marginal parts understood as the "organisation of the world into territorially exclusive, sovereign nations, each having its own internal monopoly of legitimised violence" (Caporaso 1996, p. 34). Although this "ideal" system was nowhere completely enforced in practice, it still impacts the political thinking of the new millennium, particularly in Europe, where this system emerged and then profoundly took roots in the model of nation-states. Nevertheless, Europe is in the same time, possibly due to past negative effects that this system produced in the social and political life, the area where some more determined steps were made in the direction of its transformation with the introduction of innovative forms of interstate cooperation and collaboration. Because the European space and the EU face many other additional problems, caused by the relation between regionalisation and globalisation, the transformation of the Westphalian system in Europe is necessarily focused on the development of a quite complex multi-level management of its social and political space. This is especially evident in European border areas and cross-border regions, which are at the same time marginal areas within the frame of *individual state systems*, but connecting and "central" areas within the frame of a wider *EU integrated system* (Blatter 2003). A characteristic of these areas is that they are usually defined by a high rate of socio-economic and socio-cultural cross-border connection and co-dependence, by which they managed to overcome the state-centric social marginalisation and achieve a higher level of economic development, in many cases exceeding the state average. Cross-border cooperation was not only useful in the sense of overcoming obstacles for the development of socio-economic potentials of individual border regions, but also in overcoming the problem of "differentness" and socio-cultural diversity in the EU, since European *contact areas*, as we can define areas of contact between various social, political and cultural spaces, are more and more established as real integration "models" (Bufon 2014).

European contact areas are by their nature multilingual and multicultural, although, on one hand, the state "mononational" politics in the recent past tried to suppress and eliminate this fundamental feature on one hand, and on the other hand they tried to instrumentally exploit it for their own "irredentist" tendencies or attempts to annex neighbouring territories. As internal political borders in the EU lost their classic partition function, policies of interstate *divergence* are making way for policies of interstate *convergence*, although the latter would eventually need more appropriate institutional support in both EU and individual states programmes. In fact, the most efficient programmes of concrete interstate convergence within the EU, i.e. those that directly impact the ability to connect people and local communities, are *Interreg* and the *Schengen Area*. But both are rather "side effects" of individual states interests for redistribution of the EU development funds on the one hand, and the need for ensuring joint security and

police standards on the other hand. Actual (re)integration processes within European contact areas are therefore enforced quite spontaneously and on a fairly unorganised basis and they succeed mostly due to the "management" of common functional and cultural spaces between local communities and regional administrations.

Nevertheless, these new developments are providing new possibilities and opportunities to numerous European national and by definition "border" minorities, which can now be seen as "actors" of integration processes on the local and regional level, thanks to their new role in enhancing cross-border connection and intercultural dialogue. If it is true on one hand that the majority or dominant groups, regardless of the political relations that they have with minority groups, cannot deprive them of this potential integration role, it is on the other hand also true that the possibility of actual implementation of this role still strongly depends on the minorities' institutional and wider social recognition and promotion. Researches, mostly conducted by political geographers in Central European and other border areas (for a discussion on the changing role of minorities and border communities in strengthening cross-border contacts, see, in particular: Bufon 2006b, 2013), have shown that the intensity of cross-border cooperation, as well as the prospective of cross-border (re)integration, mostly depend on three elements: (1) the level of social urbanisation on both sides of the border; (2) the level of cultural homogeneity, which is significantly enhanced by the existence of national minorities on both sides of the border, and (3) the existence of past consolidated territorial units that formed common functional social areas. From this aspect, the "spontaneous" tendency for cross-border cooperation can be understood as an attempt of border populations to "re-establish" the regional structure that was "cut" by past political partitions and border changes into separate gravitational, economic, social and "national" cultural areas.

4. Minorities and border communities as new regional (re)integration "agents"

These new forms of cross-border regionalism are, in our opinion, especially important in Central Europe, where they do not only enable local stimulation of socio-economic integration and the preservation of cultural diversity along the development of inter-ethnic coexistence and cooperation, but also the macro-regional reconstruction of what once was a bipolarised divided continent (Bufon et al. 2014). It is also typical for Central European border landscapes, where political partition in general developed later than in Western Europe, that numerous national minorities and cross-border multicultural regional communities are represented there. This first emerged due to border changes after WWI and WWII, when international and state policies strived to adjust state areas to

cultural or ethno-linguistic areas and vice versa, the latter were the expression of preliminary traditional co-habitation of various ethno-linguistic communities in wider functional and political areas. This situation caused some paradox tendencies in the post-war separation and modern integration processes (Bufon 2006b):

- border areas and social environments that have in recent past experienced major trauma due to the separation of stable administrative and economic units, have now greater potential possibilities to develop into an (re)integrated cross-border region;

- due to possible still open political issues emerging from pre- and post-war events, functional socio-economic and socio-cultural local cross-border cooperation in such border areas is more quickly and easily enforced than institutional socio-political cross-border collaboration;

- peripheral and less urbanised contact areas which in the past maintained "banal co-existence" relations to their neighbours while keeping modest mutual contacts, are now those which are on one hand mostly interested in increasing institutional cross-border collaboration in order to attract additional socio-economic development opportunities to the area, whilst on the other hand increased socio-cultural contacts with neighbouring areas, which are a necessary outcome of these processes, cause greatest resistance.

However, European integration processes, which are implemented on a local or regional level with cross-border cooperation and enhanced intercultural dialogue, urgently need an appropriate communication instrument. This is why the language-related problems are also becoming very important in such conditions. Language is undoubtedly the fundamental identification element of ethnic and national diversity, the typology and intensity of linguistic practice show the scope and quality features of various cultural areas, the success of linguistic inter-generation transfer, its vitality and the level of linguistic social attraction or its social status (Williams 2013). Regardless of this fact, language and linguistic practice are not the final and only criterion of ethnic and national identity. Due to subjective choices or objective external circumstances, the relation of individuals and individual ethnic communities to their original languages is changing in time and space. Migrations and social and political events have quite substantially changed the original European language map: in the first phase that was connected with the process of forming modern territorial states and industrialisation, numerous traditional multilingual and multicultural social environments were forced to take over monolingual and monocultural characteristics, which were imposed by the dominant community; today, this community is trying to reactivate in these environments multilingual and monocultural practices. Yet, the conditions have changed substantially: the social distance between autochthonous European ethno-linguistic groups has decreased, social mobility and external cultural and language interference have increased, thus leading to a new, variable identity, which can be fairly indepen-

dent from the actual linguistic knowledge and practice. We should also add global cultural impacts and the effects of immigration of non-autochthonous and non-European social groups that set completely new challenges to the European cultural space (Castles and Miller 2003).

These processes and transformations of the European cultural area put the traditional relation between *ethnos* and *demos* or the socio-cultural and socio-political areas in a new light, i.e. as was established during the formation of modern territorial states. European nationalism enabled a fair part of the dominant ethno-linguistic groups to form their own nation-states, while elsewhere in the world the share of such state organisation is much smaller. The "special" relation between *nation* and *state* in Europe also reflects the fact that the same name is used for both phenomena in major European languages and that, consequently, in major European countries it is difficult to separate between state or civic and national or ethno-linguistic affiliation. Yet, the decentralisation of state administration, which evolved in Western Europe simultaneously with regional mobilisation in the 1970s and 1980s, contributed to the fact that the European political and cultural space along "nation" and "state" also discovered the existence of minority regional communities or the so called "nations without a state", and permitted the adoption of certain measures in favour of the so called "lesser used languages". After the collapse of multinational states in Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe, when previous national republics became independent states, the European diversity is even more pronounced. Currently, there are 31 European nations who managed to gain their own states, but there is almost the same number (29) of regional ethno-linguistic groups who did not achieve yet this political "goal" and are now pressing for their own affirmation, autonomy and even independence with various levels of success. Around 25 different national minorities can also be added to regional minorities and each of those minorities are on average located in two to three different countries (Bufon 2004). All these minorities together could, in respect to their demographic dimension, make a country of the size of France. What is even more important, the European continent is changing from the "battlefield" of some big nations and states into a cultural and linguistic "mosaic", within which cultural and social contact areas are more a rule than an exception.

In such conditions, the ethnic "revival" of various European minorities is not always evolving simultaneously with the linguistic "rebirth" of minority languages as can be found in Celtic communities in Ireland and Great Britain. That means that the "objective" original ethnic identity, as far as it can still be established in today's increasingly integrated social spaces, does not coincide with the subjective identity, which is variable and also multilayered (for a discussion on this issue, regarding, for instance, the Slovene minority in Italy, see: Bufon 2003, 2010). The institutionalisation of minority rights of course contributes to a greater territorialisation of minority communities, since it mostly relies on historical minority settlement territory, where greater "overlapping" of

the objective and subjective affiliation of the local population could be expected and detected, and where certain collective rights are recognised to this population by state legislation, creating thus an institutionally determined "minority territory". On the other hand, such an approach is criticised by "civic modernists" who see the danger of creating separate "ethnic cages" and thus *ethnos* dominating *demos* in the organisation of social and political life, or even a further "balkanisation" prospective for the European political map. Whilst "civic modernists" see the danger of the collapse of civic equality and solidarity in enforcing minority collective rights in individual parts of the national territory, "minority modernists" warn about the fact that, due to increased spatial and social mobility, the historical minority settlement territories do not coincide with the areas within which they are currently settled and therefore with their current functional space. In their opinion, minority members are now much more integrated in the wider social environment, due to which classic forms of separate minority institutional and territorial protection represent a potential danger of their "ghettoisation" into some sort of "Indian reserves", thus producing a possible further marginalisation of these communities and their degradation to the level of folklore communities (Bufon 2010).

Instead of the traditional, "partitioning" approach, many researchers of minority revitalisation policies advocate a new, "integrative" approach that stimulates general developmental possibilities on the social, demographic and cultural area, as well as the development of intercultural dialogue, ethnic coexistence and multilingual practice on European contact areas. The modern revitalisation programmes of minority cultures are at the same time revitalisation programmes for peripheral or marginalised environments, within the scope of which these cultures exist, meaning that the socio-cultural situation in minority or ethnically mixed environments are only improved simultaneously with the socio-economic and socio-political situation, as was proven by best practice cases in Catalonia or Wales (Williams 2013). In the case of national border minorities, these general development possibilities of regional minorities are also accompanied by the additional role of "integrators" of neighbouring functional and cultural areas. In both cases development potentials of border and ethnically mixed areas, to which minorities and multicultural local communities could contribute, must be considered in a wider context of cross-border cooperation and regional (re)integration. This means that traditional top-down development policies, whether they originate from state or European centres of power, are less successful and appropriate for a comprehensive resolution and guidance of such complex social realities, if they are not embedded in a specific regional dimension. Also in this aspect, the regional level seems to be increasingly relevant and decisive for resolving modern relations between centrifugal and centripetal social tendencies or for managing simultaneous processes of social and spatial convergence and divergence.

5. Conclusion

Although still not in a sufficient and optimal form, the issue of "different" and "diverse" has gained importance in the modern European discourse and modern European agenda. The new European paradigm "unity in diversity" actually means a deep move and deviation from classic European state-based nationalism, which was undoubtedly a major factor for the outbreak of both world wars, due to which the European continent eventually lost its central role in the world political, economic and social "architecture". The development of integration processes at the decay of bipolar world regulation now puts the European area and also European politics, economy and culture to the forefront. It would be wrong to interpret and develop European connections only as a "banal" answer to the need for post-war restoration firstly, and later as just a reaction to the challenges of world economic globalisation. European integration is not and cannot be only a matter of the socio-economic sphere, but must, in a more comprehensive and innovative way, also or mostly comprise the socio-political and socio-cultural sphere. Perhaps for the first time in history, all three fundamental areas of social life are being connected in modern Europe in such way that this process would not only follow the former pattern of internal centralisation and homogenisation. This new European developmental model could prove that the world socio-economic globalisation and macro-regional socio-political integration not necessarily lead to a socio-cultural "melting pot" and the Americanisation of lifestyle.

In our opinion, these new developmental possibilities and this new social paradigm will have to be verified and applied at first in the numerous European contact areas. This process would not so much involve the "management" of interstate areas in the sense of organising and governing functional economic, social and administrative units and eliminating internal borders and obstacles for cross-border and other movement of people, goods, services and capital, but it would more involve the "management" of potential conflicts and coexistence forms between various nations, ethnical and language groups, moving on a scale between tradition and modernity, and between *ethnos* and *demos*. Overcoming these last and most persistent "borders" means that the European society will have to ultimately also overcome the traditional ethnocentric comprehension of social areas and social processes, as well as the nationalist exclusivism towards "others" and "different" (Bufon 2006a).

The European coexistence perspective helps us understand that we do not only meet various national or state identities within the EU framework and on relatively short distances, but also numerous ethnic and regional identities and various language practices (Williams 2013). We also increasingly discover and accept the fact that different identities and language practices exist in the same administrative and social environment or that the borders between various socio-

-cultural areas are not linear and determined, but zonal and movable, thus creating not only a complex of differently partitioned multicultural and functional "contact areas", but also providing potential bases for both conflict and harmony. In these areas, people constantly "cross" various cultural borders, and therefore cultural exchange is something completely common and usual in these environments. This constant "agitation" on the margins of cultural landscapes, which enables their mutual growth and which seemed so dangerous and unwanted to the exclusive nationalist concept, does not mean that the substantial features of European cultural areas can radically change in time. The latter remain surprisingly stable and even strengthened or "reawakened" by the withdrawal of the state homogenisation pressure. The traditional local or regional territorial frameworks are also enforced, since the decentralisation of the state administration system gives them functional value and they manage to "infuse" their cultural specifics to those immigrants who want to better and more profoundly integrate in their new living environment.

By discovering modern forms of social affiliation and identification or local spatial behaviour of social groups, we again return to "borders" and "territoriality". These are social aspects that are quite close to local communities and which social scientists and political economists rediscovered in the 1970s when researching the relations between centres and peripheries in Europe. Studying the "mechanisms of resistance" in peripheral areas and regionalism, we also "re-discovered" the local and regional communities that were almost completely "wrote off" and "eliminated" by centralistic policies and modernism with the industrial paradigm at the forefront of social life. It would be wrong to attribute these communities only the role of preservers of their own, "primordial" autochthonous land and original cultural landscape, since they are now acquiring a new role in connecting border areas and establishing or re-creating cross-border and inter-cultural coexistence and integration practices, especially within historical regions and former multicultural functional regions (Bufon 2014).

To conclude, we could say that today Europe, the homeland of nationalism and the part of the world where the relation between the territorial and cultural identity is most dynamic and potentially conflicted, is more and more intensively dealing with the question, which is not new but which the Europeans want to resolve in a completely innovative way for the first time in their history, i.e. how to merge different and diverse interests and collectively "manage" them within the scope of a single, although multi-layered social system. The answer is far from simple and opens, as we saw, various contradictory processes and developmental scenarios. The relation between the potentials of democratic "opening" and "inclusion" and cultural "closing" and "separation", between the features of "European" and "non-European", between "globality", "nationality" and "locality", but also between "institutional" and "functional" as well as between the policies and practices "from above" and those "from below" will have to be completely redefined (Bufon 2001, 2006a). The fundamental question, which the

modern Europe faces and on which the possibilities for the development of not only inter-cultural dialogue but also of integration processes on our continent depend, is how will the relation between social and spatial convergence and divergence impact the co-existence and the co-dependence between European socio-cultural and socio-political areas and consequently the European “unity in diversity” paradigm. In this sense, new and important tasks in revealing fundamental socio-spatial processes on numerous “contact areas” and in guiding (re)integration policies might be foreseen for political geography.

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PLANOWANIE SPOŁECZNE W EUROPEJSKICH OBSZARACH STYKOWYCH: GEOGRAFIA POLITYCZNA MIEJSCA

Streszczenie

W artykule podjęto kwestię planowania społecznej i przestrzennej integracji w tak zwanych obszarach stykowych, gdzie różne jednostki polityczne i kulturowe spotykają się i wzajemnie na siebie oddziałują. Badania takich obszarów obejmują zarówno trwałe i immanentne dla ludzkości formy terytorialności oraz narastające problemy funkcjonalnej, społecznej, gospodarczej i przestrzennej (re)integracji. Oba trendy prowadzą do wielopoziomowych i często sprzecznych związków pomiędzy różnymi terytoriami i granicami, które wylaniają się z równoległe postępujących procesów konwergencji i dywergencji społecznej i przestrzennej. Z tego powodu, zarówno teoria, jak i praktyka geografii politycznej stają w obliczu zmian w polityce integracji i/lub separacji. W związku z tym społeczne i przestrzenne planowanie w europejskich regionach wielokulturowych i pogranicznych wydaje się być trudną, żeby nie powiedzieć, sztywną pracą. Pomimo to planowanie społeczne jest kluczowe dla stworzenia bardziej stabilnych możliwości, zarówno współistnienia, jak i rozwoju.

Artykuł zawiera przegląd rozważań autora o polityczno-geograficznych przemianach i zagadnieniach związanych z europejskimi obszarami kontaktowymi w okresach przednowoczesnym, współczesnym i postmodernistycznym, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem mniejszości i współpracy transgranicznej. Autor sugeruje, aby promować podejście integracyjne i wielopoziomowe, które mogłyby w jakiś sposób zastąpić klasyczne „narodowe” polityki w odniesieniu do rozwoju obszarów przygranicznych i ochrony mniejszości.

Słowa kluczowe: *planowanie przestrzenne, integracja przestrzenna, obszary stykowe*

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