

THE KADIBOGAZ GATHERING IN THE BALKAN RANGE  
(STARA PLANINA) –  
MODEL OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

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On the Stara planina (Balkan range), on the boundary line between Serbia and Bulgaria, in particular in the settlements Novo Korito (Serbia) and Salaš (Bulgaria), tourist event Gathering on Kadibogaz (Sabor na Kadibogazu) takes place since 2001, in the second half of July. The event itself is organized by municipalities Knjaževac (Serbia) and Belogradčik (Bulgaria). This event began in 2001 with a common goal – the official opening of the border crossing at this location. Opening of the crossing would contribute to improvement of the economies of Serbia and Bulgaria, especially because mentioned municipalities on both sides are among the poorest municipalities in the region. In addition to the official meetings of the representatives of municipalities, cultural and artistic events and entertainment shows were organized, along with popular folk groups, sports competitions and preparation of gastronomic specialties including Serbian and Bulgarian traditional cuisine. This event, which has the character of a economic and ethnographic event represent a model of a joint tourist offer of Serbia and Bulgaria in the area of Stara (Balkan) mountain, which is declared for the international nature park and Bilateral Peace Park, that have a potential to become an important tourist destination in Southeastern Europe.

**Keywords:** tourism, cross-border cooperation, events, Stara mountain (Balkan range), gathering, Kadyboaz, Serbia, Bulgaria.

СЪБОРЪТ НА КАДИБОГАЗ В СТАРА ПЛАНИНА  
(БАЛКАН) – МОДЕЛ НА ТРАНСГРАНИЧНО СЪТРУДНИЧЕСТВО

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**Абстракт:** От м. юли 2001 г. на границата между Сърбия и България, точно между старопланинските селища Ново корито (Сърбия) и Салаш (Бъл-

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гария), се провежда събор, наречен Събора на Карабогаз. Събитието е организирано от общините Княжевац (Сърбия) и Белоградчик (България) с обща цел – официално откриване на граничния пункт там. Съборът, който има характер на икономическо и етнографско събитие, представляват модел на съвместна туристическа оферта на Сърбия и България в тази част на Стара планина, която е обявена за международен природен парк и има потенциал да се превърне във важна туристическа дестинация в Югоизточна Европа. Идеята е подобряване на икономиките в тези две общини, смятани за най-бедните в региона. В допълнение към официалните срещи на представителите на общините, се организират културни и развлекателни събития, както спортни, така и кулинарни състезания от българската и сръбската кухня и др.

**Ключови думи:** туризъм, трансгранично сътрудничество, събития, Стара планина (Балкан), събор, Кадибоаз, Сърбия, България

## INTRODUCTION

International boundaries have traditionally been defined and demarcated for the purpose of constructing barriers to human interaction and mobilities including the flow of people, goods, services, and ideas between countries. A cross border region is broadly defined as an area consisting of all adjacent territories belonging to different nations, regardless of differences in terms of size, geographic conditions, history, culture and socio-economic conditions, whose economic and social life is directly and significantly affected by proximity to an international boundary (Hansen 1981; Lundquist, Tripp, 2009, Weidenfeld, 2013). Since the middle of the 20th century cross border regional cooperation has been established in the form of supranational alliances, aimed at decreasing the political barriers created by boundaries primarily in trade terms but also in other areas, such as education, human welfare, migration, environmental measures, economic development and tourism (Timothy, Teye, 2004, Weidenfeld, 2013). This research mirrors the fact that the increasing border permeability and increased frequency of interregional cooperation in the area of the European Union (EU), are manifesting themselves more and more obviously in the form of common tourism development strategies and in the building of cross-border tourism destinations (Prokkola 2008, Bjeljic et al, 2014). Regionalism also creates new avenues for Serbia to co-operate with neighbouring countries in joint tourism projects, and this in turn helps to nurture political goodwill and strategic links that might prove useful for future alliances.

By the development of national state borders, during the long history, such borders were considered for barriers to human interactivity. With definition of state borders, some borderline territories had peripheral and marginal position, which resulted in unbalanced use, development and management of common resources with neighbouring countries. With expansion of the idea of Europeanization, diminishing of borders and change in geopolitics, interstate borders are no longer considered as a barrier, but as a possibility for cooperation of borderline regions, creating better international, regional and good-neighbourly relations.

In the context of the global networking and cooperation, tourist areas close to the borderline take part in tourist unity and cooperation of the similar natural regions

and anthropogenic assets. The meaning of state borders for tourism, tourism development and cooperation in border regions has gained more attention in recent years, however, and several articles have been published on this subject (Leimgruber, 1998; Hartman, 2006; Ioannides et al., 2006; Prokkola 2007). This research mirrors the fact that the increasing border permeability and increased frequency of interregional cooperation in the area of the European Union (EU), are manifesting themselves more and more obviously in the form of common tourism development strategies and in the building of cross-border tourism destinations (Prokkola, 2008). Four identified dimensions shape the potential contribution of tourism related knowledge and mobilities to Cross Border Regional Innovation Systems (CBRIS). The first dimension includes similarities at the regional, sectoral and managerial levels, which influence the nature and levels of knowledge transfer and diffusion of innovation between actors (Weidenfeld, 2013) At the regional level, similarity refers to sharing natural and cultural tourism resources between adjacent border regions (Timothy, 1999), which increase the shared knowledge base between cross border actors and therefore facilitates joint tourism development. International boundaries have traditionally been defined and demarcated for the purpose of constructing barriers to human interaction and mobilities including the flow of people, goods, services, and ideas between countries. As a result, tourist destinations in Cross Border Regions (CBRs) have traditionally developed within the constraints of competing national sovereignty (Timothy, 1999).

The advantage of peripheral regions of a country, in places where tourist attractions and resources exist, is possibility of tourism development. Tourism as an important economic field and a mean of development of crossborder regions, has the biggest potential for establishing the economic growth and improvement of standard of living of population. By tourism development, preservation, improvement and exchange of culture and traditions, crossborder cooperation contributes to the improvement of tourist offer, better management and sustainability of borderline regions.

Borderline region between Serbia and Bulgaria can be seen as a specific geographical space with certain unity of natural resources, economical and cultural bonds between population, common infrastructure, as well as historical, ethnical and cultural tradition (Grčić, 1991). Borderline region between these two republics, is spreading along the natural border, the ridge of Stara (Balkan) mountain, about 150km long, marked with periodically rugged terrain, poor infrastructure and bad political and historical relations (since the times of Serbian-Turkish wars until World Wars I and II), which affected the area and have determined the lack of development possibilities of this borderline area. The population of borderline region of Stara (Balkan) mountain, from both sides, in everyday life are faced with tough challenges, negative demographic, economic, infrastructural and development tendencies. Unfavorable demographic processes are reflected in pronounced low birth rates and high migration levels of population (several municipalities with the largest population decline levels in Serbia, the average annual 6.4 per 1,000 inhabitants, are located in this region). Employment levels are below the average of the labor market (index 0.8), and the average income (per capita) in this area is one of the lowest in Serbia. In the economic production low processing stages of the production are prevailing, with the decline of development role of industry (drop in employment in industry is up to 40% in some municipalities compared to data from 1991)" (Tošić, Živanović, 2013).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FESTIVALS AND GATHERINGS FOR BORDERLINE REGION COOPERATION – CASE OF GATHERING ON KADIBOGAZ (KADYBOAZ)

Festivals and events that are organized by local community are primarily prepared for local (resident) population and are often organized by voluntary efforts. Even though these events are often small in scale and have limited attractiveness for tourism flows, they still can function as a potential tourist resource. In Serbia, such resources are some economic-tourist events dedicated to agricultural products, ethnographic events (folklore and customs) and religious events (church and monastery festivities, gatherings, fairs, etc) (Bjeljac, 2007; Bjeljac, Ćurčić, 2008, 2010).

During the history of Serbian people, religious-folkloristic gatherings (sabori) were the places where, since the middle ages, most important political and spiritual questions and decisions were made. Gatherings were the places from which the demands were made to rulers, where church prelates were chosen, etc (Nenadić, 2011). This custom was kept until the 1830'es and the establishment of the first Constitution law and religious laws in Serbia (Novaković, 2012). Since then, in Serbia, folk gatherings are been organized more often. At the beginning, those folk gatherings were connected to the religious holidays and were organized in churchyards, and later, on town squares and other public places where a large group of people could be gathered together. Gatherings gathered people from nearby towns and surrounding areas, mostly because of the entertainment, meeting the friends and relatives, but also to make some business (selling and buying of cattle, food, crafts, etc), finding a bride, making marital deals, and other everyday life tasks. Over time, especially in the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century the gatherings become more and more the places of keeping of tradition, customs, old crafts, or in other words, places of preservation of folklore and selling places of agricultural and crafting products. They also become the places often visited by tourists, who want to familiarize themselves with some original elements of cultural heritage assets.

In Serbia, in the offer of tourist events of some municipalities, as attractive tourist destinations attracting from several thousands to dozens thousands of visitors, there are about 74 folk gatherings. These gatherings last from one to seven days. For example, Dragačevo Trumpet Gathering (Guča Festival) gather about 600,000 visitors from all around the world, Dužijanca (Subotica) about 100,000, Vuk's Gathering (Tršić) about 80,000 visitors. Some gatherings are listed among the oldest events in Serbia. Such are Dužijanca that is organized since 1911, Slovak's folk festival since 1919, Vuk's gathering since 1933 (Bjeljac, 2010).

### CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION BETWEEN BULGARIA AND SERBIA

Cross-border and regional cooperation is one of the main principles of European integration process, as the networking of the region enables economical integration, stability and gain of trust between neighbouring countries.

At the beginning of December 1996 a Declaration on the proclamation of Bilateral Park of Peace Stara (Balkan) mountain, between Republic of Serbia and Republic of Bulgaria was signed. Among others, presidents of six Bulgarian and

four Serbian communities in the border area signed this document. Since then, a more intensive trans-border cultural collaboration started, that in any case could represent a very interesting segment of tourist offer. Among the signatories of this declaration were representatives of municipalities of Knjazevac (Serbia) and Belogradčik (Bulgaria).

There are numerous financial aid programs for the development of cross-border regions established by European union, such as Phare, ISPA, SAPARD i CARDS, which were followed by new instrument, so called IPA – Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance. IPA was established by European Council Regulation Act 1085/2006 in 2006. This program significantly improved the cooperation between Bulgaria and Serbia, since both countries saw it as possibility to improve economical status, capacity building and enhance the cultural, social and scientific cooperation between local and regional communities on both sides (Majstorovič, Stančkov, Stojanov, 2013). Cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria since 2004 can be seen in the fact that only through CARDS and IPA Programs until 2013 in total 267 projects were finalized. Cards program was undertaken in period 2004 – 2006, within CARDS, 49 projects were established based on Bulgaria-Serbia cooperation program, with total funding of 4 milion euro. Within IPA program Bulgaria – Serbia, in total 118 projects took place (2007 – 2013), with total funding of 21,3 milion euros. From all these projects, significant part was dedicated to the cultural and tourism programs (CARDS – 25,3%, IPA 19,8%) (<http://eudesk.org/>, <http://www.evropa.gov.rs/Cbc/PublicSite/Projects.aspx>)

Projects that are chosen as a representatives of the good practice of tourism promotion and cultural cooperation in the borderline region between Serbia and Bulgaria are: TIDA (Initiative for the development and attraction of the tourism investment), CULTOUR (Promotion of cultural tourism in cross-border region), MOTODESTIN (Management of tourism destinations Sofia – Niš), SPIRIT (Promoting the rural and intercultural tourism of Mt. Stara planina), MASIFF STARA PLANINA (Management, monitoring and promotion of tourism atrations on Mt. Stara planina), INFO-TOURPROD (New information technologies and tourist products for the development of cross-border region), LSOFDST (Share our future sustainable tourism development), CAP (Culture and balneology – sustainable tourist product), Cross-border eco-trail, DRB (Discover the wild parts of the Balcans), etc.

These kind of projects were usually funded under the European Cooperation Territorial Programme which aims at:

- promoting and reinforcing local cultural events, directly linked to local production, by building on synergies between existing local festivals and implementing a set of actions to form & sustain a network of festivals organisers;

- further promoting local/ traditional products. Such a project was recently established in cross-border region Greece – Bulgaria, 2007–2013, the so called LOFTProject (“Local products Festivals and Tourism development in cross-border cooperation Greece-Bulgaria”). In this respect, the project examines ways to protect and promote traditional products and production through a road show travelling in the local festivals of the region and through joint activities including a contest on local festivals and products (Dimitrov, Stoilova, 2014). Such a project has a potential to be developed within Serbia-Bulgaria bordeline as well, as the similarities can be observed.

Festivals of cultural and artistic clubs, artistic colonies and media attention and tourism promotion, that according to our opinion neither in Serbia nor in Bulgaria didn't affirm enough mutual rich and attractive cultural inheritance (Radovanović et al., 2003). The cross border regions hold a large number of annual local fairs/festivals, that are usually associated with local products and traditional production. From these festivals, most are considered as of local scope, and only a few have a potential to attracts visitors from the wider region. Most of them are dedicated on agricultural or farming products, though there are some associated to traditional handicraft (e.g. pottery) and resources (e.g. wood & marble production). All these events, entail usually a dimension of local celebration and consist of a valuable vehicle for reinforcing the branding of local production as well as a pole for tourists attraction. Furthermore, they consist of well-established cultural events as they contribute to the preservation and promotion of the local/traditional production processes/methods and infrastructure (including buildings and equipment used for the production of the relevant products). Therefore, local fairs/ festivals help bridging culture/tradition with economic activities at local/regional level. Equally important, they have a major impact on cross-border collaboration by: reinforcing cross-regional cultural and economic relations, promotion of the cross-border character of local products and further developing cross-border tourism activities and tourists flow. However, until today there is insufficient publicity of the events (typically limited at local level), while the region lacks coordination initiatives that can jointly promote, reinforce and further develop such local fairs/festivals (Dimitrov, Stoilova, 2014).

### GATHERING ON KADIBOGAZ (KADYBOAZ)

As a positive example of dealing with negative trends and a positive model that could implicate from local to the regional level, can be seen through the tourist event "Gathering on Kadibogaz", which is the result of crossborder cooperation and the inter-flow of local communities and domicile populations between Serbia and Bulgaria<sup>3</sup>. The event takes place on the area that represent the state border for 180 years, in the beginning between Serbia and Turkey (until 1833) and later between Serbia and Bulgaria.

Occasional "warming up" of the relations between the states were manifested through the intensive cross-border cooperation in certain periods among borderline municipalities and counties, and other municipal, district or regional administrative, cultural, educational, sports and other institutions. One aspect of the local cross-border cooperation are borderline gatherings, which were organized on certain places along the Bulgarian-Serbian or Yugoslav-Bulgarian border. Those places have always represented a points of international communication. It was mainly focused

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<sup>3</sup> The practice of gatherings on borderline between Former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria was living even before the Second World War. The organization of gatherings on the borderline enabled the population from the both sides to freely move through the border for a day, in order to meet their cousins and to market. The first Gathering on Kadibogaz borderpass was held in 1923, and since then, the population of border region, in the scope of 15km gathered on this gatherings on different places, mostly in sections that was populated with bulgarian ethnic minority (Цветковић, 2014)

on the opening of the border once a year by forming the buffer zone of several hundred meters, in which people of both countries can freely come in, have direct contacts and entertain themselves. Border gatherings are an important characteristic of the Serbian-Bulgarian borderline, and one of them is the Gathering on Kadibogaz (Kadyboaz). The Gathering takes place<sup>4</sup> on weekend following the Orthodox holiday St. Procopius (Velojić, 2011), which is in the third week of July. “The first Gathering was held in 1925 and it represents one of the oldest events in the Balkan area. The event is established with a goal to overcome the historical inheritance of World War I in Balkans and it was maintained, with intermittents, until 1954. On the initiative of the municipalities of Knjaževac and Belogradčik the event was re-established on 21.VII.2001” (Velojić, 2011). Since 2001 until today the Gathering is continuously held every year. The first period, period of the creation and organization of the Gathering, during the 1920’es is linked to the more personal meetings of close friends and relatives in the borderline villages on both sides of the border. During the period between the two World Wars, the Gathering is not continuously maintained due to the bad political relationships between the two republics. After the Second World War, along with the normalization of political relations came the regular maintenance of such border meetings. “In the background of the holding of this event is the personal friendship between Josip Broz Tito and Georgi Dimitrov” (Krstic, 2011). In 1961, this tradition was again broken and 40 years later, in 2001, finally restored. The idea of the organizing of this festival was born even before 1944, when many people from Serbian village Korito went to Bulgarian villages Salaš and Rajanovce to work, and the inhabitants of the Bulgarian town of Belogradchik were searching for better living conditions in Serbian villages along the border.

During the 1970’es and 1980’es, the cross-border cooperation between municipalities Knjaževac and Belogradčik is intensified; in 1990’es the opening of border crossings Kadibogaz is initiated, and finally in 2007 the state presidents Boris Tadić



Fig. 1. Kadibogaz (Kadiboaz) border crossing

<sup>4</sup> Area of Kadibogaz pass (Kadybogaz or, Belogradčički prohod), former bed of river Korito

and Georgi Parvanov signed an agreement on the opening of the crossing points (Krstić, 2011). In 2007 as a sign of friendly relations between two countries a monument is built with the inscription: “This is where according to tradition every year meet Serbs and Bulgarians, as good friends, neighbors and Slavic brothers”.

Gathering is an important traditional event representing a proof of friendship and cordial relations between the peoples of both countries. Gathering is always attended by the high-level delegations of the two municipalities and the states of Serbia and Bulgaria. With their presence and by official addressings they contribute to the event and give a greater meaning to this gathering. Cultural program consists of various exhibitions, tasting of traditional dishes in improvised restaurants and bars, selling of souvenirs made in old crafting traditions, performances by various folklor associations, the exchange of folk customs, different sports competitions, etc. During the Gathering days, only at this point, people can pass the border only with personal identification card and may move around the area extending about 100–200 m from the official border.

## CONCLUSION

Cross-border cooperation is representing an integral model of cooperation, in addition to social, economic and other phenomena, cultural events have become an important element of cooperation. Within this paper the example of a local border relations at the „Gathering on Kadibogaz“ on the border between the two municipalities Knjaževac (Republic of Serbia) and the Belogradchik (Republic of Bulgaria) is presented, which describes tourism as an important field of economic activity. Tourism development through the cross-boarder cooperation covers the productive use of joint tourism resources, harmonization of transport infrastructure, accommodation and common policies about organization of joint cultural events. Gathering on Kadibogaz is a good example of connecting the people, preservation of traditions through an international festival, which can overcome poor political and socio-economic conditions that disturb this area over a long period of time and survive by enthusiastic initiatives of small municipalities. Gathering today is an international gathering, which evolved from local to the regional level, gathering several thousands of visitors from different parts of Serbia and Bulgaria in one place for several days.

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