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Ecoregionalism - Factor Cross-Border Cooperation and Tourism Development

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Abstract

Regionalism at the time of the global economy and integration processes that are conditioned by it, becomes an inevitable factor of sustainable development of countries and wider regions. Ecoregional opportunity bringing together people of different cultures and from different countries around a common interest to improve their economic and social status and maintain their living space and environment in the whole. Recognizing principles of the European Union in this field and analyzed possibilities and consequences are needed for successful application of this model in the Republic of Serbia.

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1. Introduction

European space is characterized by significant experience in regionalization, particularly in member states which are establishing connections in order to achieve their development interests and be linked with each other (horizontal form of regionalization). The expansion of EU has increasingly emphasizes regional connectivity in the form Euro-region countries. Euroregions are primarily formed to enhance the common interests and living standards of the border population. A Euroregion is an interest organization

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of several states on the basis of geographical location, shared resources and potential, historical ties and relations, the state of bilateral relations and bilateral and regional projects.

The objectives of this regionalization are primarily: to improve and harmonize of the economy, increase the attractiveness of the region for investors, promote cultural, educational, scientific and tourist links, and joint environmental programs, etc.

This form of cooperation is strongly supported by the European Union that provides significant financial support for the promotion of cross-border cooperation. This has contributed to recent increases in the number of Euro-region. It can be said that this cooperation has become a part of the European Union pre-accession strategy, which is particularly important for Eastern and Southeastern Europe, as this can be a way of overcoming many differences.

Tourism as an interdisciplinary economic and social activity can connect all the economic factors of a region that is, strengthen cross-border geographical areas. Due to the international dimension and travel destinations are becoming an important factor of national and regional connectivity, which emphasizes the need for a special type of regionalization. With the introduction of standards for sustainable tourism development, which should provide long-term conservation and protection of natural, social and cultural resources as basic elements of existence and development, principles eco-regionalism become an indispensable factor of planning and merging at all places where natural resources are the basis for economic development. This is particularly related to tourism as a highly propulsive branch of industry.

2. Eco-Regionalism

An ecoregion is ecologically and geographically defined region covering a relatively large area of land or water and includes characteristic, geographically separate groups of natural communities and species. The above mentioned characteristics include geology, physiography, vegetation, climate, hydrology, terrestrial and aquatic fauna and soil.

The basic meaning and purpose of ecoregionalization approach is to create a useful framework in spatial terms for comparable assessments of environmental and natural resource management. Ecoregions should be seen as regions that could be used for various purposes established to perform the aggregation of similar terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in their frames.

Ecoregion division of European space is specifically addressed in the EU Directive on Waters, which has established 25 ecoregions, see Fig. 1 (a).

Cover the territory of Serbia and the five ecoregions:

- No. 5 ecoregions: the Western Balkans (Dinarides);
- Ecoregion 6: Western Balkans (Greece);
- No.7 ecoregions: Eastern Balkans;
- Ecoregion No.11: Hungarian Plain;
- No.12 ecoregions: the Black Sea ecoregion (Pontic plain).

In the Fig. 1(b) provides an accurate view of the ecoregion borders of Europe on the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

It may be noted that the territory of Serbia in terms of eco-region "most divided" countries in Europe. This division is extremely disadvantageous, especially it regard to catchments and the Great South Morava River, divided into three ecoregions (ecoregions 5, 7, 11). To be able to establish cooperation with neighboring countries in the area of planning of joint activities for the management of natural resources and environmental protection Serbia adopted a number of obligations (for each ecoregion is making plans necessary quality management of the environment, the formation of a special control unit, etc.). The advantages to be gained from eco-region division are as following:

- Ecoregions incorporate areas inside and outside the country with similar abiotic and biotic factors;

- A holistic concept of integrated natural resources management is promoted;
- Good basis is provided for cooperation between various agencies at the national level and on a broader level with regard to activities relating to international coordination and cooperation in planning and implementing natural resource management and environmental management.



Fig. 1 (a) Ecoregions of Europe; (b) Map of the ecoregions in Serbia [McMahon et al., 2001]

1st Iberian Ecoregion; 2 Pyrenees, 3 Italy, Corsica, Malta, 4th Alps; 5th Western Balkans (Dinarides); 6 Western Balkans; 7 East Balkans; 8th Western highlands; 9th Eastern highlands; 10 Carpathians; 11th Hungarian Plain; 12th The Black Sea ecoregion; 13th Western Plains; 14th Central Plains; 15th Baltics; 16th Eastern Plains; 17th Ireland; 18th United Kingdom; 19th Island; 20th Borealijske plateau; 21st Tundra; 22nd Scandinavia; 23rd Taiga; 24th Caucasus; 25 Caspian Depression

3. Cross-Border Cooperation Ecoregion Of Serbia

Cross-border cooperation is a condition for accession of the Western Balkans to European Union, as it provides an important opportunity for using European funds. Serbia can benefit from cross-border cooperation on the principles of eco-regionalism, as people living along the western border use the same language and the culture of both sides of the border is almost the same. On the other hand, Serbia is bordered by EU members - Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and the candidate countries: Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia.

Cross-border cooperation and the formation of the ecoregions with the territories of neighboring countries in addition to financial support from the European Union, the Republic of Serbia is approaching European standards and principles in the use of natural resources, tourism and environmental protection.

So far Euroregions formed in Serbia and the wider region (hydro region of the Danube and Drina), have not reached a developmental level as the Euro-region in Western Europe, where the regions themselves recognize their interests and unite themselves. Funding for these projects in the Balkans now have to provide the outside. On the other hand, Euroregions in Western Europe occur in specific

operational programs, while in the Western Balkans, the creation of the Euro-region is currently the dominant objective of stabilization of unstable relations between border regions and interstate relations.

The introduction of the notion of ecoregion in the Republic of Serbia would enhance the economic and social networking at the international level and help the region now struggling for its position and attractiveness. This would increase the efficiency of use of existing natural and human resources and create a solid organizational structure, which is necessary for the Republic of Serbia to be able to use Structural Funds before entering the European Union. Development opportunities for the Republic of Serbia provided through Economic Support of the Union intended for countries that are not members, so called pre-accession funds (IPA), the Structural and Cohesion funds to be used upon the receipt is what obligates Serbia and other beneficiary countries to accept and implement all the recommendations and standards related to stability, democracy and organization prevailing in the countries of the Union.

Eco-regionalism unites virtually all the components - the obligations for using these EU funds. By accepting these principles of regionalization, the Republic of Serbia would not only become developmentally closer to EU standards, but it would also significantly improve its system of using and preservation of its most important resources - space and environment.

4. Conclusion

Establishing Euroregions, Europe is gradually leaving behind the principle of regionalization at the level of political and national boundaries, and focusing primarily on economic and sustainable ecological development. This creates a unique space comprising primarily cross-border areas of neighboring states, which often differ in terms of development from the central parts of the country.

The concentration of the Euroregions in the border areas of countries is the dominant phenomenon in the European space and gives Euroregions and transcultural, transnational character.

Eco-regionalism as a model and expand further the interests of users and the limits to naturally-defined geographical areas, thus leading to the development of ecologically sustainable status of the region.

Geographical units, due to natural and raw materials and transport resources, become primary factors of joint planning and development of the user space. Recognizing these advantages, the European Union has established a special program INTERREG (1990) the aim of which is to help establish cross-border regions among EU Member States to form a community without internal borders. INTERREG program has its own active and significant financial funds now used only by members of the European Union. However, there is a possibility for neighbouring countries, the majority of which are the candidates for membership in the European Union to be granted access to these funds.

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