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IMAGE AND ONLINE MEDIA:
BALKAN'S IMAGE IN CULTURE SPHERE

Summary: The subject of building images in the new era of online communication media will be more discussing in future on academic and practical level. The text identified certain of theoretical concepts for national image building, presents the main components and characteristics of regional image's concept and paying attention to the basic models of cultural communication and intercultural dialogue.

Accent is placed on analysis of Balkan's image in the field of culture, built by French online portal Le Courrier des Balkans. Balkan's achievements in the field of literature, cinema, music, cultural heritage and Balkan's common cultural projects and initiatives are presented with a positive assessment. Planning, implementing and maintaining of various common projects in the Balkan's cultural sphere can be seen as a part of strategy for the Balkan's positive regional image formation.

Key words: online media, regional image, Balkans, cultural communication, intercultural dialogue

In time of online communications the building the Balkan's image in culture sphere is theme related whit global meaning of culture and her role for **common acknowledge, cohesion and acceptance** between communities and groups on regional and global level. Putting culture in the forefront in European politic and international diplomacy is determinate by her importance for **sustainable development of different countries and regions**. This approves and regulates her role in **shared cultural space** creating where can be develop a **fruitful dialogue**.

The new information and communication technologies and mostly internet closed our societies more than ever. Because of them for the first time

the Balkan's countries have the opportunity to **build, develop and maintain a favorable image in the cultural sphere**.

The culture sphere opens up possibilities for building a positive image as a various countries from the peninsula also of the Balkan's regional space. These perspectives for a favorable image can be successfully combined with the possibilities of online media, because **the accessibility, covenant time for costumer's use**, the **concentration** of information in **one subject area** presented via video, text, images, thematic links and hyperlinks, are excellent opportunities for offering attractive and detailed information from cultural field.

The positive attitudes toward the Balkan's culture, expressed in the online publications of French portal *Le Courrier des Balkans* (http:// balkans.courriers.info/), arealert for **new possibilities to build a positive image in the cultural field in the online environment**. The online media provides a direct access of the audience to needed information and the specialization of the website and the regular updating of the information in, creates a good opportunities for the construction, maintenance and introduction of new details in culture image of Balkans. In the web at any time the audience can find interviews with prominent personalities from the cultural field, to read useful and attractive tourist information or to learn details about a project or initiative that traditional media could not provide. Perhaps the online media currently played the most important role in the promotion and branding of the region and the national heritage of Balkans counties.

When the country build her image she can concentrate the efforts in the field, where she have the most significant successes and achievements, such as culture, art, science or sports. So it will be able to compensate the negative view, leaved in external audiences about functions of economic, political or social system.

According to Mincho Draganov, there is no distinguishing between personal image, corporate image, organizational image and image of nation and country in the scientific literature. He believes that „*the people, the state, the nation had as situational, so and historical image, while smaller entities have mainly situational image. The historic image, which more or less acts as a background and context of other images, in turn, may be legend, myth, woven by prejudices, to be produced spontaneously or folkloric, or to be „grown" professional of any elites…The situational images of the nation are usually less ethno-cultural, i.e. they are closer to the ordinary mass-psychic phenomena, have a specific occasions, operational mechanisms, conjuncture functions, fugitive effects*". (Draganov, 2008, 37)

The perceptions of countries are formed slowly and continuously at different levels. According to Roland Burkart, if we manage our national image, we must make situational analysis at different levels and in different dimensions. Based on the results of various communication studies and analyzes of the image, he formulated several key factors for successful management of national images. The first is the „*factual information about the actual status quo*" (Burkart, 2008:52). It includes the population of the country. „*The questions are who are the people living there? Who are the main figures in politic, economy, culture, religion etc.?(ibid.)*. Take into account also the basic factual data, digital indicators, related to the current political and economic situation in the country.

It is necessary to pay attention to „*the reasons for the existence of the status quo. In this sense, we seek to answer of questions like: why do people live this way. Why the political, economic and cultural situation is precisely this one? „(Ibid.)*. Answers to such questions, according to R. Burkart may be explored in the historical development of the particular country or nation. So can be explained how long exist the status quo, how far back in time are extend his characteristics. „*This is therefore an indicator of the traditions held by the country or nation" (ibid.)*.

As a third step in the communication management of national image Roland Burkart displayed the future prospects for the country. In them he includes the development of national identity, which is necessary of clear vision. As organizations as well as the countries should also have ideas for the future, embodied in political, economic, social, cultural and other programs. They outline the direction of a nation's development and the time limits in which it will run.

This kind of „*tree image*" (Burkart, 2008: 53) presents qualitative changes in the national image, the highlights in its deployment, the direction of change of its key features.

The concept of „regional image" is not elaborated in detail and independently in scientific literature, but we aim to draw attention to some research on regional marketing. In them it is used to describe **certain areas with their own specific characteristics, which assist their presentation beyond their borders**.

The regional image can be defined as a summary overview of the common features and components of various national images. But while corporate and national image are formed purposely, planned and consistently, the regional one is **difficult to be managed and directed**. In this sense there is **inconsistent process of its formation** in the minds of various international

audiences. The regional image is not associated with the brand, emblem or other distinctive symbol. In its construction are those symbolic elements, traditions, tangible and intangible achievements, **that have transnational relevance**.

The corporate, national and regional images are collective image, because in some groups may find the same idea about them. While in national image could exist a **situational image**, in regional one prevails the **historical image**, formed largely by generalized stereotypes and prejudices whit different emotional load.

In regional image's building, important place have also **the image of the people**, **living in the spot**. His quality of life, perspectives for development, financial and purchasing power, level of education, culture, hospitality have an influence of the regional's image shaping. It is important and into what extent the inhabitants of the region identify with it, what view have of us, **what is the internal regional image through the eyes of the inhabitants of the region**. To talk about regional identity, it is necessary to determine whether there is identification with regional geographical space, past, cultural traditions, is there similar languages, the presence of ethnic groups within the neighborhood countries. For this purpose are needed long interdisciplinary research, involving scientists and experts from various fields. Regional identity could be considered **as meta-identity**. It can coexist with ethnic, national, cultural one, situated in **the network identities** of the individual. Regional identity can complete and enrich the national one and vice versa.

The regional image is more clearly defined and easy to identify from the outside perspective. In its construction exists the consolidation of the idea, deletion of individual national's characteristics and features and bringing them to some common identification codes for the entire regional area.

On the Balkans are developed different processes, as well as violent and tragic conflicts, also cooperation and mutual assistance in various fields. Balkan's Orthodox nations live for a long time with the Muslims and influenced each other's cultural traditions. The Christian population of the peninsula has elements of self-consciousness of people in Western countries, such as a strong desire for personal success and material satisfaction.

„*Constructiveness makes it necessary to seek new opportunities for cooperation and implementation of best practices as in terms of formation of the image of each Balkan country, so as a well realistic idea for the „other", i.e., the neighbor. It also requires integration of scientists and communication specialist's activities around the strategic task to persuade European and*

the world public opinion in the presence of neighborhood and stability in relations between nations in the region, to redirect their efforts in promoting the image of the Balkans as a „cradle of European civilization" (Zlateva, 2008: 59).

Along with the division and the passage of various borders in the Balkan's countries, there are common elements and historical path of development, running of similar political and economic processes and change of regimes and ideologies. A heavy influenced has also the Byzantine and Ottoman's Empires in the Balkans, which determines the similarities in cultural heritage, the principles of polity and the institutions in the peninsula. According to Diana Petkova this provides grounds to speak of „*the establishment of a Balkan's culture and establishment of a common Balkan's mentality*" (Petkova, 2004: 189-170).

The three elements - historical similarities, geographical area and cultural traditions are universal attributes, uniting the Balkan's peoples. To these components we can add a fourth, the desire of the region to join the European Union.

The construction of the images may not be complete without taking into account the role of the media. The media, whether traditional or online, focus on certain traits of the image which is largely compliable with the existing stereotypes of the audience. The informational internet pages, as well as large national information portals gaining increasing popularity and became the main information tool for many people. Balkan's countries have not yet used the full potential of new information technologies for a more complete web presence, and to construct a more attractive image of the region to the rest of Europe. „*Surprisingly, interest in the Balkans as a common political, economic and cultural space sometimes seems more strongly expressed in the external look. But this external view is extremely useful, because it provides a scale as the local point of view difficult can outlines alone*" (Spassov, 2004: 100).

The fragmentation and the specialization of online media allow the dissemination of detailed and varied information from one specific field, such as culture, and also the differentiation of sections or entire sites for cultural news. This, in turn, facilitates the construction of the image of a country in this field.

The presence of news from the field of Balkan's culture helps for full and complex understanding of the region beyond the established framework of the Balkans negative discourse, which has long been at the heart of worse regional image.

The theory of construction of virtual identities appears since for a part of the people online media and social networks became key sources of information and entertainment. **The digital identity** as well as any media formation is unreal, chaotic and problematic. It is built on the total consumption of media production, but in its essence is selective and established relations and proximity between groups without any physical space, existing for achieving this closeness. People are increasingly individualized, different from each other, not suitable of uniformity and that leading to the need for more information about them, of developing the ability to rely various signs and symbols, to be able not only communicate with them, but also to live together. „*Demassification of the media actually put mass culture of diversification and makes it more independent from classification and polarization*" (Stoykov: http://mediajournal.info/index.php?p=item&aid=40).

The growing use of Internet and other online networks changed the way people are informed in late XX and early XXI century.They also imported some innovations **in the utilization of cultural values**.

Freedom of own time deployment, combined with image, sound and text is the great advantage that the Internet has over other traditional media. **The network combines the „culture of storage" and „outpouring culture." The culture of the third mediamorphoses brings together values, symbols, meanings and examples which size, details and transformational capabilities have no analogue in previous history of civilization and culture**. (Stoykov, 2010: 107)

Online media can be used in strategies for cultural communication, which is applied aspect of public diplomacy. To be meaningful and effective it can be used four of its models. The first is the **exchange and cooperation** between the parties, who shall endeavor to find a solution to social and cultural issues. The second model is **unidirectional transmission** of the own culture abroad. Selected central institution surveys the realized cultural activities and ensures that they coincide with the overall political strategy. **The information model** aims to cause sympathy and understanding among foreign audiences about the culture of the state. By **self-representation** it can be create a specific image of the home country abroad (Pacheva: 2005:147).

These four models are also part of the main steps taken in building a national image. The exchanges and cooperation are not only useful for solving problems. By exchanged information they contribute to mutual understanding between both parties. The one-way presentation of one's own culture helps to provide information about the country, which conduct to positive uptake of foreign audiences. So they build their sympathies for state and

complete their understanding of its culture. These are the basic elements of self-representation, which are main in image creation.

The „shared space" in the dialogue process can be locked outside of physical space and situated in the media or virtual environment. It is needed public support at different levels in intercultural dialogue's process, starting with the „road mapping" (recognition of the need for dialogue) to „bringing down the walls" (overcoming the already established attitudes and fixed opinions), „building bridges' (reaching understanding with another person), which eventually led to the creation of „shared space„. (European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research (ERICarts): Sharing Diversity, 2008: 146-147).

Cultural diplomacy as part of an overall strategy for public diplomacy, is **a powerful tool in the bilateral and multilateral international cultural relations**. Culture have an increasingly central role as an **integral part of communication and cooperation between countries** in contemporary diplomacy.

„*To lead a successful, flexible and effective cultural diplomacy as part of open diplomacy it is required a strategic plan and program which are foreign-resistant and practically applicable ... Cultural diplomacy in international relations is „soft power", because it combines the power of an attractive idea with the strategic projects of national states and has influence specifically on the culture and civilization's sustainable development*" (Vasic, 2010:364).

The Balkan's countries are becoming aware of a dialogue between themselves and the need to adjust some of the established stereotypes and generalizing views about the neighboring nations. These steps are implemented in the field of culture. The presentation, interpretation and sharing of various traumatic events and memories through artistic means, contributes to their understanding and overcoming.

The new digital media would be useful in solving some of the problems related to cultural expressions. For more artists it easy to access the production companies and for the audience is quite possible to discover unexpected cultural products of artists who work nearby or halfway around the world. Still lacks the analysis about consequences of new technology's introduction in development, production, distribution and promotion of creativity in all genres, from the most popular to those who are judged only by small groups of people, and from traditional to futuristic ones.

The culture in all its dimensions is a key component **of sustainable development**. The culture determines the way in which people live and inte-

ract both locally and globally. It is a source of identity, innovation and creativity. Her complex network of meanings, relationships, beliefs and values frame people's relationship with the world.

In 1998 the historian and journalist Jean Arnault Deres, created the site *Le Courrier des Balkans*, which develops into **an information portal of horizontal type**, designed to summarize the information and analyzes in French language from the press of Southeast Europe's democratic countries : Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Turkey. Incorporating texts from major newspapers in the Balkans, *Le Courrier des Balkans* working with a **regional network of correspondents and translators**, and thereby offers to its readers the perspective of each Balkan country over which are the most important events for her. The materials are characterized by a **variety of genres**: information notes, interviews, reports, comments.

The topics of materials suggest the highlights that authors put to the content of the texts. In reflecting of the various film, theater, music festivals and events in the region, readers' attention is focused on **regional or international participation**, and on their role of **shared cultural spaces** beyond physical borders between countries. Cultural events are viewed through **the prism of intercultural dialogue** and long-term prospects **for Balkan's cooperation**. The various partnerships in the field of culture are some of the possibilities for building a positive regional image of Balkans.

The personality of Balkan's artists is placed in regional and European context in interviews. It is underline their **contribution to the development and enrichment** of various literary, musical and film genres by mixing specific local traditions and creative techniques with European and world trends. In covering Balkan's cultural heritage, the authors and translators focus their attention on his **symbolic significance** for the peaceful coexistence between different religious, ethnic and cultural communities. The Ottoman legacy in the Balkans is presented whit a positive attitude, focused on his potential as an attractive tourist destination.

In reflecting the Balkan festivals and cultural events are used **keywords** such *identity, creative richness, traditional values, cultural area, cultural dialogue, cultural cooperation, cultural cohesion*.

The music of the Balkans is also included in the common Balkan's cultural heritage. But the accent is not so much on authentic folk melodies and performances, but on their updated sound with jazz and rock elements.

In the online portal are presented writers whit Balkan's origin, who chose as his second home some of a western countries and write their works

in the local language. Through interviews, reports and comments Francophone users can learn more about Balkan's writers who live and work in France, and to get acquainted with French reviews of their books.

The cinemas have an **identical story line**, but due to its specific expressions the suggestion of social Balkan's exclusion and isolation are much stronger. Despite these standard topics the Balkan's cinema and Balkan's literature were considered whit the ability to identify problem areas in Balkan's history and help to understand, accept and overcome them.

After analyzing the events, festivals and cooperation in various cultural projects in the Balkans, reflected in the columns for education, media, literature, cinema, music and cultural heritage of the portal **Le Courrier des Balkans**, we can make following main conclusions:

− Web sites, portals (vertical and horizontal), social networks, specialized online newsletters and individual websites of the various initiatives, allow for **widespread varied in genre information about Balkan's culture**, which forms a positive image of the region among the Balkans, Europe and world wide's different audiences.

− There is still a tendency for **encoding mythological submits in opposition Balkans- Europe**. In the reviewed films and literary works, the Balkans is situated as an area where personal choice is partially constrained and human freedom is limited by social norms and prejudices. This somewhat gives the region the status of a relatively conservative place, dominated by collectivist societies.

− The politicization of Balkan national myths and similar mythological stories, ideas for political, economic and cultural development become instruments of political struggle and create prerequisites for conflict because of geographic and cultural crossness of the countries in the region.

− Community nature of the region which is formed not only by geographical proximity of countries, but also on the similar historical, social and cultural development and sustained influences, allows to **consolidate the common Balkan culture** which has its own specifics in countries.

− The cinema and literature of the region followed a similar storyline. They interpreted the traumatic past of conflicts, surrounding the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the serious repressive measures during the communist regimes and the psychological and emotional consequences for the individual. In the publications of the portal this is not reflected with a negative attitude, it is regarded as **development of literature and cinema's critical potential**. These creative areas should be regarded as places where such an issues can be shared and discussed. Their location in the field of culture and their interpretation through art is an attempt to overcome prejudices and severe emotional memories.

− Balkan's traditional folk music symbolizes the **spiritual cultural synthesis** in the region. It undergoes its metamorphosis in the works of young musicians and un-

der the influence of modern styles, swing, funk, rock turned into a „messenger" of one form of Balkan's culture outside the peninsula.

− Cultural heritage of the Balkans is **the cultural capital of high value**. So the common projects in this area would have a major contribution in future shaping and maintaining of regional positive image in the cultural sphere. The publications in French online portal underline the importance of transnational cultural and historical heritage for civilization's development of the region as well as across Europe. Balkan's countries, however, still apply „essentialist paradigm" in which cultural and historical monuments, artifacts and sites are considered as „own" affirmation and symbols of national identity.

− The work of media in Balkan's countries is presented whit some negative attitudes in the online portal. Publications of the theme, referring to the annual reports of „Freedom House" and „Reporters without borders", emphasizes the corrupt practices in this field and **the political and economic dependence of journalism**. Balkan's media are presented as tools for building public confidence about questionable decisions of different political parties and economic groups.

− The educational systems do not use their full potential of structures, integrating different communities. Publications on the subject in Le Courrier des Balkans, except criticism about educational institutions and the school as an environment which is not create appropriate conditions for reducing ethnic, religious and cultural differences, also noted the **efforts to overcome the established prejudices** whit the methods of no formal education.

− As an omission may be reported the lack of videos, which would strengthen the impact of information and will reducing the time for its acceptance. Another disadvantage is **the disproportionate representation of Balkan's countries in the portal**. There are not enough materials for Turkey Cyprus, Bulgaria, Greece, Slovenia and Montenegro.

In the terms of online communication cultural achievements of the Balkan's peoples in literature, cinema, music and cultural heritage, could be considered as key elements in building of **positive regional image of the Balkans**.

The formation of positive image of the Balkans particular in the sphere of culture is supported today by **the wide entrance of new information technologies and quickly distribution of specialized information about cultural events and products to diverse target audiences**. The future will show whether the region will benefit more fully and effectively from this opportunity.

In the Balkans, although slow, are developing various initiatives for cultural exchanges. They are part of intercultural dialogue's process in the region and other's European space. In the various Balkan's projects, such as „Sarajevo Winter,„ „Days of Sarajevo" in Belgrade, Balkan Youth Festival in Sandanski are realized approaches to intercultural dialogue through the acti-

vities of education, cinema, music and art. In frame of such projects we can find not only **intercultural relations**, but also **creative partnerships**. There are created new opportunities for creative cultural expression. Siting such projects in cyberspace will not only provide their promotion, but will also create the opportunities for new partners and stakeholders in the region and in the world.

Still missing the establishment of dialogue between institutions in the Balkan's countries, multiperspectivity of educational resources, the elimination of schools, separating children according to ethnic and religious backgrounds (especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina). The successful intercultural cooperation initiatives are carried out in the cinema, music, theater and other festivals, including various NGOs involved in the Balkans, Europe and worldwide.

The education, media, literature, music, cinema and cultural heritage are part of the theme of Balkan culture and can be developed separately in each of its aspects. Then can be detected much more direct relations and influences with permanent ongoing cultural processes and trends in Western Europe.

For many years the nationalism, the hostility between various ethnic groups, the economic and social backwardness, and in more recent times, the corruption practices, lack of transparency in the financing of projects in various sectors of society, lack of stable process of democratic governance and institutions building are part of the **Balkan's discourse construct elements**. Today his reconfirmation largely takes place in the media sphere.

In today's global situation the individuals are more intensively involved in the process of **growing self-rationalization**. People begin to reconsider their role and importance not only within the state, but also in world space. They make a self-valuation and self-assessment **to adapt in changing social environment**. Balkan's countries can also make **a self-interpretation in new dimension thanks to their culture** and also to take a rightful place in **European cultural space**. Culture can be the medium of **self-discovery of the Balkan's countries** not only in their relations with the rest of Europe and the world, but also in their mutual relations.

The maintenance and the development of common Balkan's projects will continue to contribute to the Balkan's image shaping as the cradle of European civilization. Culture should not be regarded as a manifestation of vanguard, a fragment of social life. It is an integral part of human existence. Due to its **integrating potential** it may have contribution to sustainable development in the region.

The lack of knowledge about neighborhood's countries, limited to obsolete concepts and myths are one of the serious problems of the Balkan's people. The Balkan's citizens know more about life in Western Europe or the U.S., than the processes in their own regional area. **The establish relations and the increase knowledge about the Balkans can be implemented successfully in culture through various common initiatives and projects**. The information about them can be reached quickly and promptly to all Balkan's countries through Internet technology. Some of states may even include them at distance by providing, for example, multimedia presentations or digitized art installations.

The creation of virtual galleries on the web, the presentation of museums, movie trailers, parts of books, reports of musical concerts, short documentaries about cultural heritage and others are just a few of the possibilities for influencing the planning, implementation and deployment of a common Balkan's cultural projects for building the Balkan's positive image, as a prerequisites for sustainable development in the region.

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Имиџ и online медији: имиџ Балкана у сфери културе

Сажетак: Изградња имиџа у новој комуникационој ери онлине медија је тема која ће се у будућности разматрати како на академском, тако и на практичном нивоу. У тексту се разматрају неке од теоретских концепција изградње националног имиџа, представљају се основне компоненте и карактеристике разумевања регионалног имиџа и обраћа се пажња на основне моделе културне комуникације и интеркултурног дијалога.

Акценат је на анализи имиџа Балкана у сфери културе који је изграђен у француском он лине порталу Le Courrier des Balkans. Позитивним оценама су представљена балканска достигнућа у сфери литературе, филма, музике, културно-историјског наслеђа, као и заједнички балкански пројекти и културне иницијативе. Планирање, остваривање и подршка различитим заједничким пројектима у културној сфери разматра се као део стратегије за формирање позитивног регионалног имиџа Балкана.

Кључне речи: online медији, регионални имиџ, Балкан, културна комуникација, интеркултурни дијалог