

IS EUROPE BECOMING WIDER?

Interview with Mr. Prof. James W. Scott, The coordinator of the FP6 project EUDIMENSIONS

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EUDIMENSIONS is a project that seeks to understand the implications of geopolitical contexts for crossborder co-operation and political relationships between the EU and neighbouring states. The project started in May 2006 and will end in April 2009.

One of the last conferences of the project took place in Iasi and Chisinau from the 5 to 7 of March: Neighbourhood and Boundaries in a “Wider Europe”: Regional Perspectives on the Everyday Construction of Borders.

The Romanian partner was the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Department of Sociology and Social Work. The first day of the conference took place in Iași and the second one in Chisinau. The speakers were from all over the world, most of them were professors at the European Universities: Leibniz-Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning, Germany; Ben-Gurion University, Beersheva, Israel; Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands; University of Birmingham, UK; Karelian Institute, University of Joensuu, Finland; Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain.

James W. Scott (Leibniz-Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning, Germany and Professor on University of Joensuu, Finland) is the main coordinator of the project EUDIMENSIONS: Local Dimensions of a Wider European Neighborhood: Developing Political Community through Practices and Discourses of Cross-Border Co-operation (Research Project PC6, STREP, Priority 7, 4.2.1. New visions, new neighborhood. CIT-CT-2005-028804).

Anastasia CondruC – **First of all, how the idea of this EUDIMENSIONS project came?**

James W. Scott – The idea of EUDIMENSIONS did actually start from an earlier project. Several people who were involved today had the idea and write the proposal. We were looking for a cross-border cooperation across the shifting, changing borders in Europe. That project started in 2003, just before the big enlargement (10 – countries in 2004, and 2 in 2007) and ended in 2006. And until the funding, or actually before the project ended, there was another call from European Union for proposals, and we were thinking about producing the information for political cooperation, cross-border cooperation, more formal than

informal. But the border changed and the political program changed during the project, and there were some opinions to continue what we were doing but to change the focus. So we changed the focus, gradually and geographically, we included the Greek-Turkish case, because Turkey is now in negotiations to get into European Union. We looked at the Spanish-Maroc situation. Other map, same case-studies. Some couple of case-studies were not included like Balkans, Romanian-Hungarian border, because this border now kind of became inside of the EU. Is still a shaking border, so we're looking at the Hungarian-Ukrainian border. And there we were continuing what we were doing but focused on the civil society, because this is the indicator of real cooperation. So this is basically how we started.

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– Now you had this two days conference in Romania and Moldova, it is almost the end of the project, what is the role of this conference for the whole project?

– This conference is one of the most important because we want to organize a border conference, where we will not only talk about our research, but invite people from both sides and discuss aspects of European borders and cross-border cooperation. Also Romanian-Moldavian border is one of our case-studies, and the organizers from Iași already are looking at the development of network and they actually can go back several years to see how the situation on the border changed. So we were able basically to have an interesting discussion on the European border, and go to Chisinau, to Moldova. For me it was the first time, and I had the feeling for the situation on the border, and I needed to understand some local ideas, the feeling of Moldavian society. We also had a meeting with the chief of border guarder of the Romanian side, which was quite interesting, he was talking about his job and how they cooperate with the Moldavian side. The organizers said that it was problematic contacting the Moldovan border side because of the elections. So most of the Moldavians didn't show, in fact they came to Iași, people from TV, also Moldavians living here. We moved from Iasi to Chisinau, but the representative didn't come, we had some Moldavian students, which is nice. I think it's due to the political situation, kind of polarized. Just crossing the border was an experience. And maybe there will be a chance in a future to go back, and see more clear. The information I got in Moldova looked for me very interesting. And I imagine how you manage nation building projects; many peoples have dual or triple citizenship: Romanian and Russian. That's something crazy, it sounds almost impossible. But it is interesting how this actually happened, and how the people interact across the border.

- In the first day of the conference, in the first panel we saw two movies about this interaction, one of them was made by a Romanian director, and another one by the Basarabian director. Do you think there is any difference in the way they see the situation?

- There were 2 different focus parts. The Romanian one was kind of a nostalgic look at the village that is across the border. Nostalgic for their home land, cut off from Romania by the Soviet Union, and Germany of course, all the effects of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact. It was basically showed how the people lived after this separation. And the Moldavian one was about local mobilization of the civil society, saying "hell idea of Christmas celebration, we're going to do it our way." And it was about people going on the street and fighting with the communist, bureaucratic leadership, about the mayor of Chisinau who very bravely said that this is a local affair, that they don't need national government involved in the Christmas tree thing, so in many ways it was positive because it was not focusing on lost of territory and other heart brake of the border. It was more about that if we had democracy, the border will not be so important anymore.

- The European Union is created to cross this border problem, to unite the states in the economical or political points of view, and here, like the Romanian – Moldova case we have a situation where EU creates this problem, separates one nation and creates conflicts. How do you comment that?

- I know exactly what you are talking about, it's creating problems. This way typical Moldavians can't come to Romania, and the restriction at the border make it difficult to cross goods, meet imports, vegetables, agriculture products. Moldavians have to get to pay for the visas, and it will be more difficult to get visas once Romania is part of the Schengen area in 2011. I don't have an answer, there is no solution, this is the EU trying to do two things at the same time: it is trying to create a new sense of community, but at the same time it's delimiting, securing the new borders in Europe. It is very critical for the European Union, but these are its policies at the neighborhood. And I really don't understand why the EU is not supportive, exactly for Moldova. People are suffering because EU – Moldovan relationship are not very good. It's almost the same thing as in Belarus.

"I really don't understand why the EU is not supportive"

- By the way, in Moldova after 2005, the communists are saying that they changed their minds and they want collaborate with the democratic forces, but in Belarus the situation is different and yesterday we had a discussion how you can manage this kind of situation when, not the government, not the people what to have deals with EU. What do you think about this case?

- I think people want to cooperate in Belarus, but they cannot say it anything about this because of the political situation. I know that on the street they are not many people, they are afraid to open and talk about it. I think the EU can still make a difference in Belarus, but not in short terms; this is a long term thing. Russia is a key, that is a key issue. I see the EU is slowly changing situation, but not because of any policy, but because of the economical and social impacts in European Union. We have to start it slow, with discussions on human rights or environmental issues. It's easy to engage Lukashenko, but there are some changes, they realized that they have to do something. Russia is not going to support Belarus forever with free or cheap Russian energy. But Moldova is a different thing. Yes, they can be much more active. I saw you even got a minister of External Relations and European Integration. I think there is a general positive idea that EU can do something, but people have been very disappointed by EU's passivity.

- What do you think about the Transnistrian case? Do you think it's a case to study? Can it give us something in this kind of projects like EUDIMENSIONS?

- It can very much, because EU is already helping control the Transnistrian-Moldavian border, and the Ukrainian border. EU has the mission to control this border, but with Moldavian border guards. It is not an official border, it is not recognized by anyone and that makes it a very difficult and interesting case in the same time. Stalin created this little peace of territory just to secure control to the Black Sea, it was just a strategy. We all know that it's a fake state, creating this fiction of Transnistrian identity. And from that perspective it is a very interesting case. Now Russia controls the region, but it's very interesting what will be the effect of EU's involvement in a long term, because now it is too early to think about solutions. If EU makes pressures on Russia right now, Putin will say: send me your prime minister, your army and then we'll talk. EU has none of those.

Besides we know that the population is mixed in Transnistria, there are about 30% of Russians, 30% of Romanians and 30% of Ukrainians. That makes the situation even more complicated.

- For conclude, on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is the best one, what mark will you give to this conference?

- There are several different criteria you can use: the overall experience, participation, the open for discussions. I would give a quite high score. I'm thinking of a score between 8.5 and 9 and it's actually a very high score. Of course this is the problem of the conference: to bring together the theoretical and the empirical local studies. It almost never works, but I think we did a good job.

- For a simple Romanian student, a EU citizen. How this kind of conferences can directly or not influence him?

-I would like to imagine that of course it was a very important conference that it influences the young students to get involved in researches. But there is always a problem: if you talk a lot of theoretically stuff in an academic media you have a lack in communication. You have to understand a language that is spoken and it takes time. But if the topics are interesting, people come from different backgrounds presenting very different perspectives on specific issues then I think it is very motivating. That's how I got in to the border studies – the conferences. And it's not only about what people are saying during the conference, but it's about meeting peoples during the break. There is always somebody who has the same interests that you do. You get an invitation, a phone number or a connection, and that's the best thing you can get on a conference. We intentionally invited students as speakers and students from here, from both sides.

- If you remember yourself at the beginning of the project and you compare it with the actual situation, are you pleased with these results?

- I was always afraid we're going to lose track of the project about a year ago. We had some differences of opinions, internal conflicts about the specific aspects of the reporting, too different case studies. But now in the last 12 months I can see that we came up with some very interesting results and specific case studies results. The only thing that I'm worried about it's that we won't be able to publish all the materials, it takes too much time. There are tones of paper. It's incredible lot of work. We probably would do things different if we were at the beginning. You're always smarter later.

- Is there any project coming from this one for the future?

- We have submitted two proposals for the seventh frame of program. One is looking at the geopolitics of the EU and its rules as a stabilizer of the conflicts. We'll be looking at different contexts and I think this area is one of them: the Russian – EU interface. The other is looking at the borders the way that they are understood in the national histories. We have a Bulgarian partner; we'll talk about the Romanian-Bulgarian borders, about the Bulgarian-Soviets borders. The project is focusing on the representation of the border, but it's basically contributing at our case studies. But who knows if we'll get any funding? It is a very competitive program; it's very hard to get money. We'll see. This is the third project and I'm afraid the commission we'll say: are you a club or something? And we're trying not to pressure.