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Școala Doctorală „Relații internaționale și studii de securitate”**

**TEZĂ DE ABILITARE**

**Puterea culturii și impactul paradiplomației în sfera  
relațiilor internaționale și în aria de frontieră**

**The power of culture and the impact of paradiplomacy in  
international relations and the border area**

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## Abstract

The present work captures the author's academic profile, the main scientific themes addressed over time, especially after the public defense of the PhD thesis, and the manner in which the research results were disseminated. The following lines present the structure, methodological approach, argumentative thread and perspectives outlined in the habilitation thesis.

Structured in two parts, the first part of the thesis captures the author's professional career seen from several complementary perspectives: teaching, scientific and administrative. The undergraduate, master and doctoral studies are presented in an evolutionary way, with a focus on their international dimension, complemented by the obtaining of grants with non-reimbursable European funding. We also find here, among the biographical elements, the author's teaching career, from preparator to lecturer, in the Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Science and Communication Sciences, University of Oradea, together with the administrative activities undertaken in the Faculty and Department. The measure of a rich academic activity is also given by the involvement in the field of quality development in university education, both internally, in the University, and through the status of expert evaluator in the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS).

Also, in this first part of the thesis, the author draws a red thread of scientific activity, with a focus on the last years of her career. This part is methodologically designed in such a way as to reflect as objectively and faithfully as possible the main results of the research. Grouped by research subfields, they are presented synthetically, by analogy with the main scientific trends in international relations and European studies. Reference is made to a broader contextual framework, which frames the results thematically and conceptually. The perspective of this research is a complex, interdisciplinary one. Moreover, disciplinary areas, not long considered peripheral to the system of international relations and European studies, are relatively recently regaining their place in the field. We refer primarily to the *power of culture* on the scene of international relations, but also in the context of a necessary unity of the European Union and the emphasis on the role of culture in the process of European integration; *cultural diplomacy* and the

role it plays in the foreign policy of states, through the promotion and use of the cultural and historical heritage of nations, in order to achieve political and economic objectives in particular, but also to create a country image, a brand that facilitates the implementation of political and economic objectives; *cultural identity* on the internal and external borders of the European Union; the *paradiplomatic phenomenon* that has become increasingly intense, widespread and permanent. Paradiplomatic players (autonomous region, region in general, city, etc.), as well as enjoying autonomy and numerous resources, are increasingly influential in international relations. All these and other elements demonstrate the presence of major changes in relations between states at world level, changes which show the need for new instruments to support traditional diplomacy, which is already insufficient: public, digital, cultural, cellular, celebrity diplomacy, etc.

Based on the main results of our research in recent years, which have been presented and published in an international context in particular, we intend to synthesize the results in three complementary and interdisciplinary thematic directions:

- History, International Relations, Foreign Policy and Diplomacy,
- The power of culture in the international system,
- Border space: transition zone, interaction and identity.

The first thematic direction outlines research that complements the main scientific concerns of the author's early research activity, including her doctoral period and immediately thereafter. Validated and recognized by academia (the author was awarded in 2016 by the Rector of the University of Oradea a diploma of merit for outstanding results in scientific research in the field of International Relations and European Studies) the volumes and scientific works are an argument in support of the thesis of the complexity of international relations and the establishment of the new world order.

It is important to note that historical analysis allows for a diachronic perspective on international relations and the foreign policy of states. Cultural specificity, historical imprint and the experience of mutual contacts of human groups can become elements of prognosis, of anticipation, on reactions and behaviours affecting the sphere of inter-state, regional or international relations. Complex relations and contemporary international connections are the result of past efforts or actions that have influenced generations of people. What we know today about diplomacy is the result of a consistent evolution in international relations, marked by the realities encountered and the transformations and mentalities in society. International relations,

bilateral relations, foreign policy and diplomacy as an instrument of implementation, the system of negotiation or the abuse of power are just some of the topics covered in this first part.

The second thematic line of interest is devoted to the power of culture in the international system. In the author's view culture has a catalytic role for political and economic activities at European, national and regional level. The local cultural factor can significantly influence an area's ability to generate wealth for the community, while at the same time being a catalyst for a sustainable economic revival through the development of innovative and creative sectors based on artistic activities. On the other hand, culture is also seen as a democratising factor. Authorities that are aware of the role of culture in regional development and the fact that access to culture changes community mentalities, improving the mental state of the population, focus on a civic culture that allows the expression of participatory democracy, thus increasing the involvement of individuals in the development of the community.

The usefulness of involving cultural diplomacy (*soft power*) in addressing global security issues has also been noted. In her analyses, the author finds that there are three key elements that can influence both the outbreak and resolution of conflict: language, ethnicity and religion, all cultural elements. Current international reality has therefore shown that *hard power* cannot provide the solutions that mankind demands and expects. Consequently, soft solutions must be found, the preventive nature of which can become the key to future diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy has an important chance in resolving, but especially in preventing conflicts, and its goals are mutual trust, negotiation and cooperation, in support of which it has the ability to identify major risks, but also the tools to develop and implement programs essential to achieve its objectives and implicitly of the states that assume it as an instrument for implementing foreign policy. The expansion of democratic space through cultural diplomacy will generate a different type of relations between states and nations, based on dialogue and understanding of each other. Cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue will replace the old type of relationship based exclusively on military force and economic pressure, creating democratic mechanisms for dialogue and strengthening cooperation between political and civil society, thus increasing citizens' trust in power and reducing conflict in a constructive way. The basic pillars of cultural diplomacy include education, religion, media, etc.

In a strongly interactive cultural context, the new paradigms of global reorganisation have eroded clear boundaries, overriding these are the processes of globalisation, which have

reconfigured the architecture of politics and society, changing the power relations between states and markets. The balance of power has shifted. The decision-making role of states is being strongly undermined by the role of markets. There is a decentralisation of the state, whose authority is increasingly transferred to regional governments, international institutions, transnational companies, municipalities, giving rise to a new concept of functioning in international relations - paradiplomacy, or sub-state diplomacy. This form of diplomacy takes on important international and transnational efforts for the development of communities, but its role is most prominent around education, healthcare, climate change, waste management or transport.

In addition, at the level of the EU and therefore of the Member States (some highly centralised, others fully federalised) we are dealing with different types of regions, which in turn benefit from different forms of administrative and political organisation. The use of paradiplomacy in their case is different, depending on the link/dependence they have with the national authority. That is why we propose in our studies a focus rather on the paradiplomatic element in the city world. It benefits from a universally recognised formal organisation, with a similar bureaucratic structure and legal framework within which it operates. The city or its local structures join more easily the various cross-border, transregional and transnational networks and organisations. Today 80% of global economic output is already generated by cities. This phenomenon can only be compared to the effects of the great industrial revolution of the 19th century.

The last thematic strand comprises the author's research into the study of the frontier, and the cultural frontier in particular. The recent realities of the effects of the refugee crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have generated the politicisation of culture and borders more than ever. Culture in border spaces, from culture considered to be on the margins, has suddenly become central to the geopolitics, flows and experiences of the transnational world. Increasingly, culture and borders are everywhere and yet nowhere. In border spaces, national narratives and counter-narratives are tested and evaluated, confronting transnational culture.

The author's research in this scholarly direction, of the intersection of border and culture, offers a time-expanded and critical view of culture in moving border spaces. They sum up our more than 12 years of experience in this field, complemented by numerous examples and a growing literature.

This cultural dimension of borders through its influence on individuals and communities plays an important role in how human identity is formed and perpetuated through different levels

of exclusion and inclusion along a continuum of physical and social separation. It is well understood that any form of boundary at any social or spatial scale is far more complex than the simplistic notion of lines on maps or fences and walls in the landscape. The ways in which borders and their images leave an indelible imprint on our understanding of local spaces and environments allow us to understand the more complex and richer meaning of what actually constitutes a border and how it impacts our lives.

In order to continue research in the field, the author proposes to further pursue her scholarly interest in how the power of culture engages and manifests itself in international society. The subject deserves to be studied through the perspective of as many case studies as possible, of best practices, in order to develop local communities with positive effects at national/international level. The author of this thesis also intends to devote the same great interest to the study of paradiplomacy at the level of Romania and the EU, providing solutions by comparing situations with the experiences of sub-state formations in Asia, Africa, the USA or Latin America.

Another direction of career development is placed under the auspices of the European Commission's Jean Monnet programme, part of the Erasmus Plus funding framework. Already benefiting from her cumulative experience as coordinator of a Jean Monnet module and as a member of two other modules, the author intends to apply for a chair dedicated to European integration through culture, with a strong impact on curriculum development and international mobility, including at doctoral level. Ways of disseminating scientific results through the author's international teaching internships both in the European Union (Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Slovakia, Hungary, Greece) and abroad (Bolivia, Morocco, Montenegro) were also shown.

Therefore, in the second part of the thesis, a career development plan is conceived, based on a two-pronged approach: professional-teaching career development and research activity development. The conclusions require the need to obtain the habilitation certificate, followed by the candidacy for the post of professor and obtaining the doctorate. Particular importance is attached to deepening research and integrating it into the teaching activities that we wish to improve both in terms of content and teaching skills.