

## **Regional Cultural Mobility between Serbia and Croatia**

### **Background**

The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina has been engaged in long-term cooperation with the district of Istria (Croatia). Bilateral visits and events such as the "Days of Istria in Vojvodina" and the "Days of Vojvodina in Istria" have taken place each year since 2001. The important aspect of such cooperation activities has been to re-establish cultural, economic and political contacts and connections.

This cooperation project is based on a formal bilateral agreement between the regions of the two countries.

There are important reasons for cooperation to take place between these two regions, especially considering the similarities between Vojvodina and Istria. For example, they are both developed regions within the larger political borders of their countries, the people have similar mentalities, a rich cultural life is on offer, they are geographically close to the EU, are multicultural and cosmopolitan in their make-up, have pro-European aspirations and had a strong anti-war attitude during 1990s.

The main goals of this cooperation are: to improve relations between these two regions and their countries; to exchange positive experiences regarding economic transition, to establish economic cooperation, to facilitate the exchange of artists and arts and cultural programmes, etc.

### **How it works**

The main target groups of this cooperation are artists, cultural practitioners, businessmen, local administrators from both regions.

Every year a delegation of the most prominent artists, businessmen and politicians from Vojvodina pay a short visit to Istria. During the visit, both Vojvodina policy (through round tables, guesting in local media and institutions, fairs etc) and its cultural heritage (e.g. music, ethnography, film, arts exhibitions etc.) are presented in several Istrian towns. Agreements are made for future cooperation activities.

Visits that are payed within the project are mutual. Many artists (musicians, pop music groups, fine artists, theaters, folklore ensembles) from Istria had their shows in Vojvodina since the initiation of the "Days of Istria in Vojvodina" in 2001. However, Regional Secretariat for Education and Culture has not made precise evidence, calendar and statistics of these guestings, so the information are sporadic and not sufficiently organized. On the other hand, approximately dozen Istrian artists and cultural operators yearly come to Vojvodina to show their works during the Manifestation. The same applies to Vojvodina's part.

### **Results**

Since cooperation between the two regions was re-established, the level and intensity of artists exchange has increased from year to year. A network of businessmen and artists has become denser, and the number of tourists to each region has almost doubled in recent years.

On average, around ten artists and cultural workers, and nearly as many cultural programmes (performances, exhibitions, concerts etc.) from Vojvodina are presented in Istria each year, and vice

versa. According to a rough estimate, more than one hundred various artistic programmes and over 1 000 people from both regions have engaged in such exchanges since 2001.

Mobility (exchange) of artists between the two regions has increased dramatically. Individual artists and cultural institutions in Vojvodina show greater interest in such forms of cooperation than the regional governmental institutions.

The formal framework of bilateral cooperation between the two regions has helped to improve overall relations between Serbia and Croatia. The number of tourists, visitors, joint economic actions, bilateral state agreements and artistic co-production projects continue to increase.

The Cooperation between regions of Vojvodina and Istria is a good example of how relations between countries of the Former Yugoslavia with the history of recent conflicts can be easily and successfully improved. Positive experiences and principles of this cooperation should be applied as a resolving conflicts model for the regions that have had the similar problems. With the same intention, a few years ago Region of Vojvodina initiated a Manifestation called "Days of Vojvodina in Sarajevo" which is getting ever more serious.

## **Sources**

Region of Istria: <http://www.istra-istria.hr>

Regional Secretariat for Culture in Novi Sad: <http://www.psok.org.yu>

The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina: <http://www.vojvodina.sr.gov.yu>

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