

## Abstract:

The relations between Croatia and Serbia are determining for regional peace and stability and for the course of the EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) is the funding mechanism designed for the implementation of the EU's enlargement policy in the Western Balkans. This research investigates the extent to which IPA has integrated to the local cross-border initiatives in culture and youth and has fostered social reconstruction between Croats and Serbs in Slavonia (Croatia) and Vojvodina (Serbia). Co-operation in the cultural sector is an important element of social reconstruction, as it favours contacts and the erosion of antagonistic prejudices against the other ethnic group.

The objective of this research is defined as two-fold, firstly to test a model of cross-border co-operation devised from EU integration theories and, secondly to provide an accurate picture of the cross-border initiatives in Slavonia and Vojvodina based on ground-level experience.

The analysis of the data collected shows mixed results. On one hand IPA has integrated successfully into the landscape of local cross-border initiatives by stimulating socialisation between civil society organisations. IPA has also increased local ownership of cross-border co-operation amongst the regional authorities. On the other hand, cross-border co-operation in culture and youth is a policy area generally absent from the local political agenda and mostly dealt with at the level of the civil society. Social reconstruction requires complete local ownership at all levels of decision-making and full integration in the societal discourse in order to be completely successful.

Keywords:

EU Enlargement, Western Balkans, Croatia, Serbia, Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), social reconstruction, civil society organisations.