

*Research Insights  
Изследователски проникновения*

## **BULGARIAN SCHOOL – SHOWCASE OF IDENTITY**

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**Abstract.** The text was built on the concept of “showcase of identity” developed by the French ethnologist Jocelyne Bonnet-Carbonell. In the context of this metaphor, the types of identity of Bulgarian school have been described in a postmodern perspective. The aim is to make a parallel between them and to indicate the possible, actual and necessary choice of the Bulgarian school in constructing its own identity. As a document and “commodity”, the “showcase of identity” of the school institution is the opportunity to gain insight not only of the visible field of education that is to be sold, but also of the invisible one, which must be kept and preserved as a spiritual substance.

*Keywords:* showcase of identity; nation; value; democracy; school institution; Balkan identity; European identity; loss of identity

For centuries, Bulgarian school has been a translator of kinship and national affiliation in the minds of many generations. Post-modern times and democratic changes in 1989 have put the school in an “emergency situation” – a blur of denying traditions and un-experimented innovations borrowed from Europe. What is happening in students' minds with regard to the Europe ideologeme and is it a “showcase of identity” where high educational examples and standards are offered as a commodity? What is more, does the Bulgarian school have the potential to preserve Bulgarian identity in students' minds, or is it about to lose its own identity in wanting to imitate Europe at all costs?

### **The Showcase of Identity as a Concept**

The concept of “showcase of identity” was created by the French ethnologist Jocelyne Bonnet-Carbonell in the 1990s. As a professor of ethnology in Montpellier, in 1988, she established EURETHNO as a Network of Scientific and Technical Collaboration in the Service of Cultural Heritage, a Network for Scientific Cooperation in the Field of European Ethnology and Historiography. The

network seeks to restore the disturbed balance left by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's book *Europe: a History of its Peoples*, where 87% of the cited places are west of Trieste and Ljubljana, only 9% are in the east, and the remaining 4% are in Northern Europe (Bonnet-Carbonell, 1998). The tasks of the network include:

- exploring Europe's cultural and anthropological roots in order to nurture the unification of its various components;
- developing and maintaining the climate of harmonious cooperation, friendship and peace in order to strengthen cultural and social ties;
- the building of a scientific, pedagogical, dialogue-based, discussion space of European humanitarianism (Bonnet-Carbonell, 1998).

*Showcase Identity* is associated with the tasks Jocelyne Bonnet- Carbonell has set as for the ethnologist it is rather a record of a particular document, a testament to the reality of life (Bonnet-Carbonell, 1998). The concept has a commercial sense as „the showcase identity” is designed for the audience and crowd wherever it could get acquainted with the authentic history of a nation. These showcase identities can be seen in airports, as a symbolic field for the passing tourist. They are not deprived of the commercial purpose which dominates the time we live in. But their real purpose is not only for the tourists' money or cameras. Being part of an unknown space, they facilitate its seamless perception as part of life's discovery and attitude for what is different from us. From an ethnological point of view, showcase identities could be any symbol and relic. Historically, these are „places of memory” of a people who allows us in through them. From a didactic perspective it is the ability to learn and perceive the foreign culture on the move.

In the context of school institution, the notion of „showcase identity” is used as a metaphor, not as a method of study created by Jocelyne Bonnet- Carbonell. The reasons for this choice are the many „identities” of Bulgarian school and the fact that some of them remain undiscovered. The clear and precise naming of problems or their prominent vision leads to timely decisions. In the educational sphere at the beginning of the 21st century, more than ever the questions ‘Who does the school institution in Bulgaria work for?’ or ‘Who does it serve?’ become more urgent. The answers to these questions also pre-determine the problem of school identity.

### **Europe and the Balkan Identity. „The Three Europes”**

„The historical structure of Europe divides it into three blocks, three historical belts: the West's historicity, the absurd history of Central Europe, and the lack of historicity of the East” (Kroutvor, 2005). The cult words of Czech researcher Josef Kroutvor encrypt the coding levels and borders of Europe that are difficult to overcome. What is the place of the Balkans in this historical cartography and the role of the school institution as a mediator of social messages?

*Western Europe.* France, Germany, England, Spain, Portugal, Italy are all great nation countries that have gradually been evolving into superpowers since the

17th – 19th century. Things in the 20th and 21st centuries have not changed significantly, despite the new social, political and historical conditions and factors. Their power is not in their unity, but in their history, which rewrites the history of all other nations and peoples. The monopoly that they hold over the rest of the countries is in the standard of living that attracts the small states and nations. But the preservation of Western European identity is possible, because of the fact that the West, as we know it, did not originate spontaneously by an ethnos, but was formed by the perception of a developed culture and has become what it is, only through an assimilating transformation of this culture, and a set of unity and openness (Kluxen, 2001). The preservation of the Western European identity and the containment of its continuity pass through the educational institutions, and especially the Universities. Modern universities will be the places that will most closely check membership of Europe as a reflection. The role of the Bulgarian school is not to instill a European identity in its Western variation but to develop reflexive practices for entering Europe with a preserved Bulgarian identity.

**Central Europe.** Most researchers, such as Josef Kroutvor, František Palacký, Thomas Masaryk claim that Central Europe's history is of a personal priority: „In Central Europe, history touches people in a personal way. This is the difficulty” (Kroutvor, 2005). This personal perspective on history is accompanied by the impossibility of collective choice or the unmade choice of small nations unable to rewrite the world's history. The subjugation of the Poles, the Czechs and the Hungarians as small nations by the Habsburg monarchy continued for centuries and led to a sense of separation or insecurity in these nations. In *István Bibó's book, The Misery of the Small States of Eastern Europe* this process in Central Europe is considered as a warning from the possibility of federal configurations. The latter will not solve the old and inherited problems of these countries, but they can create new precedents. Another point of view on the subject is offered by Jenő Szűcs, in 1985 in his essay „The Three Historical Regions of Europe”. Szűcs defines Central Europe as „The Western end of Eastern Europe geographically and the Eastern end of Western Europe structurally”, i.e. it is a mix between Western and Eastern Europe (Le Rider, 2005). The question is: Is there a truly Central Europe? Does the notion of Central Europe disappear, or does it consolidate behind the historical traumas of the small states and their desire to prove themselves at the expense of unrealized revolutions such as the 1968 Czech Spring?

**Eastern Europe,** which is most commonly thought to be Russia (Kroutvor, 2005), is associated with a lack of history because of the rejection of the law as an absolute criterion for the community. His impersonality is opposed by rituals and instincts as well as absolute worship of power. The Russian soul, which is passionate and dedicated, can embrace absolutes such as Orthodoxy, monarchy or communism. With every change in society, the history is rewritten or manipulated as a state monopoly. History is interested in people, power is only interested in itself. Despotism of power is permanently settled in people's daily life, depriving it of

spontaneous events. Eastern Europe, given its unpredictability, has always remained a potential threat to Western Europe and has forced the borders of Central Europe to move. If Eastern Europe is primarily associated with Russia, then the Balkans are its remote province. The fate of the Balkans has always been connected with Russia and dependent on Western Europe. The Balkans are the redemption of the West and the mercy of the East. The Balkans are never self-sufficient because their history turns out to be rejected by the West and rewritten by the East. Although Western Europe is believed to be the dominant, Central Europe is obsessed with the danger of its extinction and Eastern Europe is obsessed with itself, the Balkans' identity remains dark and obscure. In the Balkans' vision there is no high pathos, justified optimism or a deserved place in the heroes' pantheon. The Balkans had eternally been looking for connection to Europe, and when they have finally built it, it is at the cost of losing their own identity.

### **The Balkan Identity of Bulgarian School**

Europe is a value-normative image of the world, the „eternal city” that makes every province possible, including and mainly the „last province”. It cannot be captured, but it can be stripped of history for several centuries like the Balkans have. Europe can only connect through what separates it, so far as the European standard is a nation. However, the question is how much the nation is a guarantee of identity because the value of the European identity lies in its incompleteness and denial of identification. The real Europe is always ahead of us. Bulgaria's path to Europe goes through „places of memory”, like „convulsions between memory and history” (Nora, 2004), through the „traumatic screens of memory” (Dichev, 1998). The year of the writing of the first Bulgarian school book by Petar Hadji Berovich is the year of the claiming of the school institution as Bulgarian. This fact is important because Europe is possible through inclusion in its institutions that contain the spiritual continuum of time in ideas: „With no less reason, it can be said that the Revival period is self-expressed through historical works, student books, reading clubs and libraries, schools, publishers, bookstores, journalists, newspapers, revival leaders and sponsors. The „rays” of knowledge scatter the gloomy darkness and dissolves the horizon of time, as categorically as Christ's martyr sacrifice (Lilova, 1995). The comparison of “Science is a sun” with “Freedom or death” is not just ideological symbols and cultural strategies to get out of "the time of shame" and the five-century suppression. They are much more than that - they are forms of life and behavior of thousands of Bulgarians who have preserved what is believed to be traditionally Bulgarian. The Balkans have a common history, but different ways to experience it. In this sense, the Balkan identity is not a cliché, routine, or archaism, but a will to live.

It is easy to use standards in modern Europe, because its universal principle is commensurability. Postmodernism introduces as its foundation

the incommensurability justified by the term "paradigm" by Thomas Kuhn and protected by non-classical rationalist thought. This translates the question of the legitimacy of each criterion as a singular one, where it is impossible to predict the course of events until the time of the study (observation) Merab Mamardashvili. The social space turns out to be incoherent and dispositional. The agonal key of the educational paradigm is preserved, but its emphasis is shifted- from communicating with ancestors and traditions to following the best achieved example of mankind. This changes not only the direction of communication from the vertical (with the ancestors) to the horizon (with the neighbors), but also the type of dialogue. The dialogue of the paradigmatic type, in which the most important is empirical proof, is replaced by narratives, relying on the truth as a "community of understanding".

The form of the relationship between teachers, students and parents is changed through the delegation of responsibilities and risk sharing in the educational institution similar to that in an enterprise. For the Bulgarian school, this means that democracy is based on the educational standard for "education for a certain price" (Simidchiev, 1997). The cost for a studying person becomes an economic factor in the spiritual substance of society, the family, and its development. Gradually, the Bulgarian identity is modernized through being unified. The unification starts with the introduction of economic mechanisms into the social space of the school institution. The school is permanently associated with the practices of inheritance of life's personal projects (Bourdieu, 1997) which are determined by the family but are realized in school and its verdicts (regulations and decisions).

### **European Identity of Bulgarian School**

Bulgarian School is the most democratic creation of a nation that existed without a state for five hundred years, but which managed to create a unique social phenomenon like the Bulgarian school. For centuries Old Europe has been unsuccessful striving for the transparency and publicity of the Bulgarian educational system and its results, a fact that the Bulgarian National School realized without hiding behind innate abilities and social inequality. The European standard in the form of „the appreciation of the individual, the realism of the individual and the detail, the analyticism, the practicalism, the horizontal orientation in the world, the sense of modernity and the idea of progress” (Bogdanov, 2000) is part of the Eurocentricism of Bulgaria. If Eastern Europe attracts Europe with something, it is the „value-preserved past life forms” (Bogdanov, 2000) i.e., the authenticity of the existence, to which the pedagogical practice and experience of our people also belongs. Bulgarian School „acquires a national characteristic when it is most open to new ideas and pedagogical models from all over Europe” (Borin-Velichkova, 2000). The educational paradigm specifies the common cultural ideal through inclusion. “Creation” and “inclusion” are an appropriate code for any modern education that is able to update tradition because „universal norms are minimal

and are woven into a maximum morality” (Dichev, 2000). with specific historical dimensions. These words are a reminder that every true story is a shared past and a will for a present. Bulgaria, then, can become a part of Europe only to the extent that Europe is part of Bulgaria and Bulgarian history because “Europe remembers us even when we forget about ourselves” (Lilova, 1999). Bulgarian modern European identity, however, is built on the principle of “universal imitation” (Gabriel Tarde) which implies first trying to look like and then to act like as it is easier to learn the way of life than the way of social production. Identity, such as “master and slave dialogue” since Hegel's time, is proof that every master is a slave in his mind, and that the freedom of the slave remains slavish. The slave’s illusions quickly grows into hatred for the master, thus the implemented European models, are quickly perceived as anti-Bulgarian after a short while. This model of distance play between “local and global”, between “center and periphery” is also manifested at institutional level. The Bulgarian school, designed in the nineteenth century as autonomous and decentralized, was at the end of the 20th century centralized and non-autonomous. The new education law of 2016, linked to the creation of innovative and unified schools, is another proof of the increased differentiation and selection of children, parents and teachers. These schools mainly separate students through the lifestyles, attitudes and expectations that they are being taught. In those schools, there will be no “agon” as a competitive spirit inherited from Antiquity, but a fierce competition that is foretold. In an attempt to reach Europe, the Bulgarian school is again hold prisoner by the “law of universal imitation”, and is creating its own surrogates.

### **Bulgarian School in Search of Identity**

What is the reason for the wrong-understood identity of the Bulgarian school? The answer is probably in the misunderstood national identity. The last decades of the previous century were a continuous effort to construct a European identity in the Bulgarians, not as a superstructure over their own (human) identity, but over the national one, which is a European invention for border protection. Europe is the “principle of pleasure” and the European identity is “the technique of seduction” (Mineva, 2000). The national identity of the Bulgarian as part of the European identity is built on the “lack of Europe” (Mineva, 2000). The contemporary spiritual Elite of Bulgaria creates its cultural models in an attempt to overcome the lack of Europe and its destitution. In reality, the identity of the “unclear person” (Mladenov, 1998) is created as a buffer zone between the European models and the impossibility of their realization in a way other than their national profanization. The truth, however, is different – the higher spiritual examples are always national; as far as their authentic nature is concerned, it is their Europeanization that profanizes them “because a nation that is engaged in a process of being civilized, consumes much more than it produces” (Dichev, 2000). The cultural capital of a nation, which is not necessarily nationalistic, is possible in its continuous movement and purpose.

The nation is hardly a “showcase of identity” because its spatial parameters are not defining. What is defining is the time that “distorts space” to “before and now”. This explains why Europe is primarily oriented towards the past and very little to the future, but only defines the present as sacred. The Bulgarian “circular identity” (Kapriev, 1999) includes the close, the distant, the shameful, the guilty, the marginal, the universal, the real, and the ideal Europe. Is it possible that the way we think of Europe is also the way we think of ourselves in the terms of “unprotected” Europe (Mineva, 2000). Bulgarian education as a modus of Bulgarian school should transform *the issue of Europe into a debate on priorities* – an overlap between the unfinished and open identity of Europe and the fixed, static border of what is considered to be national. In its worst historical times, Bulgaria has preserved itself not through the cliché Europe ideologeme of a “nation”, but through its own “cultural, religious and linguistic unity” (Kapriev, 1999), a significant role in which is played by Bulgarian school. It is also the real European institution whose task is to associate us with ourselves as Bulgarians in order to be Europeans.

### **Empirical study of the perception of Europe as an ideologeme in the minds of middle school students**

The empirical survey was conducted using the survey method, with 167 students aged 14 (7th grade) and 189 students aged 18 (12th grade – high-school education). The goal of the study is to make a comparative profile for the perception of the ideologeme “Europe” in the minds of 7th and 12th grade students in the context of the problem of the Bulgarian identity.

#### **Tasks of the study**

1. To conceptualize the ideologeme of “Europe” in a postmodern perspective.
2. To conceptualize the concept of “European Identity”, “Showcase of Identity”, “School Identity”.
3. To conduct an empirical study of the ideologeme “Europe” in the minds of secondary school students as an identity marker.

#### **Interpretation of the survey results**

Students of the lower secondary grade see Europe as an “educational opportunity” – 75%, compared to 58% for the students in the higher grades. As the age grows Europe becomes a marker for “standard of living” – 72% for 12th grade students, compared with 54% for 7th grade students. The question of the “competitiveness” of Bulgarian education, shows increase of the trust in its quality with the increases in age, too – it is only 10% for junior high school students, compared to 35% for final year high-school students. With the graduating high school students also dominates the subjective view of Europe as “values and attitudes” – 45%, compared to 25% for junior high school students. In general, however, in the responses of both groups,

the surveyed believe that the European and Bulgarian education are incomparable – about 70 % of all respondents in both 7th and 12th grades, with a small statistical difference. The respondents from the two groups firmly believe that a European university as an “ideal educational choice”, but for 10 % more of the older students the chance grows to choose a Bulgarian state university. When it comes to real choice for education, the respondents mainly choose the “state university”. Regardless of the 10% drop, it is to be noted that the graduating high school students self-esteem to apply to the European university has increased to 35%, versus 23% for 7th grade students. There is a sharp rise in the percentage of graduating students who consider Europe as a “professional” platform – from 45% to 75%.

The questions for the priorities of the Bulgarian education is answered with “the preservation of unique values and traditions” – 42% at the lower high-school level and 45% in high school students; the answer “preservation of the national consciousness and culture” applies to 29% and 25% in both survey groups respectively. In the respondents' consciousness European education is an opportunity to remain and live in Europe – 68% at the lower high-school level and 55% at the upper high-school level. But marker differences are significant when speaking of “European education is an opportunity to help yourself” – 72%/45% and “an opportunity to help your people” – 42% in 7th grade vs. 65% in grade 12. The clash between “desirable and real” in regard for Europe as an ideologeme sharply decreases in older students – 78% in 7th grade students vs. 45% in 12th grade students, which speaks of realism in the thinking, dictated by the social situation in Bulgaria. The feeling of belonging to Bulgaria increases as a result of the possibility for European education which will later work for the Motherland. The Answer to the question of how to become Europeans manifests the belief that this is possible with “much more investment in education – 67% in 7th grade vs. 85% in 12th grade students. The answer to the question “How not to cease being Bulgarians is answered with “we should always go back to the roots” – the graduating high school students double the statistical difference from 25% to 45%, which is encouraging. It is alarming that the percentages in the responses “by preserving the values characteristic of the Bulgarians” has 60% in the lower high-school level and 35% in the high school which shows a sharp decline in contradiction to the previous answer.

### **Conclusion**

The study has produced the following results with respect with the tasks set:

– The Europe ideologeme has different manifestations in Western, Middle and Eastern Europe in line with the historical development of these Three Europes. The Balkans lack history that is capable of transforming Europe as a real historical and social configuration. The Balkans and Bulgaria, in particular, are marked by the drama of their own history, which is also a marker for preserved Balkan and Bulgarian identity.



– The Bulgarian School is a translator of identity in all possible historical and social situations. As a postmodern institution, it has “showcases of identity” to present the history and identity of the Bulgarian people.

– In the minds of final year high-school students and students from the lower grades in Bulgaria, the Europe ideologeme continues to be a “showcase of identity”, through which the future generation seeks and measures themselves against the high European models and standards. In terms of European education, it retains its dominant positions in the consciousness of students as an optimal educational model. However, the tendency for Bulgarian education to keep in the minds of generations of students a generic and national affiliation as a sign of identity is also a fact.

The concept of “showcase of identity” borrowed from ethnology can be used, if not as a method, at least as a metaphor in the sphere of education and its study in postmodern perspectives. The reason for such a claim is not the commercial spirit of the concept, but its didactic position, in the study of the foreign identity, wherever it is possible. Europe presents itself in every possible way. In the field of education, it is conducting a real trade campaign to attract potential candidates from Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Bulgarian School is interested in creating in the minds of its students, especially in graduating high-school students, an affinity for a powerful culture like the European one. At the same time, it must at all costs preserve its national identity as a cultural and educational institution and to leave a mark in the students' consciousness, because there is nothing in the field of culture that, before it is universal now that was not national before (Furet, 1993).

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