

The Identity of Franche-Sylvanie: 30 Years of Cooperation and Migration between France and Romania beyond Stereotypes and Xenophobia

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Abstract. The article looks at the cooperation between France and Romania through the lens of the association Franche-Sylvanie. It especially focuses on the impacts of the activities to tackle xenophobia and stereotypes. Based on archives and interviews, the research presents how the actions of Franche-Sylvanie have since the beginning of the 1990s contributed to a better understanding between the two countries in general and more specifically between the inhabitants of Besançon and Bistrița. It gives an overview on the various initiatives undertaken in thirty years. In the last part of the article, the authors try to delineate how the association and cooperation have evolved over time and what are the important criterion to be taken into account.

Keywords: *France, Romania, Intercultural relations, Solidarity, Network*

1. Introduction and context

Ruled by a left-wing mayor since 1919, Besançon, the 120 000-inhabitant former capital of the Franche-Comté region (East of France), has developed a long tradition of hospitality and international cooperation that has become more important after the Second World War when the rather provincial town turned into an industrial city attracting migrants from Southern Europe and Northern Africa. In the 1980s, when its economic shine started to decline, the city of Besançon enhanced its program of solidarity activities to the point of becoming a nation-wide reference with its Minimal Income and its allowances for elder inhabitants. The *Centre Communal d'Action Sociale de Besançon* – the Municipality Center for Public Aid, the local body in charge of these schemes – was, at the time, considered as an example of efficiency in the whole of France. Gradually, thanks to a dense network of associations backing these social policies run by the city council, Besançon has

become an example of international cooperation. Indeed, the long-lasting tradition of cooperatives and militant structures inspired by some of the most famous 19th century utopian thinkers such as Proudhon and Fourier have given to the city a quite welcoming image. Besides, the steadily growing attractiveness of the university of Franche-Comté, especially thanks to its very active policy towards the French-speaking world, the so-called *Francophonie*, has helped attracting more than 120 nationalities in nowadays Besançon thus giving it a quite cosmopolitan look (Fohlen, 1982; Defrasne, 1990).

When, in the mid-1980s, the first actions of cooperation between France and Romania took place with the so-called *Opération Villages Roumains*, a Belgian association that started in 1988 to help Romanian villages, it is no surprise to see that Besançon became very rapidly involved in helping Romania. Obviously, the special cultural ties between France and Romania since the time of the Principalities and the high numbers of French speakers in Romania made this cooperation easy. Officially created in 1994, the work of Franche-Sylvanie has in fact begun in 1990 and the association is still active 30 years later. Since most of French-Romanian associations have disappeared after a few years, Franche-Sylvanie can be considered as a very good and ancient example of cooperation between the two countries that can help identify various perspectives of growth and changes. The aim of this article is therefore to see how Franche-Sylvanie went beyond stereotypes and xenophobia to carry out its activities and to try to delineate the future of Franco-Romanian cooperation. In order to reach such objectives, we will base our analysis on the work carried out between March and July 2020 within the framework of a Eurodissey internship¹. The goals of this 5-month internship were to analyse, preserve and explain the key moments in the history of Franche-Sylvanie to highlight new perspectives regarding cooperation between France and Romania. At the beginning, this internship was meant as merely writing down the history of Franche-Sylvanie but it gradually became an opportunity for the association to take time to think in which directions carry on its activities in the years to come. For us, scholars, it has

¹ The Eurodissey program supported by the Assembly of European Regions offer internships opportunities to young Europeans (from 18 to 30 years old) looking for an experience in one of the regions partners of the project. The objective is therefore to incentivate professional encounters that strengthen historical and contemporary bonds withing the EU <http://www.eurodissee.eu/en/about-eurodissey/who-we-are.html> (consulted the 2 May 2021). For this project, the partnership was between the region of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté and the *Generalitat de Catalunya*.

proved to be a good opportunity to look at the peculiar organization of Besançon associative network and to look at, in a broader perspective, how the relations between France and Romania have evolved since the 1990s, with a special glance at the various representations. We will first present the association through the lens of the project carried out on its history and its memory as well as on its future perspectives. This brief presentation will then give us the elements to analyse the model of cooperation between France and Romania that the association represents and will help us assess the impact cooperation can have on xenophobia.

2. Research methodology at the time of Covid 19

We started the project at the beginning of March 2020. During the first week of internship, a general meeting with the association took place to agree on a methodology, but a few days later the Covid19 pandemic dramatically changed our work plan and forced us to work mainly online, using shared documents through internet and above all Graham Bell's simple invention called a phone. Surprisingly, we came to the conclusion that this uncertain situation led to positive changes and allowed us to reinvent new forms of organisation to reach our goals. In fact, our methodology was based on two main actions that we simultaneously achieved.

The first one was the classification and the study of the association documents. As it often happens with associations, most of the documents were either at the office, somehow archived, or in boxes at the members' houses. Given the 2-month lockdown in France, we could only use previously digitized documents and rely on the members' good will to scan them. For the other handwritten and printed documents, we had to wait until May 11th and the end of the lockdown to look at them and classify them. By the beginning of July 2020, this comprehensive analysis of all documents was finished and it helped us draw a table of all activities carried throughout the history of the association. We therefore were able to know who had organized the several activities, when and how.

The second one was to record the points of view of fifty people that had been involved at one time or another with the association. We carried out both semi-structured oral interviews and written questionnaires. We proceeded in a circular manner, starting from the main actors and founders of the association, the so-called *bureau* (management committee) to gradually move to persons that could be ordinary members of the association, simply friends and that were involved in some

of the association's activities as participant or as partner such as the Besançon international relations office, the Erasmus office of the university of Franche-Comté etc. In the first weeks of April, we spoke to ten members, most of them founders of Franche-Sylvanie or with a long commitment within the association and all of them French. The aim of these interviews was above all to gather everyone's experiences, to reconstruct the history of the association's beginnings, to discuss the future and to evaluate the activities carried out over the years. Then, from mid-April to the beginning of July, we contacted 46 other partners of Franche-Sylvanie, including 30 Romanians and 16 Frenchmen. The Romanians interviewed were linked to the association either by collaborating with the Bistrița-based Romanian association ARFA (*Asociația pentru Resurse Francofone Active*), or by being professionals from Romanian public institutions or volunteers from the association who currently live, work or study in France. These interviews allowed us to obtain a cooperative point of view from the Romanian counterpart, a point of view from outside the heart of the association and allowed us to assess the bilateral cooperation process from the two countries. The 16 other interviews were aimed at French people who have participated in a way or another to the life of Franche-Sylvanie, mainly from regional public institutions, volunteers or workers in the fields of education, health or communication. These interviews allowed us to analyse the current and historical networks from a local point of view as well as to assess the synergies of working with local partners and to try to make a forecast on future projects. Thanks to this work, we have been able to identify five key characteristics that have made the cooperation possible and that we will explain in the analysis to follow.

3. Writing the story of 30 years of Franche-Sylvanie: writing about bridges and special kinds of migration

Even though Franche-Sylvanie was created in 1994, its first activities date back to 1989 and developed largely after the Romanian "revolution" of December 1989. In 1990, indeed, some inhabitants of Besançon that were in contact with Romania decided to create the *Association de Solidarité Roumanie de l'Agglomération Bisontine* (ASRAB). Within this framework, the first convoys of material and the first exchanges started as an interviewee remembers:

During 1989, the first activity was a huge call for donations. 38 tons of material were gathered in Besançon. There was a volunteer move to organize in order to know the real situation in Romania. Thus, in 1990, the organization called ASRAB has been

created as a result of the growing awareness of the political, economic and social situation of Romania².

After a few years, in 1994, this structure gave birth to the Association Franche-Sylvanie, a name that unifies Franche-Comté, the name of the region of which Besançon was the capital until the 2016 merge with neighbouring Burgundy and Transylvanie, Transilvania, the Romanian region with which the founders of the association had contacts. These contacts were often a combination of work and personal relations as a second interviewee put it:

No political motivations, really an attachment to a people, like between two people. A very strong link has been created between us³.

Since 1994, Franche-Sylvanie is pursuing two main objectives thus structuring its various activities. The first main objective of the association is to carry out bilateral cooperation actions with the city of Bistrița and the village of Parva (both in North-East Transylvania) in the fields of culture, economic development, education, law and medicine. The Romanian association ARFA, mentioned above, is the necessary counterpart of Franche-Sylvanie, as well as the various tied collaborations with French and Romanian governmental and non-governmental institutions.

There were different ways of doing exchanges. For Franche-Sylvanie, there were humanitarian objectives and they wanted cultural practice to be shared with Romania, by learning from each other⁴. The close work relations between the two associations grew rapidly and extended to a more political and administrative cooperation and twinning between the municipalities of Besançon and Bistrița.

The contacts with ARFA exist since the year 1991 and we have had a frequent contact to see how people live in Romania. The contacts between the persons linked

² «Pendant l'année 1989, la première activité fut un gigantesque appel au don. Une grande collecte organisée à Besançon de 38 tonnes du matériel. Il y avait un mouvement d'organisation bénévole en France pour connaître la réalité de la situation en Roumanie. Alors, pendant l'année 1990 l'organisation ASRAB a été créé à cause de la sensibilisation pour la situation politique, économique et sociale de la Roumanie » (translated by the authors). Interviewee 1, member of Franche-Sylvanie, 60-80 years old.

³ « Pas de motivation politique, vraiment un attachement pour un peuple, comme entre deux personnes. Un lien très fort s'est établi parmi nous. » (translated by the authors) Interviewee 2, Funding member of Franche-Sylvanie, 60-80 years old.

⁴ «Il y avait des différentes façons de faire les échanges. Pour Franche-Sylvanie, les objectifs étaient humanitaires et ils voulaient que les pratiques culturelles soient échangées avec la Roumanie, en apprenant les uns des autres » (translated by the authors). Interviewee 3, Funding member of Franche-Sylvanie, 60-80 years old.

to the association are very important, in Romania and here)⁵.

Or:

I think that Franche-Sylvanie and ARFA have contributed their part to the instauration of official relations between Bistrița and Besançon⁶.

Besides this first objective, the association has also been seeking since its beginning to contribute to promote Romanian culture in Besançon and its surroundings, through socio-cultural and educational actions such as participation to the Solidarity Christmas Market called *Marché de Noël Solidaire*:

At the Christmas Market, every year since 2001, we wish that the visitors can appreciate the craft and cultural richness of this country to be discovered and to give information about the projects we are implementing. This activity is organized by Recidev, a network of associations for international solidarity⁷.

This activity as well as others such as the *Saison France Roumanie* – a series of cultural events throughout 2019 in occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Union of Romania – are targeted to a wide audience and sometimes organised in partnership with local public institutions. They contribute to cast new light on today's Romanians and change the negative image that they sometimes have in France due to several stereotypes such as a widespread poverty and a high criminality rate. They also give visibility to the association, both in Besançon and outside, and it has had an influence on the institutional relations. Year after year, project after project, trip after trip, the association has indeed developed a close relationship with the village of Parva and the city of Bistrița. In 1997, Bistrița and Besançon became officially twin cities and, from then on, there are every year official visits from both sides. The twinning between Besançon and Bistrița went through a period of intense activity in the 2000s, supported by the simultaneous actions of Franche-Sylvanie in Parva and Bistrița. These exchanges occurred in fields as diverse as health and education,

⁵ “Les relations avec l'ARFA existent depuis l'année 1991 et nous avons un contact fréquent pour voir comment les gens vivent en Roumanie. Les contacts avec les personnes liées à l'Association sont très importants, en la Roumanie et ici » (translated by the authors). Interviewee 4, Funding member of Franche-Sylvanie, 60-80 years old.

⁶ “Je pense que Franche Sylvanie et l'ARFA ont eu leur part de contribution à l'établissement des relations officielles entre Bistrita et Besançon » (translated by the authors). Interviewee 28, Collaborator with ARFA, 50-60 years.

⁷ “Dans le Marché de Noël, chaque année, depuis l'année 2001, nous souhaitons que le public puisse apprécier les richesses artisanales et culturelles de ce pays à découvrir et faire connaître les projets que nous mettons en place. Cette activité est organisée par Recidev, un réseau d'associations pour la solidarité internationale. » (translated by the authors) Interviewee 2

justice and culture, etc. It contributed to shape decentralised cooperation in the framework of programs such as *Teritorii* led by the two municipalities (2001-2007) or, years later, *Comenius Regio* led by the *Cercoop Franche-Comté* (Center of International Cooperation of Franche-Comté) in association with a large number of partners, including both municipalities (2012-2014).

Exchanges are based on a shared discovery of a common job. During the first years, besides the general demand of Romanians (students, teachers) to discover France, the main reason for these exchanges was to discover the cultural working context. In the same way, there have been interesting things to observe in the Romanian teaching system : the relations between parents and professors; certain methods, the important proximity between professors and students, their important role in accompanying them in the following years at school, the valorization of their successes, the preparation of school parties, the “natural”, the respect and the spontaneity of students in front of teachers⁸.

Romania's entry into the European Union in 2007 completely changed the way cooperation with Romania was made. Indeed, France and Romania could apply to the same European funding and it was much easier for Romanians to travel within the EU and for Western European companies to implement plants in Romania, especially in the western part of the country, namely in the regions of Transylvania and Banat.

Before 2007, people needed an association to go abroad like in France and to have a visa. That is why many people passed through ARFA (from different working classes) to go to discover France and that many Frenchmen went to discover Romania. French-Romanian couples were established. Since 2007 and the entry in the European Union things have changed⁹.

⁸ Les échanges sont fondés sur une découverte partagée d'une profession commune. Dans les premières années, outre la demande générale des roumains (élèves, professeurs, ...) de découvrir la France, le support de ces échange a bien été de découvrir le contexte culturel dans lequel exerçaient les personnels. De la même forme, Il y avait des choses intéressantes à observer dans l'enseignement roumains : les relations entre les parents et les professeurs ; certaines méthodes, la grande proximité des professeurs avec leurs élèves, le rôle éminent dans l'accompagnement de leur scolarité ultérieures, la valorisation des réussites, la préparation des fêtes scolaires, le « naturel », le respect et la spontanéité des élèves vis-à-vis des enseignant (Entrevista n°6, Miembro fundador de Franche-Sylvanie, Entre 60 y 80 años)

⁹ « Avant 2007, les gens avaient besoin d'une association pour partir à l'étranger comme en France et pour avoir son visa. C'est comme ça que beaucoup de personnes sont passées par l'ARFA (de différents milieux professionnels) pour aller découvrir la France et aussi beaucoup de personnes françaises elles sont aller à découvrir la Roumanie. Des binomes franco-roumains

Situated only 100 kilometres away from Cluj-Napoca, one of Romania's economic capitals, Bistrița benefitted from this growth. At the same time, Romanians started to migrate to Italy and Spain thus reinforcing the connections between these countries like between Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Transylvania as Adina Cornea demonstrated it in 2008 and 2019 (Cornea, 2008, 2019) or when, for instance, the county of Timisoara was nicknamed Trevisoara and the eighth province of Veneto. The way cooperation had been made so far therefore changed and the framework within which the associations had been working so far was completely turned upside down. Consequently, Franche-Sylvanie had to adapt and developed new forms of partnerships involving more actors and more linked to cultural aspects than before. Between 2010 and 2016 activities such as *Comenius Regio*, the *Festival Destination Roumanie*, and the *Festival de Théâtre Universitaire*, among others were developed in association with a large number of partners: more than before, networks became essential for the association's activities.

With regard to Comenius Regio, the particularity of this programme is that we have brought together different actors and we worked both on the formal and informal. Everything seemed to me fascinating, I was discovering the relations between actors¹⁰.

Since 2016, the association has continued to build networks with local and international public institutions, cultural and educational exchanges have remained active and every year internships for students or activities to continue learning from Romania and from France in Romania are carried out. Franche-Sylvanie seems today quite dynamic and it is striking to note the importance of interpersonal relations in its 30 years of activities:

The cooperation between France and Romania is also the cooperation through friendship, between two cities. The cooperation between Besançon and Bistrița or Parva is lively. It is dynamic. There are authentic bonds of friendship between the cities. All this friendship has been cultivated throughout the years. For me, the motor of friendship are the meetings between people that appreciate

se sont établis. Depuis 2007 et l'entrée dans l'Union Européenne les choses ont changé ». (Interviewee 11, Former president of ARFA, between 40 and 60 years)

¹⁰ « Par rapport à Comenius Regio, la particularité de ce programme est que nous avons mélangé différents acteurs et on a travaillé à la fois sur le formel et l'informel. Tout me paraissait passionnant, je découvrais les relations entre acteurs. » Interviewee 24, Student collaborator, 30-40 years.

themselves, that get on well together and that have things to share¹¹.

This excursus in the history of Franche-Sylvanie and in its current situation raises several questions. What has been the impact of the partnership on cooperation between France and Romania? What was the process? What are the characteristics of the partnership that have been decisive for the cooperation? Should this work be continued? In which way? Which stereotypes and which forms of xenophobia the association has been faced with over the years? How has the association been able to work with the Romanians immigrating to France? Some answers to these questions can be found in the analysis of the association activities and its perspectives of growth.

4. Analysis and perspectives

4.1. Knowledge sharing as a means of cooperation

During this work, we have analysed the activities that Franche-Sylvanie has carried out throughout the years and we could see that most of these have been a means of sharing cultures, contributing to train people and allowing the development of new projects as well as of a network of partners. In order to collect and classify the information, we prepared a summary in the form of a calendar of the association's activities, which also served to analyse the type of activities carried out each year, their impact and their duration. The oldest and current activities of the association are related to the field of education and since the early 1990s, the association has been committed to sharing training knowledge in both Romania and France.

We have also highlighted the work to spread *Francophonie*, which has been a means of sharing common cultural values, discussing political and economic issues, strengthening the exchange of knowledge and supporting linguistic and cultural diversity. In this way knowledge sharing was used as a means of what can be called “critical cooperation”. We came to the conclusion that this kind of cooperation is a way of achieving bidirectional richness as our analysis shows. We have also found

¹¹ « La coopération parmi la France et la Roumanie c'est la coopération par l'amitié, entre 2 villes. La coopération entre Besançon et Bistrita ou Parva est vivante. Elle est dynamique. Il y a des authentiques liens d'amitié entre les villes. Toute cette amitié a été cultivée au fil des années. Pour moi, le moteur de l'amitié sont rencontres de personnes qui s'apprécient, qui ont des atomes crochus et qui ont des choses à partager. » Interviewee 12, journalist and collaborator of Franche-Sylvanie, 60-80 years).

another type of exchange that allows us to get to know other cultures, this time without having to travel to another country, like the activity at the Christmas market. During this market, Romanian trade, culture, art and crafts are promoted, allowing us to get in touch with local producers in Romania and to keep in touch with the old members since 1992 and the new members of the association. Moreover, this activity permits to raise money by and for the association and for the Romanian producers, thus enriching both sides.

The project of ecotourism first implemented in 1997 that promotes local production and exchange of know-how is another good example of a new kind of cooperation. This project opens new possibilities for local participation to develop local agriculture and trade. It is therefore an opportunity to work without hierarchy with Romanian farmers by creating a specific network. The opportunity of this project is amplified by the possibility of learning about the concept of responsible tourism, the respect for the environment and the development of sustainable economy. In this way, the project was planned to help making it possible to continue learning about Romania.

The 2019 *Saison France-Roumanie* which aimed at breaking down stereotypes about Romania and revitalise Franco-Romanian relations is another relevant example. In the organization of the event, a steering committee with all partners involved in the project was set up and this format is interesting because the steering system allows associations to carry out joint projects and also allows the governance of civil society. Thus, this type of project allows a more active participation of the partners, richer and more constructive, as we have seen previously.

The latest example of projects promoting the exchange of knowledge and, in this case, innovative in terms of governance, is *Comenius Regio*. This programme supported the organisation of teacher exchanges, training activities and the exchange of teaching tools. The project supported both by Besançon and Bistrița aims at developing the European dimension of school education by promoting joint cooperation activities between cities, bringing together several of their schools and associative partners. This project, coordinated by the former *Cercoop* with a broad participation of actors, has the particularity to be based on a horizontal methodology shared at European scale. We can say that this way of developing projects allows us to be among actors from different territories, to share cultures and to exchange ideas on the methodology of citizenship education at the level of school teachers.

4.2. From humanitarian cooperation to decentralized cooperation

A second characteristic will help us identify the importance of evolving in the conception of cooperation in order to achieve new types of cooperation that can be suited to the context and getting rid of an assistance-based methodology in the field of cooperation. The information gathered on the political context in Romania in the association's historical archives and the data from the interviews allowed us to analyse how cooperation has developed and what perspectives or methodologies have been used over the years. Today, it can be said that decentralised cooperation is the way to develop Franche-Sylvanie actions. However, as we will see, this has not always been the case.

At the beginning of the twinning between France and Romania, at the end of 1989, and during the 1990s, the forms of cooperation were focused on aids, as most of the actions were aimed at sending material or food resources. However, from the very first years of the association's life, Franche-Sylvanie relied on one of its greatest levers: the introduction of the personal dimension in cooperation actions. This is why, in an avant-garde way, the Association first adopted actions in a critical, transforming and reciprocal logic. We can draw many examples from the activities carried out throughout the 1990s from the training of doctors, actions or the establishment of professional relations in the field of justice to the first French-speaking camps. The first actions developed by Franche-Sylvanie in education were an example for a kind of decentralised cooperation which has, over the years, become a characteristic of the association. The creation of this kind of cooperation has been made possible by the networking and organisation of civil society, two fundamental characteristics of cooperation over the years. This organisation and networking have made it possible to build up the great diversity of the association's projects that have been carried out until today. The fact that the work of the association is based on a network helps strengthening and often facilitate cooperation.

4.3. Networking, a constructive tool for cooperation

Since its creation in 1994, Franche-Sylvanie has built up a solid network of institutional partners in both France and Romania. Civil society, as we shall see below, is also a fundamental actor for promoting and achieving the various

objectives set up throughout the years. This networking is carried out by different partners such as the Romanian counterpart of Franche-Sylvanie, ARFA, the municipalities of Besançon and Bistrița, the cultural services of both countries, the Council of Europe, the multi-actor network of the former *Cercoop* (now called *Bourgogne Franche-Comté International*), an association dedicated to international cooperation and solidarity, the *Rectorat de l'Académie de Besançon* (the entity responsible for state-run primary and secondary education), the School Inspectorate of Bistrița, the Citizenship Development Network with the aim of raising awareness and educating on solidarity issues, the Romanian products association PRODUS, the University of Franche-Comté, several institutes and schools in both countries, local social entities as well as the individual partners who are part of the association or who have collaborated in a way or another as volunteers, exchange, civic service, etc. Thus, when we talk about the work of Franche-Sylvanie, we are not only talking about the activities that have been managed by the association, but we are looking at an articulated and horizontal work with different actors at local and international level, which clearly enriches the cooperation actions because the diversity offers a wide view and makes it possible to join different working forces with the same objective.

This networking is largely possible thanks to the twinning between the two cities institutionalised in 1997. In the field of decentralised local cooperation, a network of active and organised actors is always essential for the defence of local democracy and therefore of local policies. These forms of institutional twinning constitute a form of governance through individuals, national and regional institutions agreeing on initiatives in order to develop common objectives. Thus, governance is possible and legitimate if there is active participation in all processes, that is to say in the diagnosis, in the articulation of interests, in discussions, in the analysis of alternatives and in evaluations.

4.4. The role of civil society: from volunteering to institutionalization

We cannot ignore the fact that this institutionalised work was promoted from the very beginning by conscious, informed and critical Romanians and French people ready to organise themselves, to create projects and to learn about other cultures both professionally and personally. Thus, the driving force behind all the actions is and has been the civil society which, with constant work throughout the

years, can have an influence on the institutional sphere and constitutes a wide network of collaboration between France and Romania. For these cooperation policies to remain active, the participation of the different actors involved in the processes and the search for consensus are necessary. Thus, they share actions and proposals to improve the social, political and economic situation. The various projects therefore become a development tool and an instrument for reducing local inequalities, offering through them different resources. All these projects are always developed through networking and communication between the partners involved, whether they are professionals working in public or private institutions or individuals participating in an individual capacity, such as members of an association, local producers, students and volunteers. It is then civil society that is the driving force behind all the actions developed, as active Romanians and French people aware of local needs for the development of coherent and critical cooperation actions which, through political advocacy, have managed to involve institutions over the years.

4.5. The affective bond and work from informality

At the end of this study, we came to the conclusion that the affective bond has been an element present in all interviews, not only when talking about people but also about activities. Indeed, we could feel a certain form of affection towards the actions developed in cooperation, which is an element that crosses the history of the association and is present in all the people who have been part of it since its creation. All the interviewees report their experience with a certain emotion and a direct link to the activity developed, to the territory or to other people in the network of the association. A strong and permanent emotional bond between all the members of the association and external agents has therefore made it possible to forge a sense of belonging to the association.

This affectivity is due to the horizontal relationships that people maintain with the environment. For this bond to last throughout the history of the association, it has been necessary for this pattern to be established from the earliest forms of cooperation in the 1990s and to have been shared for other predecessors. We can say that the link to the people who were part of the cooperation project and the personal motivation of each participant has been the engine of the actions. Then, the interpersonal issues and the organization of sensitized people from both countries have made it possible to prioritize the interests of individuals over general

political interests.

In the day-to-day work of the association, all decisions are taken by consensus thus allowing a kind of respect for all and listening to all the members, which has facilitated the permanence of its members within the association. In this way, all decisions and actions have been developed through assembly processes in formal and informal spaces. Informality during decision-making and during the execution of some of the actions has been another key element throughout the history of the association. We refer to informality as the way to plan or carry out actions without the need to have a framework in formal meetings. This means that since the beginning of the association, the tasks to be carried out have gone beyond the professional field. Examples are all the ideas that have been developed from dinners, excursions, friendly meetings, etc.

Finally, we can say that the characteristics that have allowed the longevity of the association have been the link between the participants and the fact of carrying out the actions from volunteering with the motivation to learn from another culture. The strong and permanent relationships that have been established between the members of the association and its members has allowed to invest in energy for the actions, but also to overcome the difficulties; with a constant desire to question and invent new forms of action.

5. Conclusion

With this analysis of the Association Franche-Sylvanie, we have seen an example of the characteristics beyond 30 years of history of cooperation with Romania. The knowledge of the history of the association has allowed us to know what can be repeated and what needs to be improved. This work has also served to rethink the future of the Association, as it wondered whether, after all these years, it should continue and how. Thanks to the interviews, we were able to obtain many proposals for the continuation of the association. These have already been and will be used to shape new projects and to draw up a work plan to improve the weaknesses detected.

One of the weaknesses analysed is the current lack of participation by new members of the association and new volunteers. This is a fairly common problem for the association as it is based on voluntary participation and requires a huge amount of commitment and time. The proposal is to open up new activities based on working

with the members' network and to invest in improving the association's communication. Currently, the association has identified the need to train and retrain with new technologies in order to reach a wider audience and thus improve participation issues. Along with the lack of new members, one has to underline the very low participation of Romanians from Besançon in the association: it is without any doubt a challenge for the association.

Besides, in order to continue the two-way work between France and Romania, the association considers it important to rethink the position of the association in the way of cooperation. This means analysing the demand of both countries before proposing an action to ensure a critical and horizontal cooperation. On the other hand, the role of the public institutions involved must be strong in order to maintain the articulation of the network. Another major commitment of the association concerns the mobilisation of young people, giving room to new projects created by them and linked to the objectives of the association. It is therefore important to strengthen the link between the university and local institutes in order to develop this line of work. This strategy aims to give continuity to the association and to involve new actors.

Finally, the last point to be strengthened for cooperation is the one related to the cultural valorisation of activities. For the association, the idea of sharing different cultures contributes to the training of people and allows a wide range of knowledge. The association understands that diversity is a stimulus that questions us, that serves the limits we know and that obliges us to develop new ways of seeing, understanding or relating - in short, of living. Diversity is therefore the driving force behind personal and social progress, a source of creativity and a demand for innovation. Thus, Franche-Sylvanie is committed to continue organising cultural activities and to bring the richness of Romanian culture to Besançon. To conclude, Franche-Sylvanie has developed over time a model of cooperation with Romania that we believe represents a model of cooperation that works between the two countries. One of the strong points of the association is the constant questioning to which the association submits itself and the adaptation to the different economic, political and social contexts. For all the above mentioned aspects, Franche-Sylvanie has been, over the years, a powerful tool against racism, stereotypes and xenophobia.



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