Delta - in general – historically an ambiguous area, a hybrid of center and margin.

- marginality - ambiguous space, could be seen as safe space (traditionally used by refugees, outlaws, people searching for a new beginning or just to lose their traces), a paradise (of birds, animals, for tourists, holidays), infernal space (prisons, war, being lost)

From the perspective of the administrations - a history of marginality, a tradition of soft or absent law, a tradition of freedom, present difficulties with law enforcement – reinforcement of convenient metaphors (“we are pirates”) - a certain pride in lawlessness, marginality, adventure, tax evasion

Another aspect of marginality: the limited control from the centre.

History – Sulina – historical documents mention Sulina as a pirates’ nest, an unpredictable place that could not be avoided when sailing upstream on the Danube – a route that seems to have been of utmost importance on the geopolitical map of 19th century Europe.

- the area was vital to the economic interests of the great European powers. Following the war of Crimea, the Peace Treaty in Paris (March 1856) established the European Commission of the Danube (CED), setting its headquarters in Sulina for an initial mandate of two years. This “European Union” avant-la-lettre included representatives of France, England, Austria, Prussia, Russia, Sardinia and Turkey. CED in Sulina transformed the place into a new centre, politically, commercially, culturally. Large scale technical improvements of the harbor, and the Sulina branch of the river were carried out, tax- exempt status was given, schools and churches subsidized for the various trading communities.
the CED construction and its creation of centrality in Sulina proved to be artificial: Constanta, with a railroad and later a canal linking it with the Danube, proved a much more profitable harbor, and the CED construction collapsed in 1936 with rising tensions in the coalition, with Romania strengthening as a state.

- Northern Dobrogea - hybrid entity - complicated the situation for Romania, since it did form an obstacle for consolidation of the territory, a challenge to the sovereignty and unity of the state.

- During communism (1946-1989), Sulina developed a local industry (fishing and tinning fish, making carpets, repairing naval ships). The demographic structure changed radically; most Greeks, Armenians, Jews – urban populations par excellence - have left the country; due to the communist politics of intense urbanization, the population was heavily “Romanian-ized”, and many Lipoveni from the neighboring villages in the delta came “to the city”, in the 70’s, to find work.

Local ethnicities

the Delta- marshes themselves, mostly inhabited by minorities, by Russian and Ukrainian speaking people, but their networks were limited, their histories rarely recorded, their collaboration was rarely solicited. Education levels were traditionally low, poverty rates high, life expectancy low

- the people from Sulina, mostly coming from the villages, rewrote their identities, downplayed ethnic boundaries, and inscribed themselves in the multicultural and international identity of Sulina. Even when any centrality in political, cultural, economic sense is long gone, this identity of place still survives, succeeds in adopting new people, redefining them, turning them into Sulinese. The histories of Sulina used in this process were originally largely the histories of people now gone, but they are simplified and revived constantly.

- Group memories either disappeared quickly, when people moved out suddenly, or faded slowly, as in the Greek case, because the people lost their connections with their international network, and left behind the production of knowledge, memory and identity

- Competition between ethnicities – religion - (Ukrainians vs. Lipovan Russians)

- Mutual ethnic stereotyping – Greek pride – different social status
- Contempt for people outside the city – the swamp (*baltalbaltareti*) – fishermen vs. seamen (also Danube fishing vs. sea fishing)

**Local identity**

- Under communism, international connections were under suspicion, contact was limited and pressure to identify as Romanian high
- Nowadays: there is the vision of the grandeur and the cosmopolitanism of the free port, and the nostalgia for the security of the communist times (sometimes self-censored, deemed unsuitable for expression/publication in present-day Romania).
- Images produced in the media - of Sulina as the dying city at the end of the world - are felt as very painful and insulting. Those national discourses in turn reinforce the local marginalities, despite the powerful local palimpsest, the generative power of old places and memories.
- The resurrection of the CED narrative is partly determined by the current difficulties of imagining a future for the city: “Once part and nexus of one of the first European organizations, today doomed to isolation, Sulina tries to recuperate a regional identity and position. [. . .] The official discourse increasingly points to European integration, portraying Sulina as ‘the gate of Europe,’ thus reversing symbolically its –both geographical and socio-political – marginality, as summarized in the favorite catchphrase of the locals: ‘We are the first to see the light and the last to see justice’” (Teampău and Van Assche, 2007: 274).
- The new mythology of the EU – the Danube Delta is an EU border-zone nowadays – reinvigorates the CED mythology and vice versa. New promises of wealth revive the stories of old European wealth, and the old images of affluence structure the expectations for the EU future. Narratives on Europe emerged in discussions of the Danube (connecting 11 European countries), of the Danube Delta (as an EU border, as Europe’s most valuable wetland) and of Sulina, with a history of interventions by the European powers (CED)

**Planning** – Sulina - a shrinking town surrounded by protected green areas, ideally catering to the taste of small groups of affluent eco-tourists
- Rampant suspicion, lack of trust, the loss of memories about previous successful cooperation.
- Widespread mistrust and envy - major obstacles for change, improvement, planning (local and regional administrations are very suspicious of each other).
  - During communism, Sulina was a problem. The Delta was a technical obstacle, but also a challenge, an opportunity. There were always reports of untapped resources, despite various failed plans. A history of linkage with the larger world was an obstruction now for becoming a model communist place. The narratives of old networks made new networks less likely
  - Locally, ecological organizations are unwelcome in the decision-making process, one of the reasons being their assumed connection with regional administrations (in Tulcea) that are perceived as far too green, too ecologically inspired, too restrictive for Sulina and the Delta
  - The green actors - focused entirely on nature conservation - locals in general treated as either lost in the swamp, or criminalized. Fishing, the traditional livelihood of most of them, and for many a survival skill, after other job opportunities disappeared, was perceived as damaging nature, and the locals as main enemy of the Biosphere Reserve.

Contact with the world at large, seeing what works elsewhere, and understanding what worked in the past, helps to figure out what can work in the future, how the community can find agreement, can be mobilized, can mobilize others, to define a future.

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