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CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE NEISSE-NISA-NYSA EUROREGION, AS AN EXAMPLE

WSPÓLPRACA TRANSGRANICZNA NA PRZYKŁADZIE EUROREGIONU NEISSE-NISA-NYSA

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Summary: The article explores the issues related to cross-border cooperation in the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion as an example. It also emphasises the need of cooperation between Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany in the area of economy, culture and tourism. Using an example of the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion, the benefits from closer cooperation in neighbouring border regions are discussed.

Keywords: cross-border cooperation, Euroregion, economic borderland.

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono zagadnienia dotyczące współpracy transgranicznej na przykładzie Euroregionu Neisse-Nisa-Nysa. Wskazano też na potrzebę współpracy pomiędzy Polską, Czechami i Niemcami w zakresie gospodarczym, kulturalnym oraz turystycznym. Przez pryzmat Euroregionu Neisse-Nisa-Nysa omówiono korzyści wynikające z zacieśniania stosunków na obszarach przygranicznych.

Słowa kluczowe: współpraca transgraniczna, Euroregion, pogranicze gospodarcze.

1. Introduction

The processes which have been taking place in Europe since the eighties of the last century significantly influence cross-border cooperation. The first of them aims at integration and leads to the dismantling of internal borders within the European Union (the EU) and also the strengthening of the external borders of the Community. The second one – aiming at regionalisation – supports the establishment of contacts between regions across new external borders of the EU. Its objective is to facilitate the intellectual, political and economic exchange with the third countries. Both

processes have a significant impact on the regions sharing internal and external borders and thus contribute to a significant increase in cross-border cooperation which may have the form of intergovernmental commissions, planning committees, or with the participation of regional and local level in the form of so-called euroregions [Warych-Juras 2003, p. 178].

An Euroregion is an institution established to form long-term relations in the scope of cross-border cooperation and steady and sustainable development of regions on borderlands [Markiewicz, Modrzejewska 2005, p. 161]. It may be also defined as a specific type of cross-border region characterised with highly institutionalised structures of cross-border cooperation which are the institutions of cooperation of two or more units representing the regions of two or more states (at least one from each). Each of those institutions is established according to the internal law of their state. They may include self-government corporations (that is single self-government bodies or associations of municipalities [Polish *gmina* – a principal unit, that is the third level of administrative division of Poland]) as well as local authorities that conclude the cross-border cooperation agreements [*Euroregiony w nowym...* 1999]. Euroregions are the effect of progressing integration and, at the same time, its tool. They naturally fill the gap in the expectations and needs of borderland populations and are a kind of link between the unofficial contacts among citizens and the cooperation at the international level. Cross-border cooperation can take different forms and Euroregions aim at solving the problems in different areas of social and economic life [Ładysz 2002, p. 329].

2. The role of cross-border cooperation in the European integration process

In spite of regulations in internal laws, the term ‘Euroregion’ is not used either in official documents concerning the cross-border exchange between the countries or the EU official documents. Although the official terms are ‘cross-border cooperation’ and ‘cross-border regions’, the word ‘Euroregion’ has become the most often used term for that form of cooperation [Warych-Juras 2003, p. 178]. Simultaneously, the term ‘cross-border cooperation’ is usually used to define any mutually agreed activity undertaken by two states that include regions and municipalities on both sides of their border. It means undertaking cooperation or common activities within a specified area.

Cross-border cooperation is one of the most important forms of the European cooperation. It is possible to define three types of cross-border cooperation in Europe [*Polskie doświadczenia...* 2001]:

1. Cooperation at the government or intergovernmental level which is a part of broader intergovernmental cooperation. The states form bilateral intergovernmental

commissions which deal in particular with regional planning and infrastructure planning on a large scale. An example of that is the European Union.

2. Inter-regional cooperation and cooperation at the level of federal states. It includes multilateral structures, such as the Alps and the Pyrenees region.

3. Cross-border cooperation between local communities flourishing across all European borders.

The model applied in Poland emphasises the grass-roots local cooperation in the form of cross-border and interregional cooperation undertaken by local government units [Ładysz 2002, p. 330].

Table 1 shows the basic reasons for the development of cross-border cooperation.

Table 1. Reasons for the development of cross-border cooperation

Reasons	Description
Historical	The borders of nation states divided the historical communities and national groups but did not cause their elimination.
Political	They cause that cross-border cooperation is an essential part of the European political integration process for the EU states and candidate countries.
Economic	Including the necessity for economic activation of border areas which result in economic benefits.
Sociological (social)	Aiming at overcoming mutual barriers and prejudice and strengthening formal and informal contacts among citizens.

Source: [Warych-Juras 2003, p. 179].

The implemented policy of the European Union increasingly emphasises that it transforms from ‘Europe of the Regions’ to ‘Europe with the Regions’. The creation of ‘Europe with the Regions’ means the existence of regions with different statuses singled out pursuant to different criteria, according to the needs and historical conditions of each state. It arises from the principle to respect the national identity of Member States by the European Community [Warych-Juras 2003, p. 179].

The operation and development of cross-border areas, including Euroregions, is an important element of the European integration process [Rościszewski 1997].

Cross-border cooperation should be used to take advantage of opportunities offered by the integration process, to search for solutions and frames for coexistence and cooperation with other nations, to overcome the barriers, stereotypes and tendencies for isolationism, xenophobia, and nationalisms [Broszkiewicz 2001, p. 10]. Euroregions constitute a forum for different professional and social groups – of entrepreneurs, scientists or the youth [Ładysz 2002, p. 332].

Therefore, it may be stated that a Euroregion – as an institution – contributes to the promotion of the European integration process through supporting administrative, economic, institutional, and cultural integration within the areas it covers [Ładysz 2002, p. 332].

3. Euroregions across the Polish borders

In Poland, the conditions favourable for the formation of Euroregions arose after 1989. They originated from the accession of Poland to the Council of Europe and signing of the international conventions regulating the regional cooperation¹. Concurrently, bilateral agreements concerning cross-border or inter-regional cooperation were concluded with the countries that neighbour Poland or not [Osękowski, Szczegóła 1999, p. 121].

At present, there are sixteen Euroregions on Polish borderlands. Definite majority of the Euroregions operating within the borderland areas of Poland were established before the new administrative division that occurred in 1999 (see: Table 2).

Table 2. Chronology of development of the Euroregions including Poland

Item	Name of the Euroregion (English name – if different)	Founded	Area of Euroregion in Poland voivodeship)	Foreign partners
1.	Neisse-Nisa-Nysa (Neisse)	21.12.1991	Dolnośląskie, Lubuskie	Germany, Czech Republic
2.	Karpacki (Carpathian)	14.02.1993	Podkarpackie	Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania
3.	Spree-Nysa-Bóbr (Spree-Neisse-Bober)	02.06.1993	Lubuskie	Germany
4.	Pro Europa Viadrina	21.12.1993	Lubuskie	Germany
5.	Tatry (Tatras)	26.08.1994	Małopolskie	Slovakia
6.	Bug	29.09.1995	Lubelskie	Ukraine, Belarus
7.	Pomerania	15.12.1995	Zachodniopomorskie	Germany, Sweden
8.	Glacensis	05.12.1996	Dolnośląskie	Czech Republic
9.	Niemen (Neman)	06.06.1997	Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Podlaskie	Lithuania, Belarus, Russia
10.	Pradziad (Praděd)	02.07.1997	Opolskie	Czech Republic
11.	Bałtyk (Baltic)	22.02.1998	Pomorskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Russia, Lithuania, Sweden, Denmark
12.	Śląsk Cieszyński (Cieszyn Silesia)	22.04.1998	Śląskie	Czech Republic
13.	Silesia	20.09.1998	Śląskie, Opolskie	Czech Republic
14.	Beskydy	09.06.2000	Śląskie, Małopolskie	Czech Republic, Slovakia
15.	Puszcza Białowieża (Białowieża Forest)	25.05.2002	Podlaskie	Belarus
16.	Łyna-Ława	04.09.2003	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Russia

Source: own work pursuant to [<http://www.mrr.gov.pl...> (access: 03.12.2012)].

¹ Poland became a member state of the Council of Europe on November 26, 1991. It joined the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities and Authorities (the Madrid Convention of the Council of Europe dated May 21, 1980) in January, and to the European Charter of Local Self-Government – in February 1993.

The process of establishing the Euroregions in Poland followed different rules. The ones across western and southern border were formed as a result of agreements concluded by associations and local government unions. In consequence, each municipality joined the Euroregions after adopting relevant resolutions by Municipal Councils. Therefore, the territorial range of such Euroregions was changing over time [Warych-Juras 2003, p. 182].

The process of forming the Euroregions across eastern and northern borders was a bit different because in that case the agreements were signed by voivodes, which meant that whole voivodeships (the first level of administrative division of Poland) joined the cooperation – also those which did not neighbour a border (former Rzeszów, Tarnobrzeg and Lublin Voivodeships). For that reason, the Euroregions in this part of Poland are clearly bigger than those across the remaining borders. The Euroregions across western border were formed when the Polish-German border was simultaneously the external border of the EU and thus the conclusion of the European Treaty, which established the association between the Republic of Poland on one hand and the European Communities and their member states on the other, meant that this cooperation was a pioneering project. A factor that played an important role in creating such a form of cooperation was the activity of local and regional circles (represented by local government authorities, voivodeship authorities, and also by natural persons) [Warych-Juras 2003, p. 182].

The Euroregions located across southern border of Poland were established in new political circumstances. The border with the Czech Republic and Slovakia was the border between the states associated with the EU and was an internal border between the states of the Visegrád Group. The development of cross-border cooperation in that area resulted from – to give an example – the long tradition of cooperation and similar system transformations. The cooperation in the form of Euroregions across the remaining Polish borders is characterised with lower dynamics because of economic diversity in the eastern areas and lack of immediate connection by land across northern border [Warych-Juras 2003, p. 182].

The general objective and scope of cross-border cooperation were defined in the European Charter for Border and Cross-Border Regions. Each Euroregion defines its own detailed objectives of cooperation. However, many of them are common and universal; they include the following [Warych-Juras 2003, pp. 182-183]:

- development of economic potential,
- common regional planning,
- aiming at free crossing of the state border by the citizens of a given Euroregion,
- mutual regional education,
- protection of the environment, etc.

There are many measurable effects of such cooperation in different areas. The cooperation prevailing in the social and economic sphere should be also emphasised.

4. Experience of the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion

The Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion (the ERN) was officially established on December 21, 1991, within a part of the border areas of Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany (see: Figure 1) in the form of community and was the first institutionalised form of cross-border cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe [*Współpraca transgraniczna...* 2000, p. 3]. The Euroregion consists of three members, that is three associations being independent legal entities, whose objectives and general form arise from the common document – the Framework Agreement for the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion. On the Polish side, an entity forming the ERN community is the Association of Polish Municipalities in the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion with its registered office in Jelenia Góra [*Euroregion Neisse...* 2009, p. 5].

The basic objective of existence and operation of the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion is the comprehensive cooperation for social and economic development and continuous improvement of living standards and quality of the population on that land. The version of the Framework Agreement from 2004, that is the year when Poland and the Czech Republic became the Member States of the European Community, lists the common objectives and tasks of the ERN that include but are not limited to the following [*Euroregion Neisse...* 2009, p. 6]:

- further comprehensive development of cross-border cooperation,
- promotion of the Euroregion as an attractive and integrated area for tourism and holiday activities,
- support for the activities which conform to the priorities of the Euroregion with the use of the EU funds and aid programmes.

The Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion is a voluntary association of municipalities, towns/cities and poviats (the second level of administrative division of Poland) with common interests. Their cooperation is based on the equality principle which is expressed in the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities and Authorities. The ERN is of communal nature because the border municipalities had the greatest awareness of the existing problems and the necessity of their solving [*Współpraca transgraniczna...* 2000, p. 3].

The current list of Polish municipalities in the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion includes 44 territorial units (see: Table 3).

The Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion is an area of specific nature. The increasing cooperation covers different areas, mainly the sphere of culture, tourism and economy, where it is particularly intensive.

The border regions experience the formation of new type of social bond which may be defined as a bond of cooperation, mutual exchange and complementing one another. Sociologists do not categorise the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion as the cultural borderland where the cultural values and patterns mix and thus lead to the elimination of national identity. It is the place of intensive intercultural interactions of economic origin covering different levels of social life: social circles and groups,

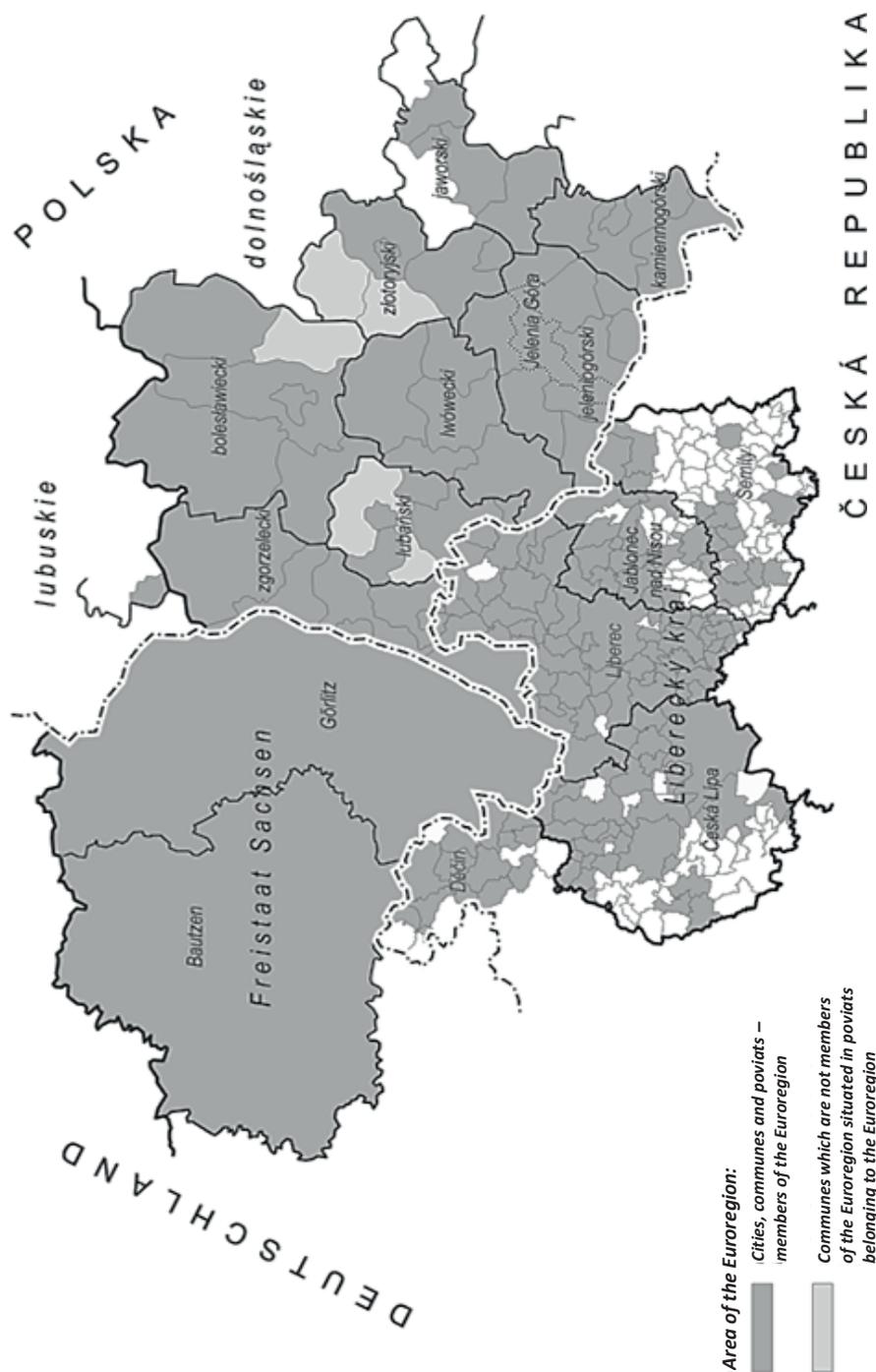


Figure 1. The Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion in 2012 (as of 30 September)

Source: [<http://www.euroregion-nysa.eu/mapa> (access: as of 03.01.2018)].

Table 3. Current list of Polish municipalities in the Nisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion.
As at December 31, 2017

Item	Municipality name	Web site	Item	Municipality name	Web site
1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Town and Municipality of Bogatynia	www.bogatynia.pl	23.	Municipality of Mysłakowice	www.myslakowice.pl
2.	Town of Bolesławiec	www.um.boleslawiec.pl	24.	Town and Municipality of Nowogrodziec	www.nowogrodziec.pl
3.	Municipality of Bolesławiec	www.gminaboleslawiec.pl	25.	Town of Olszyna	www.olszyna.pl
4.	Town and Municipality of Bolków	www.bolkow.pl	26.	Municipality of Osiecznica	www.osiecznica.pl
5.	Town of Gozdnicza	www.gozdnica.pl	27.	Municipality of Paszowice	www.paszowice.pl
6.	Municipality of Gromadka	www.gromadka.pl	28.	Town of Piechowice	www.piechowice.pl
7.	Town and Municipality of Gryfów Śląski	www.gryfow.pl	29.	Town and Municipality of Pieńsk	www.piensk.com.pl
8.	Municipality of Janowice Wielkie	www.janowicewielkie.pl	30.	Municipality of Podgórzyn	www.podgorzyn.pl
9.	Town of Jawor	www.jawor.pl	31.	Municipality of Siekierzyn	www.siekierzyn.pl
10.	Town of Jelenia Góra	www.jeleniagora.pl	32.	Municipality of Stara Kamienica	www.starakamienica.pl
11.	Municipality of Jeżów Sudecki	www.jezowsudecki.pl	33.	Municipality of Sulików	www.sulikow.pl
12.	Town of Kamienna Góra	www.kamiennagora.pl	34.	Town of Szklarska Poręba	www.szklarskaporeba.pl
13.	Municipality of Kamienna Góra	www.gminakamienna.gora.kei.pl	35.	Town of Świeradów-Zdrój	www.swieradowzdroj.pl
14.	Town of Karpacz	www.karpacz.pl	36.	Town and Municipality of Świerzawa	www.swierzawa.pl
15.	Town of Kowary	www.kowary.pl	37.	Town and Municipality of Węgliniec	www.wegliniec.pl
16.	Town of Leśna	www.lesna.pl	38.	Town and Municipality of Wleń	www.wlen.pl
17.	Town of Lubań	www.luban.pl	39.	Town of Wojcieszów	www.wojcieszow.pl
18.	Town and Municipality of Lubawka	www.lubawka.net.pl	40.	Town of Zawidów	www.zawidow.info

1	2	3	4	5	6
19.	Town and Municipality of Lubomierz	www.lubomierz.pl	41.	Municipality of Zgorzelec	www.gmina.zgorzelec.pl
20.	Town and Municipality of Lwówek Śląski	www.lwowekslaski.pl	42.	Town of Zgorzelec	www.zgorzelec.eu
21.	Municipality of Marciszów	www.marciszow.pl	43.	Municipality of Złotoryja	www.zlotoryja.com.pl
22.	Town and Municipality of Mirsk	www.mirsk.pl	44.	Town of Złotoryja	www.zlotoryja.pl

Source: own work pursuant to [<http://www.euroregion-nysa.eu/gminy...> (access: 03.01.2018)].

families, enterprises, local governments, state administration. A new type of social community is being formed in the ERN which has been defined by W. Durka as ‘economic borderland’ [Durka 1995, p. 8].

The shaping of regional identification and regional awareness in the citizens should mainly facilitate mutual contacts. The popularisation of active culturation of traditions influences the development of emotional bond with the region. The realisation of values related to integration is the way to achieve the unity of the Euroregion. The development of regional identity and the implementation of cross-border projects is fundamental to shaping the relations in the Polish-German border areas [Ładysz 2002, pp. 336-337].

The intensive cross-border movement which can be noticed in the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion is an important reason for the development of this area. The development of tourism may create additional jobs, which – in consequence – may facilitate the combating of unemployment problems in this region [*Współpraca transgraniczna...* 2000, p. 22].

Modern tourism movement requires the highest-quality infrastructure and services, including the communication routes and railway networks, airports, information centres, possibilities of accommodation with leisure centres. It also depends on the provision of services such as healthcare centres or shopping centres [*Współpraca transgraniczna...* 2000, p. 22].

Free cross-border movement within the Neise-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion has a significant impact on changing the mutual attitudes. It should be noted that the citizens of the region have a wait-and-see attitude [*Współpraca transgraniczna...* 2000, p. 3].

The cooperation between local and Euroregional authorities allows better administration and shaping of the local development mainly at the level of municipalities. In that scope, the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion offers advanced spatial planning works, developed statistical materials concerning tourism movement,

environmental protection, local government units, etc., which result from the operation of different working groups [Ładysz 2002, p. 337].

The economic cooperation within the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion takes place mainly through the agency of the Chambers of Commerce which also form the basis for the working group dealing with the economy in the Euroregion. The activity of those institutions is directed at the organisation of seminars, trainings and meetings. Each chamber takes part in the search for persons interested in economic cooperation and it is also a place where meetings and consultations take place when a new company is established or when it is necessary to deal with other issues [*Współpraca transgraniczna...2000*, p. 20].

The economic cooperation on borderlands is also supported by the Job Centres (Employment Offices) in the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion, which systematically exchange the information about the labour markets and legal conditions [Ładysz 2002, p. 338].

The development of economic cooperation within the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion is also positively influenced by the regular preparation and exchange of statistical data about each territorial unit included in the ERN which operates a number of institutions whose objective is to promote the information about prospective investors, to act as agents in commercial relations, etc. [*Współpraca transgraniczna... 2000*, p. 20].

Each part of the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion has its own economic specificity. The administrative systems in Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany are different, for example in the scope of effective economic legislation (e.g. fiscal issues, possibility to interfere in the labour market, and legal regulations concerning the development of entrepreneurship) and the distribution of tasks and competence of authorities at the national (state), regional, subregional (poviat) and local levels. Diagnostic works and comparative analyses in cross-border spatial system encounter numerous problems which arise from the lack of compatibility between administrative and legal situations on the one hand, and on the other hand, have methodical and informational dimension [Obrębalski 2006, p. 11].

5. Conclusions

What should be emphasised in the cooperation between Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany is the uninterrupted continuation and regularity of aiming at the achievement of common objectives. Bearing in mind the undertaken activities and decisions of governmental authorities and local governments of the listed countries, it is possible to indicate the continuous attempts to strengthen and intensify the economic relations.

More than twenty years of operation of the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion resulted in tangible successes. Support for projects – mainly in the area of culture

and sports – contributed to the intensification of communication and meetings among people.

Short description of the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion given in this article leads to the conclusion that it is an important, intriguing and exciting area of research. The observation of life on borderlands may be the grounds for outlining the regularities concerning the future of the European cultures and the directions of their transformations. What happens on the ethnic and cultural borderlands and in the state-border areas anticipates social, cultural, and sometimes even economic and political changes. This special appeal of Euroregions causes that they will not lose their central position in research programmes of numerous academic centres.

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