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Local Collaboration Between Municipalities and Counties of Warmia and Mazury Voivodship and Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation

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**LOCAL COLLABORATION BETWEEN
MUNICIPALITIES AND COUNTIES OF WARMIA
AND MAZURY VOIVODSHIP AND KALININGRAD
OBLAST OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

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Key words: foreign collaboration, local collaboration, collaboration with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation.

A b s t r a c t

The paper presents the diagnosis of foreign collaboration of Warmia and Mazury voivodship with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation. The studies were carried out during the period of April–June 2006. During the period covered, 40% of municipalities and over 70% of counties had collaboration with foreign partners established. The estimates showed that only 33% of municipalities and 66% of counties were involved in active collaboration with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation. The municipalities and counties noticed the benefits of collaboration, in the order of priority, in the areas of: culture, tourism, education, economy, border crossings, environment protection and territorial government. The administrative units mentioned also supported local entrepreneurs (organized exhibitions, joint trips) and diverse entities (schools, museums, houses of culture) searching for opportunities of collaboration with the Oblast. Initiatives concerning joint preparation of projects involving the use of European Union funds were also supported.

**LOKALNA WSPÓŁPRACA GMIN I POWIATÓW
WOJEWÓDZTWA WARMIŃSKO-MAZURSKIEGO Z OBWODEM KALININGRADZKIM
FEDERACJI ROSYJSKIEJ**

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Słowa kluczowe: współpraca zagraniczna, współpraca lokalna, współpraca z Obwodem Kaliningradzkim FR.

A b s t r a k t

W artykule przedstawiono diagnozę współpracy woj. warmińsko-mazurskiego z Obwodem Kaliningradzkim Federacji Rosyjskiej (FR). Badania przeprowadzono od kwietnia do czerwca 2006 r. W analizowanym okresie 40% gmin oraz ponad 70% powiatów nawiązało współpracę z partnerami zagranicznymi, lecz tylko 33% gmin oraz 66% powiatów aktywnie współpracowało z Obwodem Kaliningradzkim FR. Gminy i powiaty dostrzegały korzyści ze współpracy w sferach: kultury, turystyki, oświaty, gospodarki, przejść granicznych, ochrony środowiska, samorządu terytorialnego. Wspierano również miejscowych przedsiębiorców (organizowano targi, wspólne wyjazdy), różnorodne podmioty (szkoły, muzea, domy kultury) poszukujące współpracy z Obwodem Kaliningradzkim oraz podejmujące inicjatywy dotyczące wspólnego przygotowywania projektów związanych z wykorzystaniem środków unijnych.

Introduction

Currently, foreign collaboration is an important element of economic integration. It is, among others, the tool for obtaining and exchange of information. It also secures the flow of experience and facilitates development of tourism. It leads to cultural and educational development of the region and is a tool of promotion. The above-listed functions fulfilled by foreign collaboration result also in its contribution to the economic development of the region.

As a consequence, foreign collaboration can be treated as a measure of situation in international relations, both political and economic, and the indicator of the evolution in widely understood social-cultural area. For those reasons that collaboration deserves particular attention. This applies in particular to local collaboration, which is understood in this paper as all forms of crossborder contacts highlighting at the same time that "local" means territorially and institutionally limited coverage of the crossborder contacts as in this specific case it covered collaboration between Warmia and Mazury voivodship and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation.

Until the end of 1980s, because of political considerations, the scope of the collaboration was small. The Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation had the status of a special military zone and the closed character of the border made wider and unrestricted collaboration difficult. All the contacts were limited and formalized, conditioned by ideological factors. Only the transformations at the turn of 1980s and 1990s caused elimination of the rigors of closed area and increased interest in the Oblast, which was expressed, among others, in establishment of contacts by a variety of regional and local entities¹.

The Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation is an important area for Warmia and Mazury voivodship from geopolitical and geo-economic perspec-

¹ For example the Collaboration Agreement between the Voivod of Olsztyn and the head of the administration of the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation.

tive. Mutual collaboration is becoming important in both bilateral and multi-lateral dimension considering the European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

Methodology of studies

The study assumed that as a consequence of common historical heritage as well as political and economic role, Warmia and Mazury voivodship and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation can implement active collaboration justified by geographic, economic, administrative and political considerations.

The paper aims at presenting the diagnosis of collaboration between Warmia and Mazury voivodship and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation with special focus on the scope, forms and development of the local collaboration of the voivodship with the Kaliningrad Oblast. An attempt was also made to identify the basic barriers hindering the collaboration.

Individual interviews represented the basic research method in data collection. The technique used was the in depth interview targeted at all mayors of the counties in the voivodship (mayors or their deputies), i.e. 21 entities: two cities with the status of a county (Olsztyn and Elbląg) and 19 counties as well as towns and municipalities – mayors and persons responsible for contacts with the Kaliningrad Oblast in 16 urban municipalities, 33 urban-rural municipalities and 67 rural municipalities. Entities that implement formal and informal collaboration were included among the entities covered. The interview questionnaire was the research tool applied.

Conditions of local collaboration based on the example of Warmia and Mazury voivodship and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation

The collaboration between Warmia and Mazury voivodship and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation is influenced by numerous important factors that, after SZUL (2001) can be divided into the following groups:

1. economic factors, concerning the level of development of both Warmia and Mazury voivodship and the Kaliningrad Oblast, including among others the differences in prices, wages, exchange rates and unemployment level;
2. political factors, influence of the general political atmosphere at the government level on Polish-Russian collaboration at the local level;

3. geographic factors, including e.g. border infrastructure, roads and first of all the capacity of border crossings on the Polish and the Russian side,

4. socio-cultural factors, that is the stereotypes and mutual reservations (ZABIELSKA, WALDZIŃSKI 2004);

5. institutional factors, mainly visa and customs regulations determining the status of the border and their influence on the intensity of Polish-Russian contacts, balance of competences of the regional authorities and local partners in collaboration².

The above factors determine the intensity, forms and relations between the participants in the collaboration.

Results of studies and discussion

Foreign collaboration of Warmia and Mazury voivodship, which is the continuation of the assumptions of the foreign policy of the State, represents a very important element if the social and economic development strategy of the voivodship. The directions determined in it had lead to specification of tasks and areas of collaboration. They include, first of all, creating favorable conditions for attracting foreign capital and activities supporting the increase of the role of the voivodship in the Baltic Sea area and in the regional international structures (*Resolution...* 2002). This is included in the *Priorities of foreign collaboration of the voivodship* taking into account the territorial and national specificity of the voivodship, the current experience in foreign collaboration of former voivodships (now included in Warmia and Mazury voivodship) and the available economic and cultural potential.

The initiatives of the voivodship aimed at collaboration with the Oblast are subject to periodic verification and complementing while maintaining the stability of general development goals (*Updated Strategy...* 2005). The major areas include (*Resolution...* 2002):

- modernization of technical and transport infrastructure,
- tourism oriented initiatives,
- support to non-government organizations,
- maintaining the links with Poles living abroad by the territorial government of the voivodship.

Adequate activities at the regional level aiming at establishing conditions for collaboration with the Oblast release initiatives of local governments to

² In foreign collaboration the governor as the head of the Oblast administration is the partner for the Polish voivod and the voivodship territorial government because his competences match those of the marshal and those of the voivod. Despite the special scope of authority the governor is highly dependent on the federal authorities. For example, he does not administer border crossings as Polish voivod, which is a certain limitation.

establish collaboration at the local scale. They are limited to establishment bilateral contacts between towns and municipalities as well as making agreements in various areas. In case of municipalities and counties of Warmia and Mazury voivodship the results of such initiatives are (ZABIELSKA, WOJARSKA 2006):

- signing long-term collaboration agreements by, among others, Olsztyn and Elbląg with Kaliningrad in areas such as economy and trade, culture and education;
- organization of the days of Russian towns, among others, Kaliningrad, Prawdińsk, Bagrationowsk, Żelaznodorożnyj, within the frameworks of which specific companies present their economic and trade capacities;
- making local agreements.

This is confirmed by studies showing that among all the units of territorial government in Warmia and Mazury voivodship, ca. 45% have foreign collaboration established meaning that 40% of municipalities and 95% of counties collaborate with foreign partners (Fig. 1).

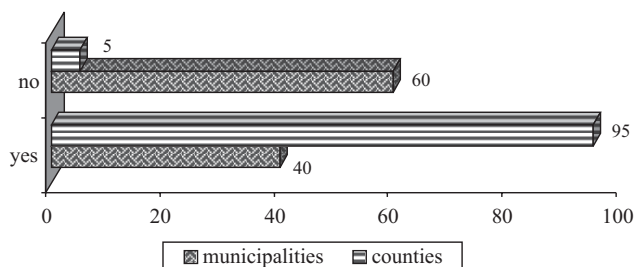


Fig. 1. Percentage of municipalities declaring established foreign collaboration
Source: Own work based on own studies.

Collaboration is more often declared by urban and urban-rural municipalities, which is presented in Figure 2.

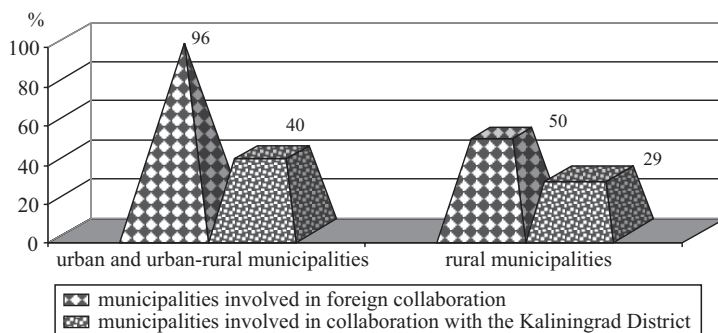


Fig. 2. Percentage of municipalities involved in foreign collaboration
Source: Own work based on own studies.

Estimates show that only 33% of all municipalities are involved in active collaboration with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation while 3% of them are located along the border. And for those municipalities situated near the border the collaboration with the Oblast is of key importance. The border municipalities share the opinion that the collaboration offers an opportunity for their development.

Municipalities initiating collaboration with a selected entity in the Kaliningrad Oblast base that collaboration on either formal or informal agreements³. Formal collaboration during the period covered was implemented by 23 municipality governments while the informal one was implemented in 7 municipalities.

In the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation there are three types of territorial government units with which municipalities from Warmia and Mazury voivodship have established formal or informal collaboration:

- towns – Kaliningrad, Pioniersk, Sowietusk,
- urban circuits – Baltijsk, Swietłowski, Swietłogorsk,
- areas – Bagrationowski, Czerniachowski, Gusiew, Krasnoznamieński, Niemań, Niestierowski, Oziersk, Polessk, Prawdiński, Zielonograd.

The most active territorial entities on the Polish side were those of: Bartoszyce, Banie Maurskie, Braniewo, Górowo Iławeckie, Lidzbark Warmiński, as well as Gołdap, Kowale Oleckie, Olsztynek, Sępole and Wegorzewo.

On the basis of the studies it can be said that accession of Poland to the European Union had a favorable influence on the activity of municipalities in obtaining funds for development of crossborder collaboration with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation. According to over 40% of the representatives of territorial governments, “after accession of Poland to the European Union it is easier to obtain funds for development of collaboration”. Before the accession, 40% of municipalities from Warmia and Mazury voivodship collaborating with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation applied for EU funds while after the accession that percentage was over 50%.

The studies conducted showed that bodies of municipal government implement collaboration with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation through visits, consultations and mutual assistance on issues of the border area.

The studies on activities of 21 counties in the voivodship in relation to the Oblast show that out of 19 ordinary counties involved in foreign collaboration 14 maintain contacts with the Russian enclave representing over 70% of

³ Informal agreements are usually agreements based on loyalty of each of the parties concerning implementation of specific projects, e.g. joint planning, coordination of activities, consultations or agreement of positions. The parties solve specific problems without contracting legal liabilities.

counties involved in foreign collaboration (Fig. 3). Cities that are counties – Olsztyn and Elbląg – have partnership agreements and together with Elbląg area county and Nowe Miasto county participate in the Association of the Municipalities of the Republic of Poland members of Euroregion Baltic. Nine counties belong to the Association of Border Territorial Governments Euroregion Łyna – Ława. Only 5 counties: Działdowo, Iława, Mrągowo, Nidzica and Szczytno reported entire lack of contacts with the Oblast. It should be highlighted, however, that the majority of all counties covered declared willingness to establish collaboration with territorial governments in the Oblast in the future.

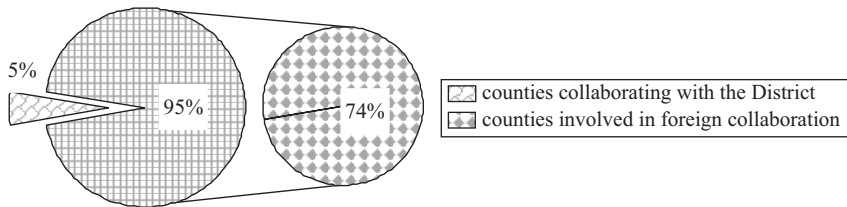


Fig. 3. Percentage of counties declaring established collaboration

Source: Own work based on own studies.

Analyzing the current status of the contacts between the counties of Warmia and Mazury voivodship with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation it should be assumed that to a large extent it is conditioned by the period of functioning of those structures in Poland. The analyzed period is too short to allow development of significant forms of mutual collaboration. The more so as counties of Węgorzewo, Olecko as well as Gołdap and Giżycko in their present shape have been in existence even shorter.

Activities of county governments cover independent initiatives as well as projects organized jointly with municipalities. Those cover in particular:

- cultural, educational and sports events – mainly by counties of Bartoszyce, Braniewo, Giżycko, Gołdap, Kętrzyn, Lidzbark, Olsztyn, Ostróda, Węgorzewo and the towns of Elbląg and Olsztyn;
- promotion of tourism and ecological projects – mainly by counties of Giżycko, Gołdap, Kętrzyn, Węgorzewo and the towns of Elbląg and Olsztyn;
- support to local entrepreneurs – mainly by counties of Bartoszyce, Kętrzyn and the towns of Elbląg and Olsztyn;
- activities for development of border infrastructure – mainly by counties of Bartoszyce, Gołdap, Węgorzewo and the town of Elbląg;
- activities for development of transport infrastructure;

- collaboration of emergency services – mainly by counties of Kętrzyn and Węgorzewo;
- exchange of experience in operation of local administration – all 14 counties involved in collaboration.

The information collected during the study indicates that representatives of the counties see their role mainly as that of the initiator for establishing the contacts⁴. The major form of current contacts between counties of Warmia and Mazury voivodship and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation is the mutual visits of working type or visits on the occasion of local celebrations.

The level of development of the collaboration does not match, however the potential for it. This results from the fact of existence of numerous obstacles and barriers that accompany the discussed collaboration⁵. The legal-administrative barrier was considered the most important (79%). According to the respondents the so-called political factor is of major importance. Tensions at central government level do not remain without influence on collaboration at local level. Additionally, implementation of the visa system hinders mutual collaboration. Lack of funds was ranked second among the barriers (69%). It was followed by limited access to information on the Russian partner (66%) and lack of support from the State (42%). Psychological barriers were ranked the least important (Tab. 1).

Table 1

Barriers to mutual collaboration (in %)

Barriers	Share in %*
Legal-administrative	79
Financial	69
Limited access to information on the partner	66
Lack of support by the State	42
Difficulties in finding partners for collaboration	35
Psychological barriers	28

* The respondents could express their opinion concerning each answer if they believed the barrier exists.

Source: Own work based on own studies.

According to the opinion of the majority of respondents, the quality and intensity of exchange depend on limitation or even liquidation of the existing barriers. This also covers improvement of the so-called political climate. The

⁴ Individual activity of people sitting in bodies of the counties who continue personal contacts established before establishment of those structures gains importance.

⁵ The study covered 37 units of territorial government possessing agreements with partners in the Oblast.

optimistic aspect is that the vast majority of entities covered were in favor of intensification of the collaboration in the future. Where there has been no such collaboration so far, willingness of establishing it was declared.

Analyzed municipalities and counties see benefits from collaboration in the following order: in the area of culture, tourism, education, economy, border crossings, environment protection and territorial government. The municipalities in particular support local entrepreneurs (organize exhibitions, joint trips) and various entities (schools, museums, houses of culture) searching for collaboration with the Oblast. In the most frequent area of collaboration – cultural events, contacts are diversified and frequent. They include meetings and exchange of the youth, artistic activities and folk events. Events organized by schools, sports events, fairs and exhibitions are also highly popular.

The results of all the projects include:

- development of crossborder collaboration,
- working meetings of representatives of local authorities serving exchange of experiences or coordination of current activities,
- participation in scientific conferences, research programs, economic symposia and seminars organized at both sides of the border.

The institutions with outstanding position in the field of collaboration are the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Museum of Folk Culture in Węgorzewo, Voivodship Public Library in Olsztyn and houses of culture⁶.

According to the opinions expressed by representatives of municipalities and counties of Warmia and Mazury voivodship, Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Kaliningrad plays an important role in initiating and promoting mutual contacts.

Summary and conclusions

The studies conducted allow formulating the following conclusions:

1. In summarizing the collaboration at the local level it is worth reminding that out of 21 counties in the voivodship 14 have established contacts with partners from the Kaliningrad Oblast, including 2 towns that are counties. All the border counties, i.e. those the northern borders of which are the border of the State, implement collaboration with the Russian partners while counties that have no contacts with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation are mainly situated in the southern part of the voivodship. Geographic nearness then determines the collaboration. Additionally, in the counties

⁶ Among others the House of Culture in Gołdap with Houses of Culture in the towns of: Gusiew, Oziersk and Niestirów.

where border crossings exist or their construction is planned the issues related to that motivate collaboration with Oblast administration and territorial government structures there.

2. Also the individual activity of people in the county authorities who continue personal contacts established still before establishment of county structures is important. The role of counties is frequently limited to initiating and promoting contacts implemented by organizational units responsible to them such as schools, museums, social aid homes or emergency services.

3. Municipalities as the longest existing tier of territorial government in Poland are the leaders as concerns the history of local collaboration. For some of them (particularly Bartoszyce, Gołdap) opening of border crossings in their areas was particularly important as the stimulus for initiating collaboration. 23 municipalities of Warmia and Mazury voivodship have established partnership agreements with the Russian enclave. Those situated the closest to the border are the most active ones: Bartoszyce, Gołdap, Węgorzewo. Those municipalities support cultural, educational and sports initiatives as well as local entrepreneurs interested in the market of the Kaliningrad Oblast.

4. The possibilities resulting from joint application for European Union aid funds represents an important motivation for establishment of collaboration by municipalities and counties. The accession of Poland to the European Union also had a positive effect on activities of those territorial government units in the area of applying for funding for development of collaboration.

5. The basic barriers to collaboration at the local level include legal-administrative and financial barriers while psychological barriers do not pose an important problem.

6. In view of the studies conducted it can be stated that lack of long-term vision for using the existing opportunities and as a consequence of filling the institutional frameworks with specific contents has been the important obstacle to development of collaboration between Warmia and Mazury voivodship and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation. Promotion of the region and activation of regional collaboration would be possible thanks to development of support tools. The character of the Oblast as an enclave and internationalization of its problems additionally determine the specific circumstances of the collaboration. The common heritage of the East Prussia, however, forms the additional base on which the relations of local identity are shaped.

Municipalities and counties of the voivodship, through collaboration with partners from the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation achieve benefits using their cultural, educational and tourist potential.

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