

The importance of cross-border strategies based on the example of the analysis of the Development Strategy of the Euroregion "Beskidy" for 2016-2023 and the Strategy of the Euroregion "Beskidy" for the period 2021-2027 with a vision until 2030

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Abstract— The article presents two strategies for the development of cross-border cooperation in the Euroregion "Beskidy", in particular it shows what the Euroregion is in general, then briefly refers to other forms of cooperation, and then characterizes both documents in more detail. Initially, it was defined what the strategy is, what role it plays in the case of cross-border cooperation structures, and the mission of cooperation within the Euroregion "Beskidy", as well as key projects aimed at the development of tourism, culture, sports and education.

Keywords— cross-border cooperation, Euroregion "Beskidy", development strategy, development, cooperation mission, cross-border projects.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cross-border cooperation implemented since 1991 in the Polish borderlands has undergone many changes, both of a legal, institutional, organizational and financial nature. They were also accompanied by political, economic and, finally, international transformations, which in many cases led to the improvement of cross-border relations, support for the socio-economic development of border communes, cities and poviats, and the emergence of new areas of cooperation.

In the context of the development of cooperation across borders, the first fully institutionalized forms were Euroregions; over time, contacts between twin cities appeared and the latter had an impact especially on the financial possibilities related to funds (Territorial cooperation programs with the participation of Poland in the 2014-2020 perspective, Musiałkowska 2015 :

265-279), as evidenced by numerous examples of support for local governments under the Eastern Partnership (Taczyńska 2013; Adamkiewicz, Dorożyński, Kochańska, Urbaniak 2009: 229-231) and legal, organizational - there was, for example, the European Grouping Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), which is an institution introduced by Community law, enabling the creation of more formalized cooperation by public entities from different Member States (Zapletal 2010: 15-26; Spinaci, Vara-Arribas 2009: 5-13; Toca, Popovici: 2010: 89 -103; Piotrowska 2011: 187-205; Łazutka 2012: 81-91; Miaskowska-Daszkievicz, Mazuryk 2010: 247-261; Lewkowicz 2013: 45-70; Kuligowski 2012: 47; Skorupska 2013: 107-110). The idea is to make cross-border cooperation more flexible, reduce legal barriers and increase harmonization. As you can read numerous data, including the list of functioning structures available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they are „a type of legal entity established by European Union law to facilitate territorial cooperation and serve to strengthen the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the Union” (Wykaz Europejskich Ugrupowań Współpracy Terytorialnej). At the same time, there are currently four European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation in Poland: EGTC Tritia z o. o., EGTC Tatry z o. o. (Lewkowicz 2011: 204-207) EGTC Central European Transport Corridor z o.o. and EGTC Novum z o. o .

In addition to these examples, M. Perkowski and W. Zoń write about the potential possibility of establishing further EGTCs on the eastern border. Thus, in 2023, the EGTC Nemunas-Niemen (EGTC Nemunas-Niemen) was established, the first such grouping on the Polish-Lithuanian border. Work



on its establishment lasted 4 years - it was slowed down by the pandemic and accelerated by the attack on Ukraine (Perkowski, Zoń 2017: 124-127; Statut Europejskiego Ugrupowania Współpracy Terytorialnej Nemunas – Niemen z ograniczoną odpowiedzialnością).

In addition to the formal framework of cooperation, there are even more informal, loose contacts. As for more formal contacts, cooperation within the so-called partner cities (Miasta i gminy bliźniacze). Generally speaking, the idea of creating this type of associations of cities can be treated as the first step towards the integration not only of states, but above all of nations. The origins of city unions can be traced back to ancient times, within the framework of the so-called polis. Establishing territorial partnerships and signing cooperation agreements closely correlate with cross-border cooperation, especially when the agreements are concluded by communes and cities located in the immediate vicinity of the border (Kalitta 2008: 25-36; Furmankiewicz 2004: 34; Kenc 2011: 143-153; Kurowska-Pysz 2019: 128-153). It is also worth mentioning cross-border clusters. Their creation results from the features and conditions related to both clusters and Euroregions. First of all: "spatial concentration (critical mass in a geographical, sectoral cluster), interactive functional connections (high specialization in the domain of activity, interdependence of processes, formal and informal relations), common development trajectory (common goal, common benefits), competition and cooperation for integration of activities in collaborative partnerships (building a common "co-opetition" culture for the purposes of non-cluster activities), orientation towards innovation (product, technological and organizational support), innovation support (financial, advisory, service, management)" (Połomska-Jasieniowska 2016: 180; Wasiluk 2013: 51-52; Gancarczyk 2010: 101; Lis and Lis 2013: 31-44; Salmonowicz 2009: 153). Cross-border clusters serve to improve economic interaction between enterprises and local governments located along the borders (Malina 2011: 21-30; Kaliszczak 2009: 97-106; Grzybowski 2012: 33-35; Kowalski 2010: 7-8; Knop 2010: 93; Matel 2016: 109-119; Dzierżanowski 2012: 36).

Planning documents - development strategies - turned out to be an important element in shaping cross-border cooperation. They were used to define future goals and formulate key threats and development opportunities. Many authors have written about Euroregional strategies, focusing on their thematic importance - domain or area (Bałtowski, Miszcuk 2000: 89-110; Studzieniecki 2015: 13-28; Olszewski 2022: 65-95; Gasparini, del Bianco 2011). Generally, these studies show that strategies for the development of cross-border cooperation play a similar role to documents relating to municipalities, poviats or even voivodeships - streamlining, ordering, defining new areas of activity, opportunities and potential threats.

The study focused on the analysis of the last two strategic documents, which, at the time of preparing this text, constituted the basis for the activities of one of the Euroregions located on the southern border of Poland, namely the Euroregion

„Beskidy”, this is the only Polish-Czech-Slovak structure of cross-border cooperation so far, integrating local government units, in particular communes and poviats at the lowest level.

II. THE CONCEPT OF "EUROREGION"

As M. Greta writes, „the Euroregion is a unique example on a global scale of organized cross-border cooperation, which, in accordance with the *Madrid Convention*,¹⁶ is good-neighborly cooperation between entities from at least two countries. By signing a cross-border cooperation agreement formulated in this way, a cross-border region is created. However, Euroregional relations are a specific type of cross-border cooperation. (Greta 2013: 5-8).

The advantage of a Euroregion over a traditional cross-border region is that, in addition to signing an agreement, a Euroregional organizational structure is established, i.e. each Euroregion has a management board, a secretariat and thematic working groups. Such an organized structure creates greater opportunities to apply for EU aid funds, both in organizational, substantive and resource terms (Greta 2013: 5-10; Frątczak-Müller, Mielczarek-Żejmo 2019: 36-37). As K. Jóskowiak adds, from a theoretical perspective, the Euroregion can be defined in three dimensions: organizational, systemic and objective. Thus, within the first of these, the Euroregion can be defined as a specific association, organization and structure. Most entities of this type have a secretariat and other bodies - decision-making, control and executive, working groups operate at the same time, experts and administrative staff cooperate. The systemic approach emphasizes the orientation of local authorities and Euroregion employees towards development and developing a strategy. In turn, in relation to the subject method of recognizing the Euroregion, key areas of cross-border cooperation are indicated, which are usually: economic, social, cultural development, sports, tourism and recreation, spatial planning, telecommunications, ensuring security and efficient crisis management (Jóskowiak 2008: 57-58).

Experience and many years of functioning of Euroregions (including Polish ones) show that the effectiveness of this structure affects the pace of regional development. The privileges of Euroregions are visible in economic practice. The main effect of this structure is higher co-financing of Euroregional municipalities from EU funds for all projects implemented under operational programs. The amount of this co-financing reaches up to 85-90%, which does not happen in regions not covered by Euroregions (Greta, Tomczak-Woźniak 2018: 100).

All Polish actively functioning Euroregions (one Euroregion "Dobrava" - suspended its activities) benefit from this privilege, which can be seen in the number of projects implemented and the amounts of aid absorbed. These projects are of different nature. Depending on the region, this may include support for agriculture, industry or tourism. However, regardless of the

areas selected for support, digitalization activities are planned for each project and the operational programs as a whole. This has already yielded specific commercial and development effects, for example in the form of a professional and constantly enriched online presentation common among Euroregional communes (Greta, Tomczak-Woźniak 2018: 100)

III. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DOCUMENTS

The Beskydy Region Association based in Frýdek-Místek and the "Beskydy Region" Association based in Bielsko-Biala, aiming to consolidate the activities of the Euroregion and increase its activity, agreed on the need to create the Development Strategy of the Euroregion "Beskydy" for 2016-2023. This document covers the cross-border area covering the border parts of the cooperation. Therefore, the priority areas, development plans and key activities proposed in the document refer to the entire border area: Czech, Polish and Slovak parts and are implemented thanks to various financial sources throughout its territory. The document includes comprehensive activities that the structure, as an organization, will implement thanks to its activity.

It is worth mentioning that the study was created gradually, starting from 2014, thanks to the active involvement of member municipalities of the Czech, Polish and partially Slovak parts of the cross-border structure as well as the Czech and Polish parts. The team editing the document included: Ms. Dagmar Valášková - project manager of the Beskydy Region, Mr. Marcin Filip - director of the office of the „Region Beskydy” Association, and Ms. Justyna Wróbel - coordinator of the cross-border cooperation program in the „Region Beskydy” Association.

Data collected during surveys and workshops were used to create the document. The strategy does not contain an analytical part. Analyses prepared by various entities in the previous perspective were used to set the goals. In addition, materials collected during surveys and conclusions from workshops organized on related topics were used to prepare this document (Gorzelać, Jałowicki 2000: 41-57).

Moreover, the main goals and premises for developing the strategy were indicated, including: determining priority areas of cooperation, i.e. selecting areas that will be further supported and developed. Priority areas will include development plans and key activities. Another goal is the need to achieve the greatest possible impact on the implementation of development plans by defining the rules for providing subsidies for cross-border cooperation in the form of grants granted by the structure. The strategy is based on the analysis and general consensus of all key stakeholders and summarizes the priorities for cooperation in the period corresponding to the programming period of the European Union. An important reason for its preparation is to support model projects that will fit into the strategy and to seek appropriate, complementary sources of financing for these projects (Kaleta 2010: 28-32).

In the case of the Strategy of the Euroregion "Beskydy" for the period 2021-2027 with a vision until 2030 the main role of

the study is to indicate current thematic priorities and strategic frameworks for cross-border cooperation that are likely to be implemented in the adopted period. The action plan of this Strategy is intended to inspire entities to implement specific types of projects using available financial resources, including not only the Interreg Microproject Fund - Czech-Polish, Polish-Slovak and Slovak-Czech, but also from individual national grants, individual projects or other financial programs.

The study consists of several main parts, which include: characteristics of the area of cooperation, in particular analysis of the potential and needs of the region, analysis of the needs of entities, including a description of actions taken in previous years, vision and goals of entities for 2021-2027, analysis of needs in line with other strategies. An important element of the Strategy of the Euroregion "Beskydy" for the period 2021-2027 with a vision until 2030 is also the project part, which indicates: key results of the analytical part and SWOT analysis, vision and goals, priority areas, tools and key activities.

IV. VISION AND PRIORITY AREAS

Like any document, a planning study of this type the Development Strategy of the Euroregion "Beskydy" for 2016-2023 also includes list of implemented goals, development vision, priority areas.

The development vision within the strategy determines the role of the „Beskydy” Euroregion, which is a place where cross-border cooperation between local government units, organizations and people operating in all areas of social life develops. Thanks to this, its inhabitants can benefit from the potential of the border area determined by its geographical location (Strategia rozwoju Euroregionu „Beskydy” na lata 2016-2023). Moreover, tripartite cooperation of entities within the analyzed structure is necessary for the further development of the Euroregion and the strengthening of partnership relations (Wyszkowska i Wyszkowski 2001: 339-340).

To implement the vision, it is necessary to develop cross-border cooperation in the Beskydy Euroregion in the following priority areas: promotion of tourism in the context of employment growth, maintenance and development of natural and cultural resources, cooperation of institutions and communities in the field of education, nature and landscape protection, preparation of cross-border infrastructure projects, and in the field of culture and sports and recreation, providing public services, including creating cooperation networks and increasing the level of information about the common area. These goals are often very similar in other such structures of Euroregional cooperation. Other entities of this type are about bringing nations together and creating bridges of cooperation between countries, improving the standard of living of local communities, raising funds and implementing cross-border economic programs, or initiating activities aimed at cooperation and exchange of social, scientific, professional, cultural, sports and youth groups, which promote mutual understanding of communities living in border regions (Kraska 2006: 241-242). Educational and publishing activities, spatial development and

development of transport infrastructure, including tourism, improvement of the natural environment and cooperation in preventing natural disasters and eliminating their consequences are also important. (Strategia rozwoju Euroregionu „Beskidy” na lata 2016-2023). In many regions, due to certain features and specific conditions, specific objectives can be found (Greta, Otto: 2018: 77).

Cross-border cooperation must be constantly strengthened through systematic support and creation of appropriate conditions for its development (Derlukiewicz 2012: 9-16).

In the case of the second study the Strategy of the Euroregion "Beskidy" for the period 2021-2027 with a vision until 2030 what was considered most important was the transformation of the Beskids into a strong region, „a center in the heart of Europe”. As part of this mission, more specific goals were also set, related firstly to the need to create a cross-border brand identifying common values, and secondly to consolidating cultural conditions related to the border area. Equally important was the implementation of the exchange of experiences and intensive contacts of cooperating institutions and associations throughout the Euroregion „Beskidy” and the adoption of activities related to the implementation of the principle of sustainable development (Strategia Euroregionu „Beskidy” na okres 2021-2027 z wizją do 2030 roku).

In the case of both documents, the development vision is based on two key foundations, namely the development of tourism, tourism-related products and services, as well as projects related to the promotion of employment and economic development in accordance with the principle of sustainable development.

V. PRIORITY AREAS, SUPPORTED DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND KEY ACTIVITIES

Both strategies refer more specifically to the implementation of the selected development goals; for this purpose, a package of projects has been prepared to bring them closer to their implementation.

Generally, within the priority area aimed at supporting tourism and employment, it is proposed to support the following development plans and key activities: those consistent with the preservation and renewal of cultural and natural attractions that can be used for the sustainable development of the common borderland, in particular reconstruction and revitalization projects, activities aimed at preserving and restoring natural and cultural attractions. Other projects include those related to supporting the use of intangible cultural heritage and in the area of infrastructure for cross-border access and use of the cultural and natural heritage of the border region, as well as a joint information, marketing and promotional project as part of the use of natural and cultural resources, in particular regularly prepared studies, strategies or plans aimed at using natural and cultural resources (Strategia rozwoju Euroregionu „Beskidy” na lata 2016-2023; Strategia Euroregionu „Beskidy” na okres 2021-2027 z wizją do 2030 roku). In other Euroregions, e.g. within the Polish-Czech

structures, you can encounter more formalized, regular activities aimed at cross-border marketing (Projekt „EUREGIO PL-CZ”).

In turn, when analyzing the second priority area, which is cooperation between institutions and communities, it is worth noting that it is about recognizing that cross-border cooperation in most cases does not develop automatically and simply, so there is a need to systematically support it. The task of local and regional authorities is to create conditions for its development in their areas and to support specific cross-border initiatives aimed at promoting the integration of the border region, in particular it is important to support small and medium-sized enterprises, local associations and other non-governmental organizations (Strategia rozwoju Euroregionu „Beskidy” na lata 2016-2023; Strategia Euroregionu „Beskidy” na okres 2021-2027 z wizją do 2030 roku).

In the area of education, it is needed to support the development of professional qualifications at primary, secondary, vocational and higher education levels. Cooperation between educational institutions, employers and other labor market institutions should be supported (including balancing the supply and demand side of the labor market, career counseling). In the Polish-Czech context, it is particularly important to support the development of teaching the partner's language. Education plays a very important role in the area of cross-border cooperation and in building the identity of the area. The activities of educational institutions dedicated to intercultural meetings and joint education of children, youth and adults create an important basis for eliminating prejudices, good coexistence and strengthening the Euroregional identity. This is very important for the development of the cross-border labor market and the revival of the economy (Strategia rozwoju Euroregionu „Beskidy” na lata 2016-2023; Strategia Euroregionu „Beskidy” na okres 2021-2027 z wizją do 2030 roku).

Other activities revolve around supporting development plans related to initiatives aimed at strengthening integration at the local level, tightening cooperation between civil society and other activities contributing to cohesion at the local level or aimed at developing cooperation between public administration institutions. As part of supporting economic development, it is postulated to: promote cross-border cooperation and a common area (e.g. preparation of joint publications, websites), also outside the support area, create information platforms, develop information and communication systems (e.g. kiosks and information boxes, create common databases data), creating channels and mechanisms for the exchange and sharing of information and data, including the implementation of common or combining existing IT systems, databases and other work tools with information and data administered by qualified applicants, in order to improve management and further development of common borderland (Strategia rozwoju Euroregionu „Beskidy” na lata 2016-2023; Strategia Euroregionu „Beskidy” na okres 2021-2027 z wizją do 2030 roku).

The last range of initiatives is aimed at implementing the principle of sustainable development, i.e. planning and

optimizing projects related to cross-border security, transport, spatial planning and development, nature and landscape protection. More specifically, this concerns in particular: promoting cross-border non-motorized transport, including pedestrian and bicycle paths and trails, preparing plans and documentation of joint projects, provided that the activities planned in them are complementary on both sides of the border or contribute to the integration of border infrastructure, supporting activities aimed at identifying and developing cross-border functional regions. In turn, in the field of nature and landscape protection, it is about the development of activities for the renewal of ecosystems and landscape features, preservation of biological diversity, environmental monitoring, among others. preparing plans and documentation of joint projects, using and creating information tools (e.g. databases) in areas important from the point of view of the environment, educational activities in the field of nature and landscape (e.g. lectures, seminars), improving the skills and qualifications of employees of public institutions operating in the field of nature and landscape protection (Bochenek 2011: 92-93).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The presented strategic documents constitute an important instrument for supporting cross-border cooperation in the analyzed Polish-Czech-Slovak region. Their advantage is a general analysis of the area of cooperation, mainly in terms of spatial, natural, social and economic aspects. In addition, the strategies organize and integrate local communities around cooperation goals that are common to all parties to cooperation.

It is worth noting that important areas of activity are those related to the development of tourism, education, culture, sports and local cross-border infrastructure. However, they are aimed at the actual implementation of the principle of sustainable development, including deepening and maintaining positive, cross-border relations. Examples include cooperative activities of schools or other educational institutions aimed at exchanging experiences and good practices, getting to know each other, implementing interesting extracurricular activities and interest groups for children (run by schools), implementing compulsory schooling and extracurricular education in various fields, and other activities.

Other activities aim to ensure social security, create cooperative networks and common solutions combining the improvement of tourist traffic with the protection of cultural heritage and the development of entrepreneurship. Examples of such activities include: cooperation of institutions and organizations operating on the labor market in order to improve employment conditions in the common region and the use of the advantages of the common labor market (e.g. creation of cross-border databases), cooperation for the economic development of the Polish-Czech border, cooperation in the field of security carried out by rescue and law enforcement services. In turn, in terms of creating cooperative networks, it is postulated to create, strengthen, consolidate and expand cross-border partnerships of public institutions, non-governmental

organizations and other qualified entities in the area of public services and in areas that bring benefits to the general public (permanent working groups, conferences, discussion panels, etc.), sharing good practices and new solutions in the performance of public tasks and in activities that bring benefits to the general public contributing to the development of a common borderland (e.g. implementation of new procedures, changes in the organization of task implementation given institution thanks to the transfer of know-how, etc.), activities supporting the building of absorption capacity in the field of cross-border cooperation and activities aimed at removing barriers in the implementation of cooperation on the Polish-Czech border, development of analyses, studies, strategies, programs, etc. as part of socio-economic development economic border area, provided that a plan for their practical use/implementation is presented.

To sum up, strategies, plans and development programs developed for a specific period of time perform many functions, in particular they organize the material, spatial and social scope of cooperation, serve to set new goals and priorities of activity, and also define areas requiring support.

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