

**Regionalization in European Economic Area**

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**THE DIRECTIONS
OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
OF THE POLISH VOIVODESHIPS
AND LARGE CITIES
WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS
ON COOPERATION WITH UKRAINE**

Abstract

Nowadays a foreign policy is no longer the domain of national governments and the role of international relations at the level of regions and cities is growing. For these territorial units, it is a way to build their competitive position in a globalising world. The paper aims at examining the structure of the directions of international relations of the Polish voivodeships and cities – regional capitals, taking into account the role that the Ukrainian regions and cities play in this structure. Observations were made regarding differences in the directions of international activity of the voivodeships and their capitals as well as the dynamics of this phenomenon over time, and conclusions were drawn recommending the involvement of territorial units in international cooperation.

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Bilateral relations with partner cities and regions prove to be only a prelude to network integration which for years has been promoted by the structures of the European Union, first by its support for Euroregions, and in the last decade through the creation of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation. The involvement of regions and cities in the structures of international cooperation can significantly affect the creation of a strong competitive position in the territorial market.

Key words:

Economic geography, partner cities and regions, international relations, inter-organisational collaboration, international cooperation of territorial units.

JEL: F 55, R 11, R 58.

1. Introduction

In recent decades the role of network relations in the economy has been growing. The pace of globalisation and internationalisation processes is increasing along with the opening of national borders and activities of international organisations promoting international flow of goods, services, capital and workers. One of such organisations is the European Union, which, through the creation of the Single Market, has created an environment conducive to strengthening not only ties between companies but also relations in many areas of social development where the immediate beneficiaries are the inhabitants. The European Union, despite some temporary difficulties such as the process of the exit of the United Kingdom from the Community or the fierce controversy regarding the creation of the so-called two-speed Europe, is pursuing a stable policy of broadening the territorial scope.

Ukraine, increasingly associated with Poland and the other members of the EU through economic and social ties, is one of the largest EU allies expressing a desire to join the Community. Although the country's full membership requires transitional periods to adapt the legal system to the EU *acquis communautaire* or to establish the necessary institutions, ties between the peoples of the EU and Ukraine can and should be strengthened more now so that in the future

the process of incorporating Ukraine into the European structures could proceed smoothly thanks to the creation of stable foundations. International cooperation of regions and cities is a significant factor in competitiveness of territories, provided that it is not limited only to activities done for show but results in establishing lasting economic and social ties.

A regional foreign policy can be defined following K. Szmigiel (2009) as part of a regional policy understood as a policy of regional authorities aimed at stimulating the socio-economic development associated with activity of these authorities in the area of foreign relations. These relations refer to a diverse group of institutional actors, including participants in international relations as well as other actors who pursue their goals by means of contacts with organisations that are located in other countries. This issue has become a subject of considerations of scientists from Western Europe (Aldecoa, Keating 1999), (Keating 1998). It has been taken up in the context of allocation of European funds to provide support for regions, with a focus on raising their competitive position (Scott, Storper 2003).

The paper aims to show differences in the directions of international cooperation undertaken by the Polish voivodeships and their capitals (regional capital cities), with a particular focus on Ukraine as an important partner of this cooperation. The paper seeks to answer questions about the current directions of cooperation of the Polish voivodeships and their capitals as well as about the earlier evolution of the said cooperation. An attempt is also made to determine the place of the Ukrainian oblasts (regions) and their capitals in the network of foreign partnership relations created by the most important Polish territorial units.

The following hypotheses have been adopted in the paper:

1. Cities are more active than regions in terms of establishing international relations with their counterparts in other countries.
2. In international relations, cities accept much larger distances to foreign partners, while regions tend to build relations with close partners.

In the first part of the paper, formal and legal determinants of foreign cooperation of the Polish voivodeships and their declared cooperation objectives are presented with reference to the most important legal acts which regulate such cooperation in Poland and the European Union. Then a comparison of the directions of foreign cooperation of the Polish voivodeships in a variety of configurations is made, with a particular focus on the Ukrainian oblasts and cities - partners of the Polish voivodeships and regional capitals. The information contained in the Public Information Bulletin as well as on the official websites of the marshals of the Polish voivodeships and the websites of the Polish regional capitals is used here. It is assumed that the information contained therein is accurate and up to date. Data for the analysis were collected in 2016. It is worth noting that the content of partnership relations does not constitute the subject of the analysis, as these issues are so extensive that they require separate studies using a broader set of instruments.

2. Formal and legal determinants of international cooperation of the Polish territorial units at the regional and local level

The right to cooperate with local and regional communities of other countries stems directly from Poland's Constitution. «*A local government unit shall have the right to join international associations of local and regional communities as well as to cooperate with local and regional communities of other states*» [Constitution of the Republic of Poland, Art. 172]. It is worth noting that each tier of local government (commune, powiat – district, voivodeship – region) has obtained the right to the aforementioned forms of cooperation, and the content of these competences is not differentiated due to the type of entity that implements them.

In the context of the main theme of the paper – international cooperation of the voivodeships and their capital cities – the Act of the Regional Government is particularly important (Act of 5 June 1998). It provides that the authority representing the region (the Voivodeship Sejmik – the Regional Assembly) has the exclusive power to adopt resolutions concerning the participation in international regional associations and other forms of regional cooperation. The duties of the Regional Assembly also include the adoption of international cooperation priorities for the voivodeship (Art. 18).

The empirical part of the paper focuses on bilateral international contacts of the voivodeships and regional capitals. In the paper, the «partner region» shall be understood as a region with which collaboration has been established in a formal way by signing a cooperation agreement or a letter of intent. One of the most important legal acts which regulate international cooperation of regional and local authorities is the Act on the Principles of Accession of Local Government Units to International Associations of Local and Regional Communities (Act of 15 September 2000). In accordance with the Act, the term «associations» means organisations, associations and unions set up by local communities of at least two countries in accordance with their national law (Art. 1).

Although determining «cooperation priorities» is the domain of Regional Assemblies, executive authorities are responsible for their implementation, i. e. at the level of the voivodeship – Voivodeship Boards, and at the city level – City Mayors. They can establish foreign relations using three methods. The first method is a document signed with foreign regions/cities in the form of an agreement, a letter of intent, or a declaration of cooperation. The second method is cooperation established through intergovernmental agreements. They are signed by the Polish government and their provisions can point to specific regions/cities.

The third method is informal cooperation, that is, without the signing of the relevant documents. It should be emphasised that activities of local government units in the international sphere must be carried out in accordance with domestic law, the State's foreign policy and its international obligations within the limits of the law and the competences of the voivodeship. Local government initiatives in this area require the approval of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Act of 5 June, 1998).

Research on foreign cooperation priorities of the Polish voivodeships was conducted by W. Modzelewski, who grouped these priorities in an interesting way. The following are the said priorities starting with the most common: economic development, expansion and modernisation of transport infrastructure, environmental protection, promotion of tourism, development of physical culture and sports education, cultural development, creation of civil society, and contacts with Polish communities abroad (Modzelewski, 2009).

Another valuable publication addressing the issues of international cooperation of the Polish regions is the paper of K. Szmigiel (2009) on internationalisation of the Polish voivodeships. The author has conducted in-depth studies on activity of the Polish voivodeships on the international stage. She estimates that during the study period the voivodeships were at the stage of adopting models of operation from their partners in Western Europe, more experienced in the field of Europeanisation and internationalisation. Local governments of the voivodeships were «students», they failed, however, to take up an active role in inspiring action in the framework of the emerging network of information exchange between regions. In addition, according to Szmigiel, administration of the Polish voivodeships made no attempts to share its experience with foreign partners from countries with lower levels of socio-economic development. It is worth noting that these conclusions were reached nearly 10 years ago and the changes of recent years associated with the stable development of Poland have led to the situation when the experience of this country may be shared more widely with its close neighbours that are just entering the path of stable development.

International cooperation of a region or a city should not be limited to meetings of politicians and local government administration. It should serve the implementation of a number of regional and local policy objectives, such as: supporting the efforts to improve the quality of local government administration operations, stimulating the development of tourism, supporting the cultural and educational development of a given region or promoting its development at the international level (Świaniewicz, 2005).

In the case of neighbouring regions, the list of possible projects can grow even further. It can include, for example, common infrastructure investments serving the inhabitants of the regions on both sides of the border. It is worth referring here to the concept of Euroregions, which for years has been present in the process of widening and deepening of the European Union. A Euroregion can be defined as: *an institutionalised instrument of cross-border region network*

management based on the cooperation of the neighbouring territorial units in the adjacent states (Gałuszka, 2006). Euroregions function therefore as an institutionally organised cooperation network of local government units. In the process of European integration, Euroregions were particularly important before the introduction of the major project of the European Single Market and in the first years of its operation at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. Currently, they are also playing an important role, particularly at the external borders of the EU.

More recently, the EU has established a new instrument focused on the intensification of international cooperation – European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) (EU Council Regulation 1082/2006). The establishment of EGTC requires cooperation of at least two entities (members) located on the territory of at least two EU Member States. The following entities can be members of such groups: the EU Member States, regional and local authorities at different levels, other public law entities¹, and associations of the entities mentioned (Act of November 7, 2008). It should be noted that in Poland the accession of regional and local authorities, or other entities, to EGTC is quite complex in terms of procedure, as it requires consent in the form of an administrative decision of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in consultation with the ministers responsible for internal affairs, public finance and regional development. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is obliged to create and maintain a register of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation. By the end of 2016, in Poland only four such groupings were created (Tritia, the Tatras, Central European Transport Corridor, Novum) (Szewczak et. al. 2016). This means that so far the EGTC instrument has not had a significant impact on the functioning of international cooperation of Polish local authorities, although it is an interesting tool for the creation of networks between different regional development stakeholders.

3. Research methodology

All 16 Polish voivodeships, which in their current form have existed since 1998 when the next stage of administrative reform of the country was implemented, have been studied. Previously, Poland had been divided into 49 voivodeships which had not had the authority of the local government (derived from democratic, universal elections), and had been endowed only with the authority of the State in the form of the regional government representative called «voivode». The said reform entered into force on 1 January 1999. However, in the case of cities, local governments had emerged at the beginning of the political transformation, that is, in the year 1990, when the first phase of the local government reform in Poland had been implemented. The dates associated with the

¹ Including such entities as: higher education institutions, cultural institutions or research and development units.

development of the structures of local government in Poland have had a significant influence on the development of international relations of both types of units (the voivodeships and regional capital cities).

The study has also covered Polish cities which are the capital cities of the voivodeships. These are centres which are of particular importance in the socio-economic development of the whole region. It should be noted that in the case of two voivodeships, two cities are included in the analysis, as the functions of the capital city are divided between these two centres. These include: Bydgoszcz and Toruń (in the case of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship) as well as Gorzów Wielkopolski and Zielona Góra (in the case of the Lubuskie Voivodship).

The study includes the territorial dimension, which required the adoption of the method of delimitation of the territory of Poland and Ukraine based on the division of each country into parts taking into account their geographical location, which has a certain impact on the level of development of individual regions. Considering their particular location (in terms of the centre of the European development) and the shape of the two countries, it was decided to implement the West – East division. Poland was divided into two zones (Western and Central-Eastern), and Ukraine into three zones (Western, Central, Eastern). Western Poland includes the following voivodeships: Dolnośląskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Lubuskie, Opolskie, Pomorskie, Śląskie, Wielkopolskie, and Zachodniopomorskie. Central-Eastern Poland includes: Łódzkie, Lubelskie, Małopolskie, Mazowieckie, Podkarpackie, Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie, and Warmińsko-Mazurskie.

In the case of Poland, the aforementioned division refers to the simplified division into the West – the so-called Poland A (on the left bank of the Vistula) and the East – the so-called Poland B (on the right bank), which originated in the pre-war history of the country's economic development.

In the case of the Ukrainian oblasts, not only their geographical location but also other factors, which should allow a broader interpretation of the studied phenomena, were taken into account. Western Ukraine encompasses the regions adjacent to Poland as well as the ones that before World War II were part of the Second Polish Republic or were located in the immediate vicinity of its border. There are 8 regions in Western Ukraine: Khmelnytsky, Chernivtsi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Volyn, and Transcarpathian. Central Ukraine encompasses 11 oblasts located in the central part of the country along the entire longitude (Kherson, Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Lugansk, Odessa, Mykolaiv, Poltava, Sumy, Vinnytsia, and Zhytomyr), while Eastern Ukraine covers the most eastern oblasts (Kharkiv, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Lugansk, and Zaporizhia).

It should be noted that the proposed division is a simplification, but – similarly to the division of Poland – it reflects the level of socio-economic development of the country. The oblasts located in Western Ukraine are characterised by a relatively lower degree of industrialisation compared to the others, and agricul-

ture has not been restructured there yet. However, the farther to the East, the higher the level of industrialisation has traditionally been. This structure is a consequence of the policy of the Soviet Union in Ukraine, due to the fact that since the country's independence in 1991 investments have been concentrated mainly in the eastern regions of the Republic, directly adjacent to Russia. Over the last 25 years, Ukraine has not received enough new investment projects to permanently change this unfavourable structure.

The directions of international cooperation of the Polish voivodeships and large cities were shown at the level of countries and groups of countries. They were grouped according to their geographical location as well as the level of economic development. This required the adoption of certain simplifications. The following categories were distinguished:

1. Western Europe (the former 15-EU and developed European countries outside the EU: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland),
2. Central Europe (Poland and other 9 countries which joined the EU in the framework of the largest enlargement in 2004),
3. Eastern Europe (Poland's eastern neighbours: Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia),
4. Other continents (non-European countries).

For the purpose of the study, the information from the on-line Public Information Bulletin concerning international relations of the Polish voivodeships and their capital cities, including the name of the partner region/city, the document type which is the basis for the cooperation and the year when it was signed, was gathered. This information was collected in the year 2016.

4. Research results

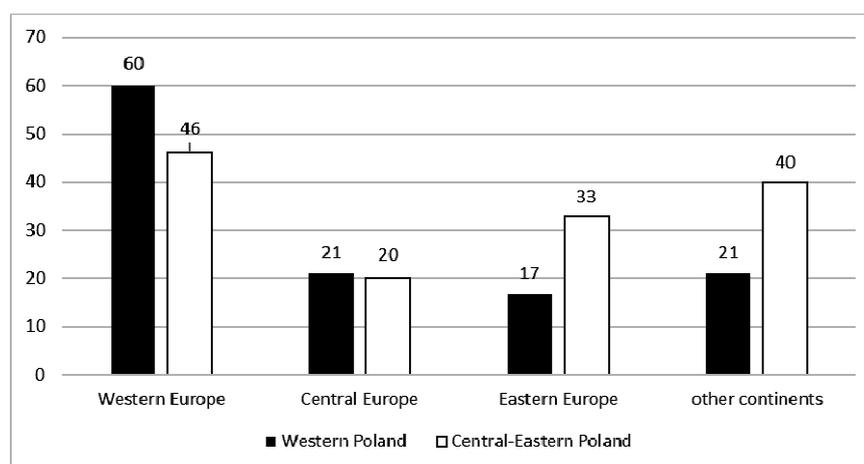
First, data on the directions of international cooperation of the Polish regional capital cities, including the key directions such as Western Europe, Central Europe, Eastern Europe or other continents, will be presented.

A total of 258 cooperation documents signed by the analysed cities with their foreign counterparts were identified. Out of this number, 139 are cooperation agreements of the capital cities of the voivodeships from Central-Eastern Poland, and 119 from Western Poland, which is presented in Figure 1. Among 4 directions of international cooperation, in general, the most popular partners among the Polish regional capitals are the ones from Western Europe. As many as 106 (41%) among 258 cooperation documents were signed with the cities in this part of Europe. It is astonishing that the cities from other continents ranked

second in terms of the number of partnerships. It turns out that the Polish regional capitals, some of which are trying to take on the role of metropolises, are taking action aimed at building their international position, and as a result enter into relationships with even very distant partners. In this category, the most popular are partnerships with cities in China (16 partnerships), the USA (16), or Israel (7). For example, the city of Łódź, the third largest city in Poland, has three Chinese partners (Chengdu, Kanton, Tianjin).

Figure 1

The number of cooperation documents signed by the Polish regional capital cities – according to the division into Western Poland and Central-Eastern Poland – with foreign cities by geographical directions



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Public Information Bulletin 2016.

In terms of the number of agreements of the Polish voivodeship cities, Eastern Europe ranked third (50 relations). It must be stressed, however, that only 3 countries were included in this geographical area: Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia; the first of these is the most popular partner for the Polish regional capital cities. The fourth direction of international cooperation, that is, Central Europe, proved to be least popular. Although this category includes as many as 9 countries, only 16% documents concerning international cooperation of the analysed cities were signed with partners from this part of Europe.

In general, the regional capital cities in Central-Eastern Poland were characterised by greater activity in establishing relations with foreign partners than the ones from Western Poland, despite the fact that the number of analysed cities was lower in the first group than in the latter (8 : 10)². The cities from Central-Eastern Poland signed almost twice more cooperation documents with Eastern Europe or «other continents» than the analysed cities from Western Poland.

In the ranking of cities that have established relationships with partners from other continents, the highest positions are taken by the following cities: Warsaw (11), Białystok (7), Cracow (6), and Łódź (6). For example, among Warsaw's partners from other continents were cities from Japan, the USA, Canada, Israel, China, Thailand, Korea, Brazil and Kazakhstan. The cities of Western Poland have more partnership relations with cities in Western Europe than the relatively closer ones. It is worth enumerating the cities that have the largest number of such agreements: Szczecin (9), Gdańsk (7), and Zielona Góra (7). However, a clear leader in cooperation with cities of Western Europe is Cracow, despite its location in Central-Eastern Poland.

Practically both groups of Polish regional capitals have shown a similar, low degree of involvement in relations with partners from Central Europe. There are even such regional capitals which have no partner in this part of Europe (Gorzów Wielkopolski and Olsztyn) and those that have only one such partner (Gdańsk and Szczecin).

Directions of foreign cooperation of Polish voivodeships are a little different than their capitals and are presented in Figure 2.

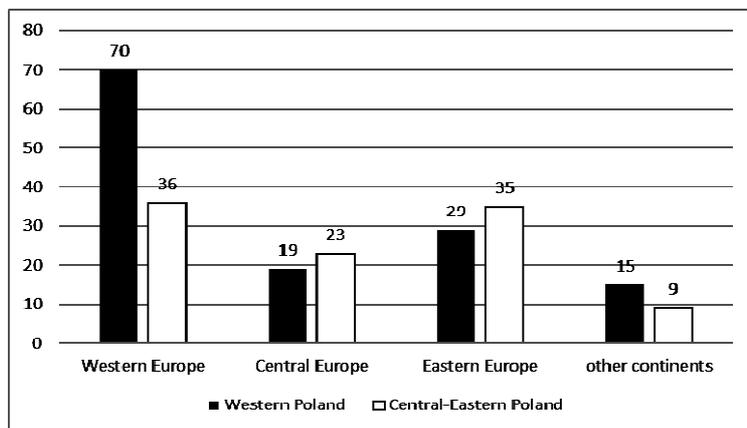
A total of 258 cooperation documents signed by 16 Polish voivodeships with their foreign counterparts were identified. 133 of those agreements were entered into by the voivodeships located in Western Poland, and 103 were concluded by the voivodeships located in Central-Eastern Poland.

The research material presented in Figure 3 indicates that in 2016 each Polish region had on average 15 foreign partners. Among the most popular directions of cooperation, Western Europe dominates. Nearly half of the cooperation documents were signed with regions from this area. It is interesting that among the Polish voivodeships which have partnered with their counterparts in Western Europe as many as 2/3 are located in Western Poland. It is worth noting in the context the geographical location of the cooperating regions and the importance of this fact for establishing the cooperation. The leaders in this respect are the western voivodeships such as: Pomorskie (18), Wielkopolskie (11), Kujawsko-Pomorskie (9) and Zachodniopomorskie (9).

² In the case of two voivodeships of Western Poland, the functions of the regional capital city are divided between two cities, which has led to the decision about the inclusion of partnership relations of both these cities in the analysis.

Figure 2

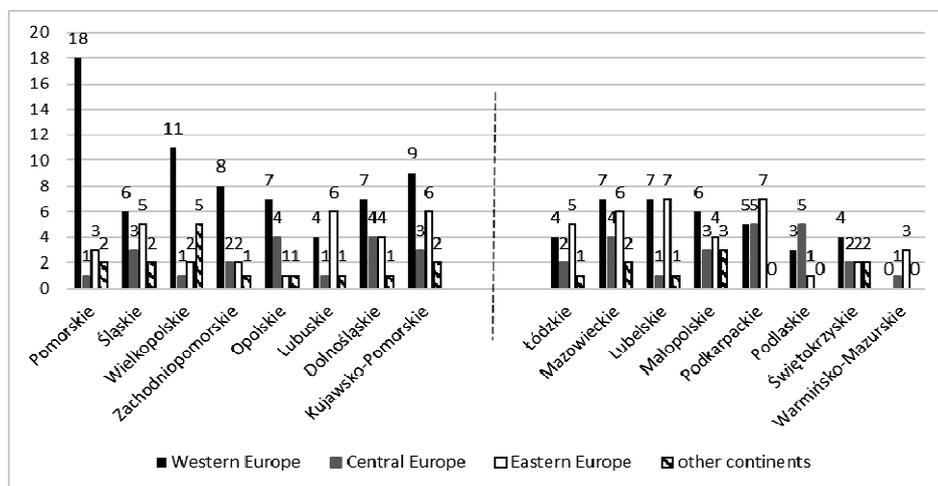
The number of cooperation documents signed by the Polish voivodeships (broken by Western Poland and Central-Eastern Poland) with foreign partner regions according to geographical directions



Source: own elaboration based on the data from the Public Information Bulletin 2016.

Figure 3

The number of cooperation documents signed by the Polish voivodeships (Western Poland – on the left and Central-Eastern Poland – on the right) with foreign partner regions according to geographical directions



Source: own elaboration based on the data from the Public Information Bulletin 2016.

Another direction of cooperation – Central Europe – has not been appreciated by the voivodeships. The number of signed agreements with the regions from this part of Europe does not differ from the regularities observed in the case of the analysed cities. At the same time, it is worth noting that most of the documents on cooperation with partners in Eastern Europe were signed by voivodeships located in Central-Eastern Poland, e. g.: Lubelskie (7), Podkarpackie (7), Mazowieckie (6), and Łódzkie (5). This shows that, in the case of the voivodeships their relative proximity to the foreign partner region is important for cooperation. It is also interesting to note that all the Polish voivodeships have signed just 24 cooperation documents with partners that are located on other continents. The leaders of cooperation with regions from other continents include: Wielkopolskie (5) and Małopolskie (3). Although it should be also said that almost every voivodeship has at least one such partner. The voivodeships from Western Poland seem to be more active in this area. Countries located on other continents that have signed the greatest number of cooperation documents with the Polish voivodeships include China (11 agreements) and others, much more diversified, such as Brazil (3), India (2), or Kazakhstan (2). In the case of the analysed cities, the number of US partners equals the number of Chinese ones (16 respectively), while in the case of the voivodeships only one voivodeship (Śląskie) has signed a cooperation agreement with a US partner.

In order to better understand the phenomenon of establishing international cooperation by the voivodeships and their capitals, one should look at the dates of concluding individual agreements and compare them with the above-mentioned stages of local government reforms in Poland. The timeline of establishing foreign relations by the analysed units is presented in Figure 4.

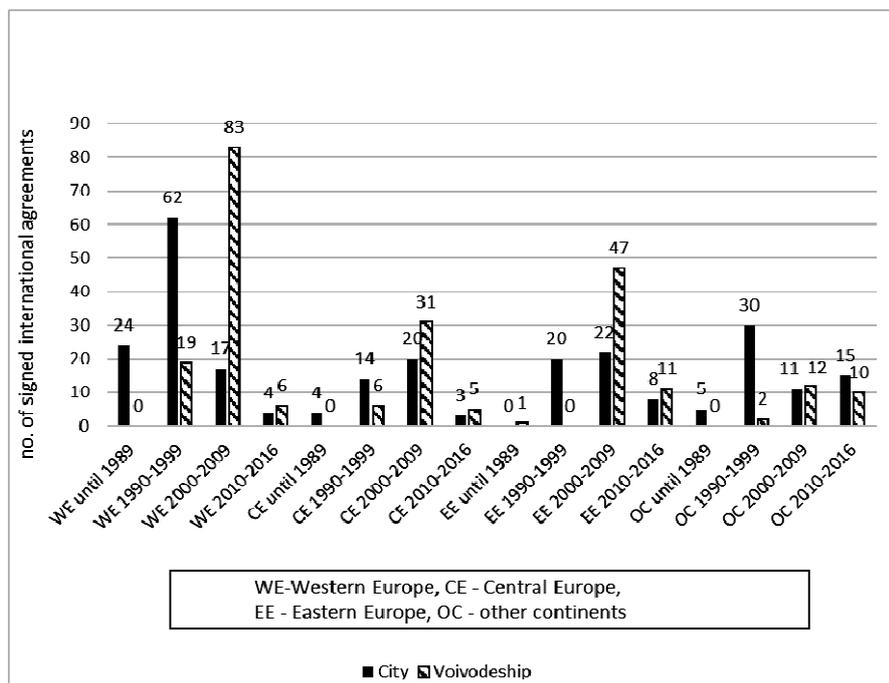
It is also worth examining the periods when the existing partnerships were established. In the case of the regional capitals, relations with their partners from Western Europe were established mainly in the early years of the existence of the self-governments at the local level (1990–1999). Almost 60% of foreign relations were established in that period. At the time, Polish cities established international relations on different principles. Currently, this direction of cooperation has almost completely come to a halt. As previously demonstrated, relations of Polish large cities with partners in Central Europe are relatively less numerous, but their largest increase occurred in the second decade of the existence of local governments at the level of cities (2000–2009). A similar situation took place in the case of relations with partners from Eastern Europe, although in this case certain activity in building new relations, especially with partners such as Ukraine, remains.

The Polish voivodeships in their present form have existed since 1999. Most of their foreign relations were established in the first decade of their operation, that is, in the years 2000–2009. This is especially true for relations with partners from Western Europe, but also with partners from other destinations. At

the same time, it should be noted that in the current, still incomplete decade (2010–2016), a significant decrease in activity related to establishing new partnerships has been reported. The only exception is the relations with partners on other continents, where a high growth rate has been maintained.

Figure 4

Periods of establishing international cooperation by the Polish voivodships and cities according to geographical directions



Source: own elaboration based on the data from the Public Information Bulletin 2016.

5. Relations of the Polish voivodeships and their capital cities with partners in Ukraine

The subject of further deliberations will be mainly cooperation with Ukraine; hence, it is worth raising the question of motives behind establishing partnership relations with regions of this country by the Polish voivodeships. According to H. Dumala, the selection of regions in Ukraine as partners for international cooperation was dictated by the desire to create opportunities for enterprises (e. g.: potential outlets) as well as the possibility of implementing joint programmes and undertakings financed by European funds. The Polish voivodeships can play the role of «an active intermediary between the regions of the East and West of Europe» (Dumala 2009). These studies have shown that the following countries are leaders among European partners: Germany, Ukraine, France and Italy. All the voivodeships that have identified specific regional cooperation partners have included among their geographical priorities German Länder and Ukrainian oblasts. According to this author, among foreign partners, the territorial units from Ukraine ranked highest. At the time of the study, the Polish voivodeships mentioned³ 15 out of 24 Ukrainian regions. The most commonly chosen regions were the Lviv Oblast (3 times) and the Odessa Oblast (2 times).

It should be pointed out that at present all the Polish regional capitals have relations with cities in Ukraine. Each regional capital in Central-Eastern Poland has statistically approx. 2 partner cities, while the regional capitals in Western Poland only little over one. The undisputed leader among Polish capital cities is Lublin, which has 5 such relations. The following cities ranked successively lower: Rzeszów (3), Łódź (2) and Bydgoszcz (2). The regional capital cities have 26 relations with cities in Ukraine, while the Polish voivodeships have as many as 38 relations with their counterparts, that is, the Ukrainian oblasts. In the case of the voivodeships from Central-Eastern Poland, statistically each of them has two partners in Ukraine, and each region from Western Poland has approx. 3 such partners. The following voivodeships from Central-Eastern Poland are the most active in establishing relations with regions in Ukraine: Podkarpackie (6), Lubelskie (5), Łódzkie (4), and Mazowieckie (4). In Western Poland, the following voivodeships are leaders in this area: Śląskie (4) and Dolnośląskie (3).

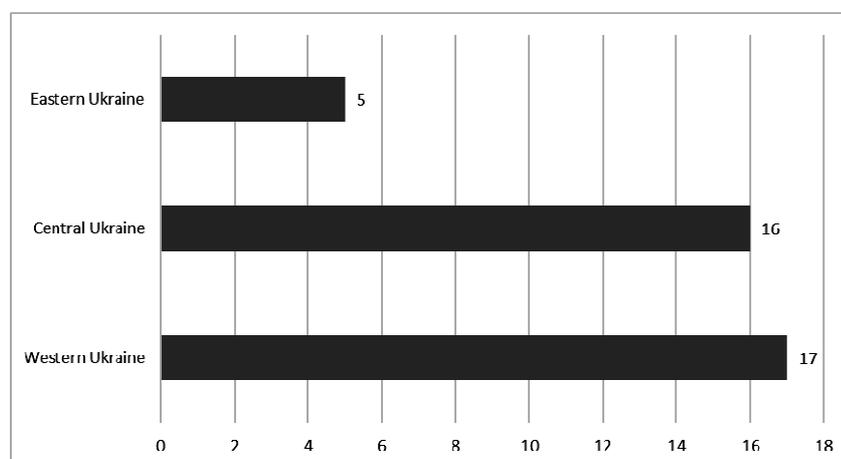
The values presented in Figure 5 clearly indicate the existence of the aforementioned relationship. The oblasts located closer to the border with Poland show a much more proactive stance in establishing international cooperation than the regions, for example, in Eastern Ukraine. It is also interesting that almost all the Ukrainian oblasts show signed documents of cooperation with the Polish voivode-

³ The study was conducted in 2008.

ships, even when the distance between the partners is significant (e. g. 1.500 km). Bearing in mind that there is no local government at the level of the oblast in Ukraine and the power is in the hands of representatives of the central government, it can be assumed that the directions of international cooperation of the oblasts are more related to the directions of cooperation of the entire country, as Poland is one of the most important economic and social partners of Ukraine.

Figure 5

The number of cooperation documents signed by the Polish voivodeships with the Ukrainian oblasts by individual parts of Ukraine



Source: own elaboration based on the data from the Public Information Bulletin 2016.

Among the Polish regional capitals, the most popular partners among the capitals of the Ukrainian oblasts are the following cities: Lviv (5 agreements), Lutsk (5) and Ivano-Frankivsk (4). In the case of Lviv and Lutsk, almost all the Polish partner cities are located in Central-Eastern Poland, that is, in their direct proximity. However, it is interesting that most of the partners of the capitals of the oblasts in Eastern Ukraine are the cities in Western Poland (e. g.: Poznań, Szczecin and Katowice). In contrast to the voivodeships, nearly half of the capitals of the Ukrainian oblasts have no partner among the Polish regional capital cities. This does not mean that they do not have a partner on the Polish side, but this is usually a smaller town that does not have the potential of a metropolis.

6. Conclusions

The Polish voivodeships and their capitals are pursuing extensive activities on the international stage as evidenced by the number of established partnerships. They have the greatest number of relations established with Ukrainian oblasts and German Länder. The fact that each Polish regional capital city has an average of slightly more than 14 partner cities is a symbol of openness, but at the same time this fact casts doubt onto the practical capabilities of operationalisation of these relations. Similar statistics applies to the Polish voivodeships. In the situation of the deficit of funds allocated in regional government budgets to conduct international cooperation, this raises a question how to translate the established relationships into opportunities for the socio-economic development of a given region by making use of the potential of such numerous partners. The proposed solution may be for the authorities of the Polish voivodeships to encourage local governments (e.g.: of cities) to establish direct relations with their counterparts in foreign partner regions. Such a practice would lead to greater involvement of actors operating on the territory of a given region in the implementation of cooperation and better integration of societies of territorial units in two different countries.

The paper shows quantitative superiority of international activity of cities over regions. The role of the distance in establishing bilateral cooperation with a potential partner from another country has also been studied. It is true that a relatively close location seems to be a factor in establishing partnerships, but by far more often one may see it with respect to international relations of the Polish voivodeships rather than their capitals. The cities tend to be freer in this regard and do not always take into account the proximity of their partner when establishing international relations. This is evidenced by a growing trend to establish partnerships with cities that are located on other continents, which is a kind of phenomenon in itself. Thus, based on the above-presented conclusions, it can be assumed that the posed hypotheses have been positively verified.

The paper constitutes an attempt to draw attention to the Polish-Ukrainian relations at the regional and city level. Although Ukraine has signed cooperation documents with a number of Polish partners at the level of regions and cities, on the basis of a review of the content of official websites of the Ukrainian oblasts, it can be concluded that the activity in the area of attracting Polish tourists and investors is mediocre. It is symptomatic that most of the Ukrainian oblasts' websites are not translated into any foreign language, and the availability of website content in the Polish language is very rare. In the context of the fact that the Ukrainian oblasts often initiate the establishment of partnerships with the Polish voivodeships, the above-presented findings testify to the lack of a comprehensive approach to manage the process of international cooperation on the part of the administration of the Ukrainian oblasts.

In the case of the Polish-Ukrainian relations, additional, in-depth research should be carried out among the authorities and administration of the units on both sides of the border. This would help to determine important factors in establishing cooperation; ascertaining what is most relevant, whether it is close location or common history, or perhaps the fact of inhabiting the same lands by communities of both nations. However, it should be noted that the European Union seeks to promote the development of multilateral relations, and the bilateral relations analysed in the paper can be treated as a prelude for further integration. Euroregions established on the border of the EU, that is, the border with Poland, provide development opportunities for Ukraine. Subsequently, these will probably also include the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, which constitute an interesting formula for establishing international ties not only with one's counterparts in another country but also with other parties that want to share their experience and resources to jointly undertake projects beneficial to the European Community.

At the same time, it should be emphasised that the last decade of the development of international relations of the Polish voivodeships and large cities shows a rising trend for transcontinental relations. In the context of globalisation, cities seek to establish relations with distant destinations which, thanks to the development of transport connections, seem today much closer than they used to be. In the future, such activities may also provide an opportunity for the Ukrainian territorial units which, once they have reached a certain level of socio-economic development, will be able to more fully make use of their geopolitical position and begin to build a closer relationship not only with the West, but also with destinations in other parts of the world.

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