



POLISH-HUNGARIAN COOPERATION AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL. CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Scientific Editors

Dorota Bis, Małgorzata Ganczar, Iwona Szewczak

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Stowarzyszenie Absolwentów i Przyjaciół
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INTRODUCTION

The development of cooperation between local government units in Central and Eastern Europe is extremely important from the point of view of several areas. Firstly, the development of the Three Seas Initiative, based on the pursuit of infrastructural development, presupposes local governmental cooperation. The assumption is that the Initiative develops not only through actions taken at the presidential level, but also those on the macro-regional level, making cooperation between local governments more effective. Secondly, the area of Central and Eastern Europe faces security issues, is closely related to the protection of the external border of the European Union and, at the same time, the eastern flank of NATO. The development of international cooperation between local government units is a prerequisite of not only macro-regional development, but also of security activities.

In this context, independent research was undertaken, the aim of which was to identify the ongoing cooperation between the local governments of the Three Seas countries, in particular those from Poland and Hungary. The focus was put on identifying the conditions and possibilities for Polish-Hungarian cooperation between local government units, along with the opportunities and challenges associated with it.

The research was prepared as a survey using the CAWI technique (Computer-Assisted Web Interview). This survey took the form of a standardised questionnaire given to respondents electronically (using the Google Forms platform).

The result of the research was a report prepared in the form of a monograph. The report presents in particular the characteristics and analysis of international cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local governments. It should be emphasised that the research was carried out in the context of contemporary socio-economic changes experienced in both Europe and worldwide, including the 2-year period of the SARS-CoV2 virus pandemic, as well as the ongoing war in Ukraine and the growing security crisis in the European Union since 24 February 2022.

The presented report consists of an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion and a list of references.

Chapter 1 deals with international cooperation between local governments along the Via Carpathia route in the context of good practices

and determinants of development. The chapter contains interdisciplinary scientific considerations introducing the broad topic of international cooperation between local governments, especially in the area of Central and Eastern Europe.

Chapter 2 presents a research analysis of Polish-Hungarian cooperation between local government units. It presents the results of the conducted research, taking into account issues relating both to opportunities for future development and to issues defining the barriers to the cooperation analysed.

Chapter 3 presents conclusions and recommendations for the implementation of Polish-Hungarian cooperation between local government units.

Each chapter has a three-part internal structure, consisting of an introduction, the main content and a conclusion. The considerations contained in this monograph are the result of research conducted on the basis of the empirical, dogmatic and also historical method. The research analysis finishes with the presentation of final conclusions and recommendations concerning the model of cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units. The proposed model is also intended by the research team to be an impulse for further research aimed at deepening the presented theses and conclusions, particularly in view of the further development of the Three Seas Initiative and the current geopolitical situation.

CHAPTER 1

International cooperation at the local government level along the Via Carpathia route – good practices and determinants of development

Introduction

International cooperation of local government units under international and European Union law developed in the 1980s. Among the sources of international law determining the foundations and framework of cooperation of local government units with external entities, the following documents of the Council of Europe should be mentioned in particular: the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, drawn up in Madrid on 21 May 1980¹, and the European Charter of Local Self-Government, drawn up on 15 October 1985 in Strasbourg². In the context of the provisions of the Madrid Convention, three issues should be noted in particular. The first concerns the scope and form of cross-border cooperation between regions³. The second issue

¹ Journal of Laws of 1993, No. 61, item 287. The Convention was ratified by the President of the Republic of Poland on 19 March 1993 and became binding under Polish law on 20 June 1993.

² Journal of Laws of 1994, No. 124, item 607. Poland ratified the Charter (as one of the few countries to do so in its entirety) on 22 November 1993. The Act was originally called the European Charter of Local Self-Government, but the name was rectified to the European Charter of Local Self-Government by a proclamation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of 22 August 2006 (Journal of Laws No. 154, item 1107).

³ Using this criterion, four types of regions can be distinguished: cross-border regions, whose area crosses one or more state borders, and border regions, where one of the borders is a state border, and internal regions, which have a relationship with regions within a state, as well as coastal regions, which can be both cross-border and border regions.

relates to the term “territorial communities and authorities”, which is very broad in nature, as it covers units, offices and bodies carrying out local and regional tasks and considered as such by the domestic law of each state. The third indicates that internal law takes precedence over agreements concluded by the cooperating partners⁴.

The choice of the research area and the subjects of the articles are related to the “Via Carpathia” initiative implemented in this area, the key effect of which is the construction of the shortest transport route from the north to the south of Europe. The “Via Carpathia” direct road route runs through the Podlaskie, Lubelskie and Podkarpackie Voivodeships, but due to their close proximity, it also includes the Małopolskie and Świętokrzyskie Voivodeships as key beneficiaries of this international route. An innovative solution is to focus the route along the Via Carpathia road (in Poland towards Kraków and Wrocław, and in Hungary towards Budapest/Balaton to the west and Pest to the south). The motivation for using the route is to take advantage of the processes resulting from *networking administration*. Owing to this instrument, local governments in Hungary and Poland will be able both to actively post information about cultural and tourist events, as well as to jointly establish cooperation between local government units or to find partners for joint projects. The countries and societies of Central Europe are strong supporters of Euro-Atlantic integration and supporters of the idea of cooperation between sovereign, independent nation states.

⁴ J. Blicharz, *Współdziałanie jednostek samorządu terytorialnego w formach zrzeszeń krajowych i międzynarodowych*, Wrocław 2017, p. 37.

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1. Via Carpatia as a material basis for international cooperation

This text offers a sociological view of an important infrastructure project, the Via Carpatia international road. It is not, however, a description of the social conditions of this project or the results of public opinion polls about it; the text takes rather a metatheoretical perspective on the advantages and disadvantages of two dominant styles of sociological thinking. “Dominant” refers here to the styles that shape the sociological imagination of societies, influencing their perception of facts and events. These include the semiotic-interactionist and problem-system approaches. They influence perceptions not only of the micro-levels of social life, but also of the macro-levels, including international politics⁵.

To start with, consider the initial verses from the beginning of Adam Mickiewicz’s seminal poem *Oda do młodości* [*Ode to Youth*]:

Bez serc, bez ducha, – to szkieletów ludy!

Młodości! dodaj mi skrzydła!

Niech nad martwym wzlecę światem

W rajsłą dziedzinę uludy:

Kędy zapal tworzy cudy,

Nowośći potrzęsa kwiatem

I obleka w nadziei złote malowidła!

No Heart, no Spirit – Lo! cadaverous crowds!

O Youth! Pass me thy wings,

⁵ A. Jabłoński, *Lubelski Lipiec w perspektywie prozopocicznej. Esej socjologiczny*, in: *Obligujące dziedzictwo Lubelskiego Lipca 1980 roku*, eds. A. Rynio, A. Jabłoński, P. Marzec, Wydawnictwo „scipitum”, Lublin–Kraków 2022, pp. 127-149.

*And let me o'er the dead earth soar;
Let me vanish in delusion's clouds,
Where many the Zeal begets a wonder
And grows a flower of novelty up yonder,
Adorned in Hope's enamellings⁶.*

We most often link this passage to thinking about the challenges facing an individual or a generation. However, it seems to sound particularly prophetic when applied to thinking about the state and its tasks. Contrary to appearances, this quote has a stronger resonance from the problem-system perspective than on the semiotic-interactionist approach. Mickiewicz's words are not only an interesting motto, the meaning of which can be used for various forms of verbal clashes, but above all as a sense that defines a state community formulating its own goals and actions.

The semiotic-interactionist approach makes social reality a platform for the direct exchange of meanings. Without going into the theoretical nuances of this type of perspective, it is important to note that it teaches us to think of international reality as the interaction of persons conditioned by meanings built on material-sensory foundations. These foundations are formed by human biological constraints, geographical-environmental location, economic-military endowment. It is these that co-create the context of mutual and direct relations, reducing it to certain necessary patterns of exchange. This forms the basis of equal geopolitical ways of viewing and describing relations between states.

The problem-system approach does not treat society as a collection of people and the relations between them, but distinguishes a system of senses that define human behaviour in the context of their collision with problems. To use K. Popper's terms, it is the recognition that the world of the content of human products of knowledge (world 3) is just as real as the physical-biological world (world 1) and the mental world (world 2)⁷. The reality of world 3 lies in impact that we most often refer to as cultural, structural or mental legacies, which mark the actions taken as making sense, e.g. in cultural,

⁶ English translation of the poem by Jarek Zawadzki, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ode_to_Youth [accessed on 02 October 2023].

⁷ Cf. A. Jabłoński, *Budowanie społeczeństwa wiedzy. Zarys teorii społecznej Karla R. Poppera*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2006.

institutional or scientific dimensions. These are not some immutable and eternal Platonic ideas, but the effects of the struggles of successive human generations. They affect the human being embedded in the tradition of historical existence connecting states and are not somehow determined, but flexibly shape the meaning of human creations. It is a sociological consideration of the sphere of the spirit, which – through the history of human struggles – exerts influence on social reality.

Such an approach has nothing to do with the construction of some notion intended to give meaning to human actions. Such a construction is rightly associated with propaganda and even manipulation. However, we should demand elements of sociological analysis and description of undertakings that escape and deprive the totality of various undertakings of their important aspect. With regard to international relations, two oversimplifications usually arise due to the weakness of semiotic-interactionist thinking. The first concerns the references to meanings and sentimental expressions in international relations – e.g. *Polak, Węgier – dwa bratanki, i do szabli, i do szklanki, oba zuchy, oba żwawi, niech im Pan Bóg błogosławi* [*Pole, Hungarian – two friends, both to the sabre and to the glass, both brave, both swift, may God bless them*] – which function somewhat in isolation from the current socio-political situation. They can be written on banners and used to label meetings and demonstrations bringing together people from both countries. The second concerns direct personal relations between representatives of the authorities, e.g. Victor Orban and Jarosław Kaczyński or Donald Trump and Andrzej Duda, on this basis of which the quality of relations between the countries are determined. However, the effects of such personal relations change rapidly when a given politician loses power or when their ad hoc policy, aimed at the welfare of their own country, fails to take into account the interests of the other party.

Another type of international relations are those built on senses derived from common interests. The problem-system perspective, however, allows one to go beyond the pragmatic understanding of this style of thinking. In pragmatism, it is the common benefits and the success achieved that shape the senses, which is determined after the implementation of a given project. This is important, but still only a component of the later stage of sense-making of joint activities. In the initial phase, however, there must be a clear sense arising from the very undertaking of the given venture.

This was well understood when formulating the idea of the Via Carpatia route, which was launched in 2006 in Łańcut by the ministers of Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary under the patronage of Polish President Lech

Kaczyński. At that time, an international route was planned to run from Klaipėda and Kaunas in Lithuania via Białystok, Lublin, Rzeszów and the Slovakian town of Kosice to Debrecen in Hungary and further to Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. Eventually reaching, among others, the Romanian port of Constanta on the Black Sea and the Greek city of Thessaloniki on the Aegean, the route is to be 3.400 km long, running through countries with a total population of 95 million. It was realised at the time that this would create a material basis of meanings, which would allude to a tradition of common economic exchange under new infrastructural conditions. Therefore, such a project could not be considered solely in economic terms. It addressed a much more important issue, that of equalising the level of development of the Eastern regions, not only in Poland, but also in the other countries south of Poland which are members of the European Union. At the same time, it provided a classic basis for applying to the European Commission for support for such transport projects. It was also about the European significance of the project, not just about investment within Poland solely. All partners involved in the project understood this very well, as they saw an important economic interest in it in terms of north-south freight traffic.

During the first PiS-led (Law and Justice) government (2005-2007), the project had very strong international support. It was an understandable concept in Europe for the construction of a transport axis along the Eastern border of the EU member states. From the end of 2007, during the years of the PO/PSL government, there was a slow disengagement from this project, which in Poland was reduced to a political identification with PiS intentions to strengthen the Eastern part with north-south investments. The subsequent changes to the government's plans, especially in 2011, under the pretext of the need to implement other priority investments, practically excluded the very idea of building this road. Opponents of the project argued that it was not commercially justified, estimating that on many sections of the future route daily vehicle traffic would be too low to make it economically viable. In an attempt to weaken the overtones of the then dominant tactical political objective of indirectly penalising the Eastern regions for greater support for the PiS party, it was also pointed out that due to these economic reasons other countries (e.g. Lithuania or Slovakia) did not want to take a leadership role in implementing this project. Given the size of Poland, making it the natural leader in this regard, this argumentation seems to be a mere propaganda ploy. It was thus right for Jerzy Polaczek, then Minister of Transport, to conjecture that at the time, the PO/PSL government was succumbing

to international pressure, not only that coming from the Brussels bureaucracy, but it could also have been the result of lobbying in the EU institutions supported from across the Eastern border.

In the end, at the request of MEPs representing the PO party, the European Parliament decided to close the petition on the implementation of the Via Carpatia project. Leaving aside the various unofficial and informal influences that would demand an explanation, e.g. through the establishment of the postulated commission to investigate Russian influence on decisions taken in Poland, it is worth noting the sociological simplifications that were used to explain their decisions to the Polish public and European partners. This was a clear undermining of the accepted sense of this investment, in favour of focusing on relations with the dominant European states within the Weimar Triangle. The joint strategic venture not only of the Visegrad group, but more importantly of the nascent idea of the Three Seas Initiative, was sacrificed on the altar of correct relations with Berlin and Paris and a pretence of sitting at a common table where most important decisions for Europe are made. What followed was an atrophy of Polish foreign policy in the Eastern part of Europe, and the Polish government showed to the partners it previously had approached on this issue and jointly signed memoranda that it was inconsistent, to say the least.

The project was resumed immediately after PiS seized power again in 2015. Not only was the road included in the TEN-T policy, as one of the key transport corridors on the continent, which would receive funding from the EU budget, but in addition a large part of the investment on the Polish side has already been realised. At various national and international forums, the importance of implementing this international route is demonstrated very well in Poland. Firstly, local government officials are demonstrating its enormous impact on creating opportunities for the development of the areas adjacent to the implemented roads. This is an opportunity for local entrepreneurs to become involved as contractors for this investment and to modify their businesses due to changes that minimise transport disruption. Secondly, the workers employed directly or indirectly on the construction site benefit from that, which has definitely contributed to reducing unemployment and increasing the wealth of the communities living near the route. This definitely improves people's quality of life, of which access to transport infrastructure is a significant indicator. Thirdly, individual local government units benefit from the investment by increasing the economic potential of individual communes, districts and provinces. Fourthly, the road not only clearly shortens the travel time

on the north-south axis, but also increases the safety of all its users. These individual benefits are clearly related to the original sense inherent in this investment, which is to become the transport backbone of Central and Eastern Europe.

In sociology, in addition to ad hoc analyses of possible improvements in social life, it is important to anticipate the unintended consequences of rational solutions to problems. These can be both unfavourable and have a real positive impact. In order for the latter to dominate, it is crucial to put particular projects in a broader context of meanings arising from a historically rooted sociological imagination. The war in Ukraine has become such an unpredictable circumstance that has strengthened the sense of the Via Carpatia construction itself. From a road that was peripheral in geopolitical terms, it has become perhaps one of the most important transport routes in Europe and the world due to the fact that it runs along the Eastern border of the European Union and along the border with Ukraine. The sense thus formed can continue to be a reference point for many formats of international cooperation such as the Bucharest Nine or the Three Seas Initiative. They are then not based only on visions, which are difficult to materialise in the absence of clear axes of cooperation and constant changes in the political priorities of the authorities of individual member states. The democratic conditions for the exchange of power can then be stabilised by an entrenched strategic sense, which offers greater guarantees of cooperation at least in a selected scope, which can expand over time and match the vision of the poet from the final verses of the already quoted *Ode to Youth*:

W krajach ludzkości jeszcze noc głucha,

Żywioły chęci jeszcze są w wojnie...

Oto miłość ogniem zionie,

Wyjdzie z zamętu świat ducha!

Młodość go pocznie na swoim łonie,

A przyjaźń w wieczne skojarzy spojnie.

Pryskają nieczułe lody,

I przesady, światło ćmiące...

Witaj jutrzeńko swobody,

Zbawienia za tobą słońce!

*While in the land of men a night so dumb,
The elements of Will are yet at war;
But Love shall soon burst forth like fire;
Out of the dark, the world of Soul will come,
In Youth's conceived desire,
By friendship braced forever more.
The ice, so long unmoved, is bursting now,
With superstitions that have dimmed the light.
Hail, Dawn of Liberty! Oh, Long live Thou!
Thou carriest the Redeeming Sun so bright⁸.*

⁸ English translation of the poem by Jarek Zawadzki, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ode_to_Youth [accessed on 02 October 2023].

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2. Prospects for the development of international cooperation between local governments within the framework of the Network of Three Seas Regions in the field of economic cooperation

The main objective of the Economic Network of the Three Seas Regions is to strengthen the cooperation of the countries of the Three Seas Initiative at regional level. One of the planes of this cooperation is economic cooperation, which is intended to:

- reduce the economic disparities created during the period of political and economic transition in Central and Eastern Europe,
- get the economy back on track in the context of the negative developments caused by the Covid-19 pandemic,
- strengthen the effectiveness of the use of the Three Seas Fund and European Union Funds in the Three Seas region,
- support the implementation of major projects (e.g. Via Carpatia and Rail Baltica).

One of the aims of the Network is to create strong and sustainable economic links between entrepreneurs from the member states and the so-called third sector (creating a business environment combined with the development of intellectual and social capital that would enable cooperation to be extended not only to **transport, digital and energy infrastructure projects, but also to create an economically competitive region**).

This is at the same time one of the greatest and most difficult challenges for the regions associated in the Network. The implementation of the idea of developing international regional cooperation in the business sphere is in fact an attempt to overcome the long-term effects of unfavourable political and economic phenomena, which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are currently facing. These phenomena include:

- 1) demographic problems and the associated shortage of workforce (since 2004, the population of the Three Seas countries has decreased by almost 3%),

- 2) a significant increase in labour costs, which can quickly lead to workplaces moving to other, 'cheaper' countries,
- 3) EU climate policy forcing Central and Eastern European corporations to reduce CO₂ emissions,
- 4) the so-called "glass ceiling" – the limit of technological advancement manifested in the inability of countries to create a national system of innovation generation, enabling them to develop their own specialisations and sell final knowledge-based products and services, and consequently – the inability to offer more complex products and services (global Western corporations dictate conditions to sub-suppliers from Central and Eastern European countries and strictly control the level of innovation of subsidiaries located in the region),
- 5) China's technological expansion and the intensifying Sino-US rivalry,
- 6) the Eurozone crisis, which has highlighted the division within the EU into a richer North and a poorer South,
- 7) fears of German-French economic dominance in the EU among other EU member states.

The above-mentioned development barriers threaten to maintain a kind of economic peripherality of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in relation to the countries of Western Europe.

The most commonly cited benefits of international cooperation between entrepreneurs include:

- acquiring new markets (geographical expansion),
- access to the knowledge and experience of partners from abroad, which can be used in new products and services,
- strengthening the entrepreneur's competitiveness,
- expanding the product range and improving product quality,
- gaining access to research and logistical infrastructure (e.g. pilot plants, living labs),
- access to consulting and highly qualified staff,
- increasing the chances of obtaining funding for joint projects,
- increased bargaining power in relation to suppliers and customers (market pressure),
- raising the entrepreneur's profile.

Entrepreneurs operating internationally are more competitive than entrepreneurs operating solely domestically as they benefit from access to skills and technology, greater productivity and better competences by entering difficult markets and exploiting the advantages of state-of-the-art technology. Due to a greater market integration, entrepreneurs can play an important role in global value chains.

Cooperation between entrepreneurs and actors from the business environment also means benefits for the region, for instance, in the form of gaining access to potential foreign investors, greater competitiveness, an increased ranking position, increased exports, higher levels of external funding for undertaken initiatives and a higher return on investment implemented as part of EU programmes.

The following are identified as the primary platforms for international cooperation between entrepreneurs:

- exchange of knowledge and experience,
- joint sales of products and services,
- sharing of logistical infrastructure,
- joint purchase of new technology,
- joint participation in trade fairs, international exhibitions, trade missions, conferences and seminars,
- commissioning expert reports, studies and analyses.

The objectives of international business cooperation can be condensed, in principle, to two aspects: **financial gain** and **development achieved through the exchange of knowledge and business experience**, as well as the diversification of markets and business activities. Within these facets, international business cooperation is classified into two main types: **co-operation**, which involves entrepreneurs pursuing a single common goal, and **collaboration**, which is a “looser” form of relationship than cooperation, in which each business partner learns from the other and thus pursues their own goals more effectively (the collaborating entrepreneurs remain autonomous).

International cooperation of entrepreneurs and business environment actors is now facilitated by phenomena related to globalisation, such as:

- lowering trade barriers worldwide,
- improved logistics and communication systems (increased number of low-cost flights, regional airports, road and rail infrastructure),

- the revolution in information technology, which has opened the way to the exchange of technology and knowledge on a larger scale (the Internet and mobile telephony have accelerated the exchange of information and reduced business costs),
- the emergence of new types of economic transactions, led by e-commerce,
- emphasis on learning foreign languages, innovative management methods
- student and academic exchanges.

A phenomenon that has undoubtedly had a positive impact on the establishment and development of existing contacts with foreign countries is Poland's membership in the European Union, including above all the abolition of customs borders, Euro-certificates and the consequent significant simplification, acceleration, reduction of costs and risks (including currency risks) of intra-Community transactions. It should be noted at this point that the Three Seas Initiative does not seek to single out the countries gathered in it as an alternative to the European Union. The Three Seas Initiative is not a project competing with the EU, its main task is to strengthen economic cooperation between the states of the region, which are also members of the European Union.

Despite the opportunities created by globalisation and the wider EU single market, entrepreneurs from Central and Eastern Europe still operate mainly on their domestic markets. Indeed, there is no shortage of serious barriers to establishing and conducting international cooperation between entrepreneurs in these countries. These barriers can be broadly classified into three categories: **financial**, **social** and **organisational**.

The financial barriers include:

- lack of innovative industries,
- difficulties in obtaining non-European funding for their activities,
- the lack of funding programmes for internationalisation, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises,
- high costs of legal support.

Among the social barriers, the following are distinguished:

- demographic problems,
- a flawed higher education system,
- lack of a modern vocational training system,
- lack of models for international cooperation,

- passive attitude of entrepreneurs and NGOs in the sphere of establishing contacts with foreign countries,
- insufficient knowledge of foreign languages,
- different business cultures,
- different legal systems.

The broadest catalogue of barriers to international business cooperation relates to organisational issues and includes:

- insufficient use of forms of international cooperation by local and regional authorities, often without consulting entrepreneurs about the choice of partner regions,
- lack of structured information on the needs for internationalisation of entrepreneurs and international cooperation, including on foreign markets,
- lack of a structured, not overly costly, model for meeting and networking with potential international partners,
- lack of functional virtual and real infrastructure to facilitate joint activities,
- insufficient coordination of activities aimed at supporting the international activities of entrepreneurs,
- negligible commitment on the part of the public administration to serve foreign partners.

It should be noted that as many as two of the above-mentioned barriers directly relate to **insufficient support of entrepreneurs by the public sector**, including local government units. However, it is also the entrepreneurs themselves who, as a rule, adopt a passive attitude in searching for contractors, only posting offers on their websites. Often, the first contact is made on the initiative of a foreign partner, to whom someone recommended a Polish supplier or found their offer on the Internet. More activity in this area is displayed by entrepreneurs whose employees have participated in training in the field of international business, benefit from some form of consultancy and/or have been participants in international fairs, exhibitions or trade missions.

The Three Seas Economic Network will enable local governments, entrepreneurs, scientific and research institutions as well as non-governmental organisations to cooperate more closely, resulting in joint applications for funding, the creation or management of joint projects, lobbying in the EU and, most importantly, in the expansion of economic relations between the entities in the Three Seas region. The economic initiatives of the actors in the Three Seas regions will be a clear signal of the emergence of an Eastern group

of European countries that are committed to joint ventures, also those going beyond the European environment.

Building strong and lasting business ties on an international level is a long-term, labour-intensive and risky process. It requires solid, comprehensive content-related preparation on the part of potential partners. This risk, however, should be taken by every entrepreneur who wants their products or services to be competitive in a globalised economy on both domestic and foreign markets. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to have a very good understanding of the situation in the respective industry in the countries with which the entrepreneur intends to cooperate (prices, technology, economic situation, availability of raw materials). It is also necessary to learn about the legal regulations in these countries and the market needs, as well as to pay attention to cultural differences and language barriers between prospective contractors. To accomplish that, it is often necessary to take advantage of professional assistance, which can be provided to entrepreneurs within the framework of the Network of the Three Seas Regions. The network has the opportunity to become a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience to identify and solve problems perceived by entrepreneurs as major obstacles to their internationalisation. This assistance can have a financial and non-financial dimension. The main pillar of financial support is the Three Seas Fund, part of which can be used to develop entrepreneurship and initiatives based on network cooperation.

Forms of non-financial support include:

- assistance in finding business partners in other countries;
- analysing and presenting information on business opportunities in a foreign market, including the creation of a database of regulations translated into English and the languages of the Network countries (especially tax, customs and labour law regulations);
- providing information on legal norms and bureaucratic rules in a foreign country.

Assistance may be provided in the form of organising international trade fairs, workshops, trade missions, exhibitions or conferences; creating platforms (e.g. online) coordinating cooperation between entrepreneurs and entities from their environment from specific business branches; keeping a joint calendar of events related to entrepreneurship; creating databases on specific markets; supporting the creation of export consortia, producer groups, accelerators and business incubators. These promotional and informational

instruments can be collectively referred to as soft support instruments. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that the authorities of regional governments of the Network countries may support the business sector and business environment entities in establishing international contacts only within the scope of their own competences, not entering into the competences of the government administration.

In the future, the Network could undertake the organisation and co-financing of cyclical meetings enabling entrepreneurs from partner regions to establish acquaintance and cooperation. These meetings could take the form of international fairs, conferences or exhibitions where entrepreneurs would have the opportunity to present their offer, get to know the offer of entrepreneurs from competing industries from other countries and share their experiences of international cooperation.

The network could create an online database with successive additions and updates:

- collections of legislation relating to starting and pursuit of business in the Network countries (including tax and customs legislation), translated into the official languages of those countries and into English),
- sample documents and examples of business plans translated into the official languages of the Network countries and into English (the so-called bank of best business practices),
- investment offers from businesses in the partner regions.

Currently, it is difficult for entrepreneurs to access such sources of knowledge since the information is scattered over numerous websites of many institutions, which are difficult to find. Moreover, the language barrier discourages entrepreneurs from familiarising themselves with them. A digital platform would become a convenient forum for the comprehensive exchange of information and experience between local authorities and entrepreneurs and entities from the business environment. In this way, regional governments could effectively support entrepreneurs wishing to develop business in partner regions by helping them to establish contacts.

The network could also create a database of accredited professionals who would provide training and workshops on setting up and running an international business, as well as language courses focused on business vocabulary for entrepreneurs interested in establishing such cooperation.

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3. Dynamics of multidimensional development cooperation in Central Europe

Introduction

Central Europe has successfully asserted its international agency since the beginning of the 1989 regime changes. It took a long time and it was connected with many hardships to shed the undeserved baggage of the communist experience resulting from the Yalta arrangements. However, the contemporary position of the Central European countries is improving. In several cases, socio-economic indicators are significantly more positive than in Western Europe. Most countries in the region are members of NATO and the EU. Within both organisations, they are active and are proposing to undertake reforms to strengthen integration processes.

The aim of this contribution is to synthesise selected Central European objectives, challenges and activities. These are diverse in nature. It is crucial to point out external constraints and, above all, joint initiatives that decisively strengthen the states and the region as a whole. This is fundamentally linked to the building and consolidation of a secure space, conducive to the development of individuals, societies, nations and states. The *raison d'état* in this case can and should concern the positioning of national goals and interests in such a way that they take account for the possibility of institutional, bilateral and regional cooperation on core issues.

Geopolitics of Central Europe

Central Europe is not just a geographical area. The region shares a specific history and cultural values⁹. Central European states do not want and should not be dependent on external visions of the international order. This mainly concerns the rejection of the idea of building the European space according

⁹ W. Roszkowski, *Cultural Heritage of East Central Europe. A Historical Outline*, Instytut Jagielloński, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2015.

to the German or Russian perspectives¹⁰. The states and peoples of the region have been residing between Germany and Russia for centuries. For many years, they had been influenced by or politically dependent on these powers. In most situations, that did not serve the Central European states' *raison d'être* particularly well. In the 20th century, this had its consequences in the tragic periods of World War I and II. At that time, German brutality decisively suppressed their independence and sovereignty. After 1945, this took the form of the domination of the region by the communist, oppressive and criminal policies of the Soviet Union. In both of the historical periods indicated, Germany and Soviet Russia tried to impose their geopolitical concepts – *Mitteleuropa* and *Eurasianism*, respectively.

After 1990, united Germany consistently strove for unambiguous leadership of integration processes in the EU. It made no secret of the fact that integration was ultimately to take a federal form under a strong German leadership role. Germany was generally a supporter and promoter of the integration of the Central European states within the EU, accomplished essentially in 2004 and completed in 2007. From Germany's perspective, this allowed it to further influence these countries through strong economic links and a large share of capital in this part of the continent. Officially, the concept of *Mitteleuropa* does not feature in Germany's political vision. However, it is worth examining its assumptions and comparing them with the actual state of affairs in a united Europe. Given the voting power in the European institutions and the positions held by German politicians, it is clear that a federalist EU would shape the political system in Europe according to the will of this state.

Eurasianism is based on Russia's complete domination of its presumed sphere of influence. This is defined explicitly, with particular tragic consequences in the 20th century. Today, following the collapse of the USSR and the dictatorial rule of Vladimir Putin, the Russian policy is focused on the so-called near abroad, primarily on the territories that were within the USSR borders until 1991. The former republics are either fully dominated (Belarus), constantly put in a difficult situation (Georgia) or invaded as part of a now full-scale war (Ukraine). Modern Russian imperialism makes full use of secret services, the military and disinformation practices. Strategically, this entirely translates into anti-Euro-Atlantic attitudes. The plan for political and military expansion, including in Central Europe, is also an indispensable part of this premise. Europe's dependence on raw materials (*Nord Stream*),

¹⁰ W. Gizicki, P. Łoś, *Geopolityka Trójmorza*, "Przestrzeń Społeczna – Social Space" 2019, Issue 1, pp. 123-138.

which has been building up over the years, and the ongoing war in Ukraine clearly indicate this.

What is crucial for the geopolitical position of Central Europe in this situation? The answer to this question must be based on clear declarations and factual actions. Central European states do not operate on the basis of anti-German or anti-Russian assumptions. However, maintaining correct political relations requires a subjective approach and understanding of Central Europe both in Germany and, especially, in Russia. The countries of the region are determined to maintain good Euro-Atlantic relations (both within the EU and NATO). The challenge is certainly not to allow the Berlin-Moscow strategic partnership to develop. This has been hampered by Russia's assault on Ukraine. However, in many German political circles, this is not an obstacle to resume close cooperation after the war.

Central European initiatives

Given the geopolitical conditions indicated above, it is important to emphasise the need for multidimensional cooperation between Central European states. Several of them are firmly established and have clear, well-thought-out objectives and activity. They are not, of course, free of problems and challenges, including those related to different perceptions of reality or current national objectives. However, this does not rule out opportunities for cooperation in core, strategic areas common to the entire region. Many forms of this cooperation should not be seen as a weakness or blurring of the common vision. Rather, it should be seen as an asset and a skilful use of the opportunities offered by network connections within international relations.

The Visegrad Group, established in 1991, is a special form of cooperation between the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. These countries form a close political, social and cultural circle. They share a similar identity and history. The importance of a community approach to the political goals of these countries had its special significance during their path to NATO and the EU. However, it did not end after the achievement of these goals. In spite of many difficult moments in their mutual relations, including the often proclaimed end of the Visegrad formula, it is clear that the individual entities comprising the group still need it¹¹. The Visegrad countries are currently

¹¹ W. Gizicki, *A Security Community. Poland and Her Visegrad Allies: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2013.

on a considerably high political and economic course. Economic indicators, e.g. unemployment rate and GDP levels are very good. They are significantly above many EU countries. These countries are a successful example of integration for those outside the Euro-Atlantic structures, especially the Western Balkans. They are unequivocal on the issue of illegal migration to Europe. With their funding for social projects under the Visegrad Fund, they contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of their respective societies.

The Bucharest Nine has been grouping together the Central European NATO countries since 2015. The initiative is formed by the countries of NATO's so-called Eastern Flank. Hence, their main goal is to strengthen the security of this area. Some of the countries forming this format share borders with Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. This is a particular challenge, directly related to Russia's aggressive policy, which has its impact on the situation in the region. This can be seen especially clearly in the actions inspired by Russia on the Polish and Lithuanian borders and in the crimes committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine. An additional element of cooperation between the Bucharest Nine countries is the development of military capabilities, with particular emphasis on defence. In this regard, joint manoeuvres and the creation of response forces are envisaged. These activities are closely coordinated with NATO. The states of the region are determined in their actions to strengthen not only their voice in the Alliance, but also in specific initiatives and projects. They thus do not want to be seen merely as recipients of security within NATO. They are betting on multiple activities and involvement. This can be clearly seen, for example, at NATO Summits, where proposals from Central European countries are an important part of the agenda.

Established in 2016 at the initiative of Poland and Croatia, the Three Seas Initiative brings together 12 countries in the region which are members of both NATO and the EU. Cooperation in the area of the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas is an essential need in light of contemporary security challenges, mainly related to the war in Ukraine and illegal migration to Europe. Apart from this, the development of communication routes, new technologies and energy security are priorities for the Three Seas countries¹². They do not aim at creating a new integration project in Europe, but want to actively support and contribute to the necessary pro-development reforms in the EU. At the same time,

¹² L. Drab, M. Gębska, M. Marszałek (eds.), *Bezpieczeństwo w wymiarze geopolitycznym, militarnym i społeczno-gospodarczym państw Inicjatywy Trójmorza. Współczesność i perspektywy*, Akademia Sztuki Wojennej, Warszawa 2022; A. Sprūds, M. Vargulis (eds.), *Three Seas Initiative Mapping National Perspectives*, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga 2022.

they emphasise the need for close Euro-Atlantic cooperation and the role of the USA in this respect. The economic development of the Central European countries is a priority for the Three Seas Initiative. The good economic indicators cited above clearly demonstrate the potential and the consistent implementation of the objectives. The improvement of communication infrastructure, the skilful use of new technologies and energy resources will certainly dominate the current conceptual and operational agenda. The skilful implementation of these assumptions will allow for further socio-economic successes.

Conclusions

A synthesis of the contemporary development dynamics of Central Europe allows for clear conclusions to be drawn. They are of a general nature, but unambiguously point to the political directions and objectives adopted in the region.

Firstly, Central Europe is a security and global policy actor. The countries of the region are no longer so-called new members of NATO and the EU. They have long since become established members of these institutions, becoming in several cases the initiators of many positive directions to reform both these formats.

Secondly, Central Europe is pursuing initiatives to strengthen global security, within NATO and the EU. Initiatives supporting the region's cooperation are not undertaken in opposition to these organisations. Central European states and societies are strong supporters of Euro-Atlantic integration. However, they are generally in favour of the idea of cooperation between sovereign, independent nation-states, rather than the controversially pushed federation illusion in the EU or the reduced involvement of NATO on the Eastern Flank.

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4. Common historical heritage of Poland and Hungary

Poland and Hungary belong to the countries of so-called Younger Europe¹³. Both countries were baptised in the second half of the 10th century and joined the countries of Latin Europe somewhat later. We can find dynastic ties between the two countries already at the time of the first Piast rulers in Poland.

The first most famous Hungarian princess on the Polish soil was Saint Kinga. She left a special mark on the development of Małopolska (Lesser Poland). The Hungarian princess from the Arpad family is particularly known in the Sącz region. Many legends arose in connection with the Tartar invasions, during which she and her sisters were supposed to take refuge in the Pieniny castle. Today, the Pieniny Mountains have many places associated with the saint. Even the popular mineral water extracted in Krościenko upon Dunajec bears her name. There is a sanctuary dedicated to the saint in Stary Sącz. After the death of her husband Bolesław, the princess settled in the monastery in Stary Sącz, where she died as a nun in 1292. Today, the monastery is home to the Poor Clare sisters, whereas the sanctuary itself is frequently visited by pilgrims and tourists. It was in Stary Sącz that Pope John Paul II announced the canonisation of Princess Kinga in 1999. He stressed that both Kinga and Jadwiga of Anjou, who had been proclaimed a saint two years earlier, “came to us from Hungary, they entered into our history and remained in the memory of the nation”¹⁴. The ceremony became a joint religious and political event for both countries. Hungary was represented by bishops and President Arpad Göncz. In his homily, John Paul II noted that “Stary Sącz is famous for its attachment to Saint Kinga”. He added: “The whole town seems to be her sanctuary”. Speaking of the sainthood of the Hungarian princess, John Paul II also highlighted her contribution to the development of economy, culture and even to maintaining the unity of the Polish lands that were divided during the feudal fragmentation. “She zealously strove for the unity of the Piast heritage, and for the sake of raising

¹³ J. Kłoczowski, *Młodsza Europa. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w kręgu cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej średniowiecza*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2003.

¹⁴ See John Paul II, *Kanonizacja błogosławionej Kingi. Msza święta – homilia*, in: https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/homilie/sacz_16061999.html [accessed on 30.05.2023].

the country from ruin she did not hesitate to give away all that she had received in dowry from her father. The salt mines in Wieliczka near Kraków and in Bochnia are associated with her name. Above all, however, she had the needs of her subjects in mind. This is attested to in her biographies, which testify that the people called her a “comforter”, “doctor”, “provider” and “holy mother”. Having given up her natural motherhood, she became a true mother to many. She also cared for the cultural development of the nation. Her person and the local monastery are associated with the creation of such literary monuments as the first book written in Polish – *Psalterz Dawidowy* [*David’s Psalter*]¹⁵.

Saint Kinga’s contribution to the development of the salt mines is now widely known in Poland. Tourists visiting the Wieliczka Salt Mine learn about the history of the mine and the life of Saint Kinga. One of the biggest underground attractions is the Chapel of Saint Kinga and the salt sculpture of the saint. Next to it, the guides tell the legend of Kinga’s extraordinary dowry. According to legend, the princess threw an engagement ring into the mine shaft when leaving her native Hungary. Having arrived in Małopolska, she ordered a search for salt. In the first lump of salt excavated, the miners allegedly found the princess’s ring¹⁶. And thus, according to the Hungarian-Polish legend, “miraculous” salt mining in Wieliczka began.

Saint Kinga is now the patron saint of many parishes and schools in Poland (mainly in Małopolska)¹⁷.

Another special moment of rapprochement in the common history of both nations is the acceptance of the throne in Kraków by King Louis II of Hungary. During the interregnum following the extinction of the Piast dynasty, Poland not only survived in its entirety, but also gained a new ruler in the person of one of Louis’s daughters. Jadwiga of Anjou is one of the most distinguished Polish rulers. She was the first woman crowned as King of Poland. By marrying the Lithuanian prince Jagiello, Jadwiga initiated a centuries-long union between Poland and Lithuania. Jadwiga’s wisdom and piety helped the young queen gain special respect among the subjects.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Św. Kinga – patronka górników i wielickiej kopalni. Rzeźba św. Kingi z najpiękniejszej podziemnej kaplicy*, in: <https://www.kopalnia.pl/kopalnia-wiedzy/sw-kinga-patronka-gornikow-i-wielickiej-kopalni-rzezba-sw-kingi-z-najpiekniejszej-wwh6> [accessed on 30 May 2023].

¹⁷ E.g. Junior High School No. 1 in Bochnia, Junior High School No. 5 in Nowy Sącz, Primary School in Bilczyce, as well as: Saint Kinga Parish in Częstochowa, Saint Kinga Parish in Kraków, Saint Kinga Parish in Wojnarowa, see *Saint Kinga*, at: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9Awi%C4%99ta_Kinga# [accessed on 30 May 2023].

Her beatification and canonisation was carried out by Pope John Paul II. During her canonisation at the Kraków Błonia in 1997, John Paul II said: "A spirit of service animated her social commitment. She immersed herself with vigour in the political life of her time. And at the same time she, the daughter of the King of Hungary, was able to combine fidelity to Christian principles with consistency in defending the Polish *raison d'état*. While undertaking great works at the state and international levels, she wanted nothing for herself. She generously contributed to her second homeland with all her material and spiritual goods. Proficient in diplomatic skills, she laid the foundations for the greatness of 15th-century Poland. She animated religious and cultural cooperation between nations, and her sensitivity to social injustices was celebrated many times by her subjects"¹⁸. Today Jadwiga is the patron of many parishes and schools¹⁹.

Over the following centuries we find further links between Poland and Hungary. Representatives of the Jagiellonian dynasty sat on the throne in Buda: Władysław III of Varna and Ludwik II the Jagiellonian. Władysław, the eldest son of Jagiello, while King of Poland, Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Hungary, set out against the Turks and died in 1444 at Varna. Hundreds of years after this event, Tsar Boris III opened the mausoleum of Władysław in Varna in 1935. Three coats of arms were placed at the entrance to the barrow: those of Bulgaria (centre), Poland (left) and Hungary (right). In 1964, a museum named after Władysław of Varna was opened in Varna. It housed exhibits donated from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Serbia²⁰. Nowadays, there is a Polish school in Varna and Days of Polish Culture are organised²¹. Today, Varna is a place of the common heritage of the three countries and the struggle of the Christian peoples to maintain their faith and culture.

¹⁸ Homily during the canonisation of Blessed Queen Jadwiga, <https://www.ekai.pl/dokumenty/homilia-w-czasie-kanonizacji-bl-krolowej-jadwigi/> [accessed on 30 May 2023].

¹⁹ E.g. Higher School of Economy in Bydgoszcz, III High School in Inowrocław, II High School in Toruń; primary schools, e.g. in: Białystok (No. 50), Chocznia (No. 2), Czechowice-Dziedzice (No. 2), as well as parishes: Saint Jadwiga the Queen Parishes in Kraków, Lublin and Bydgoszcz, see https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kategoria:Parafie_pod_wezwaniem_%C5%9Bw._Jadwigi_Kr%C3%B3lowej [accessed on 30 May 2023].

²⁰ The Mausoleum of Władysław III in Varna, in: <https://polonika.pl/polonik-tygodnia/mauzoleum-wladyslawa-warnencyka-w-warnie> [accessed on 30 May 2023].

²¹ The Adam Mickiewicz Polish School at the Polish Embassy in Sofia, based in Varna, in: <https://warna.orpeg.pl/> [accessed on 30 May 2023].

Poland's ties with Hungary and Lithuania in the 14th and 15th centuries are discussed during history lessons in Polish schools²². However, these relations were maintained even later. In 1576, Stefan Batory, Duke of Transylvania, became King of Poland. He went down in the history of Poland and Lithuania as a strong ruler able to defeat the growing power of Moscow. Nowadays, King Batory is associated in Poland with strength and efficient governance of the state. There are several schools in Poland that have chosen King Stefan Batory as their patron²³.

In the later 17th and 18th centuries, little space in Polish history lessons is devoted to Hungary and its affairs. Embraced by the Habsburg dynasty, it first became part of the monarchy and then of the Austrian Empire. The issue of the Hungarians emerges again at the time of the Spring of Nations²⁴. In this context, the common hero of Poland and Hungary, General Józef Bem, stands out. Although he participated in the November Uprising, he became most famous for his victories during the Spring of Nations in Hungary. Fighting in the name of the principle "for our freedom and yours", he defeated the Austrian army. After Bem captured Transylvania, Hungarian leader Lajos Kossuth appointed Bem as commander-in-chief of the Hungarian army.

When in 1920 Poland fought to maintain its independence against the Bolshevik invasion, it was the Hungarians who came to its aid. Both sides not only referred to the centuries-old friendship, but also readily invoked the figure of General Józef Bem. The year 1920 thus marked another instalment of shared Polish-Hungarian history. Unlike the Czech Republic, Hungary willingly provided aid to the fighting Poland. According to historians' findings, in the decisive days of the Battle of Warsaw, the Hungarians delivered to Poland some 58 million rifle cartridges, 40 million fuses and other military equipment²⁵. In this way, Poland saved Europe from the Bolshevik invasion with the prominent support of Hungary. At the same time, in the interwar period Poland did not ratify the Treaty of Trianon, which was detrimental to Hungary.

²² Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Science of 8 March 2022 amending the Ordinance on the programme basis of general education for high school, technical school and vocational school, Journal of Laws, item 622.

²³ E.g. Stefan Batory High School in Warsaw, Stefan Batory High School No. 2 with Bilingual Forms in Warsaw, Stefan Batory High School No. 3 in Chorzów, Stefan Batory Primary School No. 13 in Lublin.

²⁴ Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Science of 8 March 2022.

²⁵ S. Pilarski, *Czechosłowacja i Węgry wobec Polski walczącej z bolszewikami*, in: <https://przystanek-historia.pl/pa2/tematy/wojna-polsko-bolszewick/85342,Czechoslowacja-i-Wegry-wobec-Polski-walczacej-z-bolszewikami.html> [accessed on 30 May 2023].

The good relations between Hungary and Poland in the interwar period were not even disturbed by Germany's aggressive policy towards Poland. Just before the outbreak of World War II, the regent of the Kingdom of Hungary, Miklós Horthy, left no doubt about Hungary's loyalty to the Polish Republic. On 31 August 1939, he said at the inaugural sitting of the National Assembly that Hungary could not and would not subordinate its friendship with Poland to its friendship with Germany. He also wrote a personal letter to the Reich Chancellor, in which he unequivocally informed him that Hungary would under no circumstances act against Poland. Hungarian society itself also favoured Poland. During the Congress of the Independent Party of Smallholders (19-20 August 1939), shouts such as "Long live Poland!", "We will never use arms against Poland!" were raised. The congress enthusiastically adopted a resolution stating that not a single Hungarian would fight against the Polish state²⁶.

When, after the Soviet aggression against Poland on 17 September 1939, the Polish Army began to cross the border into Hungary, the Poles could count on dignified and good treatment. The disarming of soldiers was carried out in the most dignified manner possible. It was not uncommon for a military orchestra to play *Poland is Not Yet Lost* during this activity. The border with Hungary remained open for refugees until 28 September. Despite pressure from Germany, the Hungarians remained kind to Polish soldiers and refugees. Many soldiers managed to leave Hungary and make their way to the Polish Army being formed in France. The scale of these departures was so large that by the spring of 1940, of the 140 camps in Hungary, only 25 remained²⁷.

After World War II, Poland and Hungary shared the fate of the Central and Eastern European countries occupied by the Red Army. Although the countries were united by a common economic (the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance from 1949) and military arrangement (the Warsaw Pact from 1955), the mutual relations between the countries of the so-called people's democracy were largely shaped by Moscow. However, also this period resulted in friendship between Poles and Hungarians.

When changes were taking place at the Communist Party level in Poland in October 1956, the Hungarians came with support. On 23 October

²⁶ A. Kołakowska, *Węgry wobec agresji niemieckiej na Polskę*, in: <https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/tematy/wrzesien-1939/75002,Wegry-wobec-agresji-niemieckiej-na-Polske.html> [accessed on 30 May 2023].

²⁷ Ibid.

1956, Hungarian students gathered at the Józef Bem Memorial in Budapest. The demonstration was joined by other citizens, who eventually marched to the parliament and the radio station. Later that evening, demonstrators toppled the statue of Joseph Stalin. In this way, it could be argued, General Józef Bem posthumously became the initiator of another uprising in Hungary. During the bloody pacification of the Hungarian Revolution by the Red Army, Poles spontaneously began to organise aid. As early as 25 October, the Institute of Haematology in Warsaw sent the first batch of plasma to Hungary for the wounded. In the following days, queues of people lined up in front of blood donation stations all over Poland to donate blood and thus help the Hungarian people. By mid-December 1956, blood had been transferred to Hungary by air from 4-6 thousand Polish donors. Money, medicines and food were also transferred to Hungary. These were collected by workers, people of culture, scouts and even soldiers and militiamen. The Polish Red Cross received applications to take in Hungarian orphans whose parents had suffered as a result of the pacification of the Budapest uprising. From the end of 1956 to the end of 1958, 775 Hungarian children and 38 educators were staying in Poland periodically²⁸.

Modern history has also brought Poland and Hungary together. Both countries joined NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004 at the same time. Poland and Hungary, together with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, formed the Visegrad Group in 1993 in an effort to shape contemporary politics in this part of Europe.

A common and often difficult fate is nowadays the subject of history education at schools in Poland. In recent years, the common history of Poland and Hungary has been used as the subject of essays for the baccalaureate exam in history. In 2008, Polish secondary school graduates were given a choice of two essay topics for their final exam. The first referred to the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: "Difficult neighbourhood. Characterise the impact of the Ottoman threat on Polish and Hungarian policy in the 16th and 17th centuries". The second topic referred to the history of the 20th century: "Poland and Hungary in the face of landmark events in Europe in the 20th century. Characterise the political changes in Poland and Hungary between 1918 and 1956".

²⁸ K. Filip, "Bracie Węgrzy, my jesteśmy z Wami". *Mieszkańcy Wybrzeża Gdańskiego wobec rewolucji węgierskiej 1956 roku*, in: <https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/teksty/89749,Bracia-Węgrzy-my-jestesmy-z-Wami-Mieszkanicy-Wybrzeza-Gdanskiego-wobec-rewolucji-.html> [accessed on 30 May 2023].

Today it is worth remembering that the common historical heritage should not be limited to history lessons only. Poland and Hungary have shaped the history of Central and Eastern Europe for long centuries. The two countries were linked not only by a common border, but also by many economic, cultural or political relations. Many of the common heroes whose examples have been cited are today an excellent point of reference for building contemporary friendly relations.

Summing up the issue of the common historical heritage of Poland and Hungary, it is worth pointing out that during the first centuries of the two countries' state history, outstanding heroes such as princes, kings or commanders came to the fore. The 20th century changed a lot in this respect, when Poland received support from Hungary during the Polish-Bolshevik war. Also the year 1956, or in general the common fate of dependence on the Soviets after World War II, somehow brought the Polish and Hungarian society closer. Today, when both Hungary and Poland enjoy sovereignty, both countries can refer to their common past. There are many examples of good-neighbourliness, friendship and common historical heritage.

Conclusions

The considerations presented in Chapter 1 introduce the issues of European international cooperation, mainly in the area of the Three Seas States, indicating the possibilities of Polish-Hungarian cooperation at the local government level.

Arkadiusz Jabłoński, presented a sociological view of an important infrastructural undertaking which is the international Via Carpathia route. From a meta-theoretical perspective, he pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of two dominant styles of sociological thinking, which shape the sociological imagination of societies, influencing their perception of facts and events – the semiotic-interactionist approach and the problem-system approach. Both influence perceptions not only of the micro-levels of social life, but also of the macro-levels, including international politics.

The idea of the Economic Network of the Three Seas Regions and its main objective, which is to deepen the cooperation of the countries of the Three Seas Initiative at the regional level, was presented by Anna Ostrowska. Among the main areas of cooperation between entrepreneurs, she pointed to the exchange of knowledge and experience; joint sales of products and services; joint use of logistics infrastructure; joint purchase of new technologies; joint participation in fairs, international exhibitions, trade missions, conferences and seminars; and the commissioning of expert opinions, studies and analyses. Building strong and lasting business ties at the international level is a long-term, labour-intensive and risky process, and thus requires solid, comprehensive and content-related preparation on the part of potential partners. However, this risk should be taken by all entrepreneurs who want their products or services to be competitive in a globalised economy on both domestic and foreign markets.

Wojciech Gizicki presented a synthesis of selected goals, challenges and activities of Central Europe, which are characterised by their diverse nature. It is crucial to point to external constraints and, above all, to joint initiatives that decisively strengthen the states and the region as a whole. This is directly linked to the building and consolidation of a secure space that is conducive to the development of individuals, societies, nations and states. Importantly, the *raison d' état* in this case can and should also be about positioning national goals and interests in such a way that account for the possibility of institutional, bilateral and regional cooperation on core issues.

Robert Derewenda pointed to the important dimension of the common historical heritage of Poland and Hungary which had shaped the history of Central and Eastern Europe for long centuries. The two countries were linked not only through a joint border, but also through many economic, cultural and political relations. The history of the first centuries of statehood of both countries is marked by outstanding heroes, i.e. princes, kings, commanders. In the 20th century, during the Polish-Bolshevik war, Poland received support from Hungary. Then, in the years following World War Two, the common fate of dependence on the Soviets brought the Polish and Hungarian nations closer together. Today, both Hungary and Poland enjoy sovereignty and can undertake multiple initiatives by referring to their common past, which abounds in many examples of good neighbourliness, friendship and common historical heritage.

The content presented here shows the multifaceted nature of the issues, which are co-created by both historical conditions and contemporary contexts, challenges and multilateral opportunities for cooperation. It is very important to implement the idea of the Economic Network of the Three Seas Regions and to undertake joint initiatives to develop international cooperation with Hungary.

CHAPTER 2

A research analysis of international cooperation between Hungarian and Polish local government units

1. Research methodology

The research process in social sciences involves several stages. The key element of this process is a clear formulation of the research aim. In the case of this report, the main objective is to present the conditions and possibilities of cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units, along with the related opportunities and challenges. On the basis of the adopted aim and assumptions of the project, research questions were formulated. They concern the fundamental problems: 1. What are the conditions of cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units? 2. How is cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units assessed? 3. What are the prospects for Polish-Hungarian cooperation at the local government level?

The first stage of the study involved preparing a research tool in the form of an original survey questionnaire that was addressed to Polish local government units. The basis for developing the questionnaire was to identify the level of activities of local government units in their relations with Hungarian local government units, the potential for the development of Polish-Hungarian cooperation and to identify the most common problems and barriers in the implementation of this cooperation.

The second stage involved posting the questionnaire in electronic form on the website and Facebook page of the Institute for Local Government Development of the Lubelskie Voivodeship¹. The research team monitored

¹ See <https://www.irst.lubelskie.pl> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

the status of the survey completion on an ongoing basis. In the event of a lack of response, members of the research team contacted local authorities by electronic means (e-mail) and telephone. As a result of the measures taken, a satisfactory response rate was achieved, with 143 of the nearly 1,000 local authorities to which the invitation to take part in the survey was sent taking part in the survey. It should be noted that this figure refers to full responses to all survey questions. There were many more so-called “entries” on the website with the survey and partial completion of the survey, discontinued completion etc.

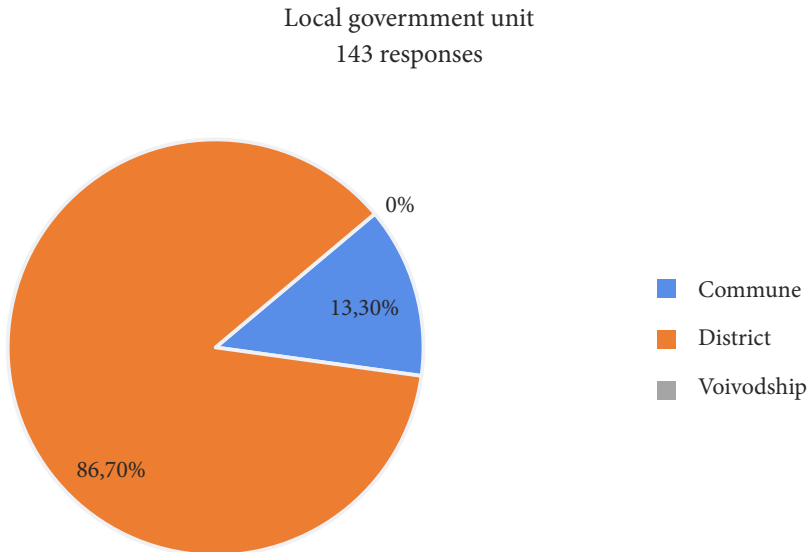
The third stage of the research involved an analysis of the collected research material. As a result of the conducted analysis, a numerical and visual representation of the obtained research results was created. The final stage of the research involved a subjective evaluation of the results of the conducted analysis. In addition to the research results, officially available data was used in the evaluation.

The survey was conducted at the turn of July and August 2023. The questionnaire was addressed to local government units in Eastern Poland, i.e. the region which in the previous financial perspective of the European Union received, and will probably receive in the nearest future, special support for the implementation of developmental activities. It is also the area of the eastern border of the European Union, through which runs a transit route to the countries of Eastern Europe as well as from the north to the south of Europe.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 21 questions. The answers were closed (7 questions), semi-open (7 questions) or open (2 questions). In 5 instances, respondents were asked to indicate satisfaction, acceptance of phenomena, views, processes using the Likert scale. In the case of several questions, respondents were able to select several answers. Hence, in some of the charts the data do not add up to 100%.

A total of 143 local government units participated in the survey, of which 86.7% represented communes and 13.3% districts. It should be noted that local government units at the voivodship level did not respond to the research questionnaire.

Distribution of local government units participating in the survey



The local government units surveyed belong to the following voivodships: Podlaskie, Lubelskie, Podkarpackie, Małopolskie and Świętokrzyskie.

When discussing the issue of international cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units, attention should be paid both to those local government units that are pursuing such cooperation and those that are not currently pursuing international cooperation with Hungarian entities. Of the 143 local government units surveyed, only 16 (11.2%) indicated that they were cooperating with Hungarian local government units. The lack of such cooperation is probably due to the fact that Hungary is not an immediate neighbour of Poland. The survey shows that Polish local government units usually have partners from directly neighbouring countries. In addition, so far, there has been no recommendation of the Hungarian direction of local government cooperation as a positive, mutually beneficial one.

However, it is worthwhile for local government units that are not cooperating with Hungary to consider such a possibility, to review their development strategies to include cooperative activities with Hungary. This is justified by the increasing international exchange in terms of personal capital between Poland and Hungary over the past few years. It is worth noting that this area can be an important element of cooperation at the local government level. The tasks of a local government are centred on regional development,

including culture, education, tourism, environmental protection etc. The research carried out has made it possible to find out trends illustrating expectations on the part of local government units with regard to international cooperation with local government units from Hungary.

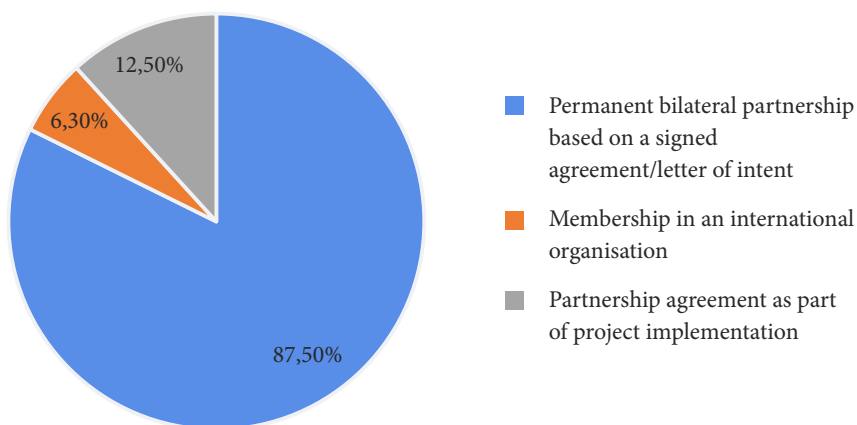
2. The current status and evaluation of Polish-Hungarian cooperation at the local government level

Detailed data concerning international cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units are presented in the following analyses.

1) What forms does cooperation with a partner from Hungary take?

What forms does the cooperation with a partner from Hungary take?

16 responses



In response to the question – *What forms does the cooperation with a partner from Hungary take?*, the respondents representing the surveyed local government units first indicated a permanent bilateral partnership on the basis of a signed agreement or a letter of intent, followed by a partnership agreement for the implementation of a project, and membership in an international organisation.

The most frequently indicated form of cooperation with a partner from Hungary was a permanent bilateral partnership on the basis of a signed

agreement or a letter of intent. This was considered the most important answer by 87.5% of the surveyed local governments. Permanent bilateral partnership on the basis of a signed agreement or a letter of intent is crucial and offers a wide range of possibilities for the development of cooperation between a specific Polish and Hungarian local government. In addition, it creates new opportunities for activities to expand cooperation economically, culturally, educationally and in other areas, which can be implemented in accordance with the current needs of a particular region. The implementation and undertaking of further partnership activities is facilitated by their inclusion in a long-term strategy for the development and promotion of partner towns and cities. The exchange of experience, also in the form of various initiatives, including study visits and the use of good practices, is significant. Issues related to international cooperation are usually associated with promotional activities in the fields of tourism, culture and economy.

Another answer indicated by the surveyed local government officials was the partnership agreement concluded within the framework of project implementation – this was indicated by 12.5% of the respondents. Joint implementation of international projects confirms the quality of cooperation and development of local governments. It also shows to what extent and in what fields EU funds influence the implementation and development of international cooperation between local government units. This is a very forward-looking activity, as it is linked to the possibility of applying for further EU funds in both the most crucial areas and those requiring equal opportunities. Partnership means involvement in the joint implementation of a project of at least two independent, autonomous entities, listed in the application for project funding, whose participation is justified, necessary and indispensable, as it may contribute to the achievement of project objectives to a greater extent than if only the applicant was involved in its implementation, create synergy or enable a holistic approach to the issue addressed by the project. Joint implementation of the project consists in the contribution of human, organisational, technical or financial resources to the project by the partners, proportional to the scope of tasks to be performed². The partnership agreement is a specific example of an agreement used in the area of developmental policy. It is conceived of as a voluntary form of cooperation between public authorities and private entities, undertaken in order to implement some public tasks,

² Article 33(1) of the Act of 11 July 2014 on the principles for the implementation of operational programmes in the area of the cohesion policy financed in the financial perspective 2014-2020 (Journal of Laws, item 1146 as amended).

implemented based on joint resources, under joint management and at joint risk. It is characterised by the interaction of a public entity, which is a public finance sector unit, with another unit and/or a private entity³.

Meanwhile, membership in an international organisation was indicated by only 6.3% respondents. It should be emphasised that membership in international organisations and conducting international cooperation between cities is increasingly promoted and justified. In the current post-pandemic situation as well as with the political and economic tensions and the war in Ukraine, it is important to draw attention to the opportunities for international cooperation in the EU area offered by the use of networking administration. The idea of networking administration emerged in the administrative structures of the European Union as a response to changes in the model of administrative management. The creation and functioning of European networks of administrative authorities is intended to ensure the efficiency and uniformity of the application of Community law, as well as to foster administrative convergence and the creation of a European administrative area⁴. Furthermore, the creation of a European network of administrative authorities can be perceived as a manifestation of the implementation of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and as an alternative to European centralisation (the creation of a single authority at the European level that is supreme to national authorities). This “networking” is thus a manifestation of a certain demonopolisation of the administration in certain areas previously assigned to it⁵.

Referring to the research analyses included in the 2019 report on forms of cooperation with a partner from Hungary, it can be stated that the converging level of answers indicated by local government units (88% and 87.5%, respectively) relates to a permanent bilateral partnership on the basis of a signed agreement or letter of intent, followed by a partnership agreement for project implementation – here we can observe an increase from 6% to 12.5%, a similar situation applies to membership in an international organisation – an increase from 2% to 6.3%⁶.

³ J. Jaśkiewicz, *Komentarz do art. 28(a) ustawy o zasadach prowadzenia polityki rozwoju*, in: *Ustawa o zasadach prowadzenia polityki rozwoju. Komentarz*, Lex 2014.

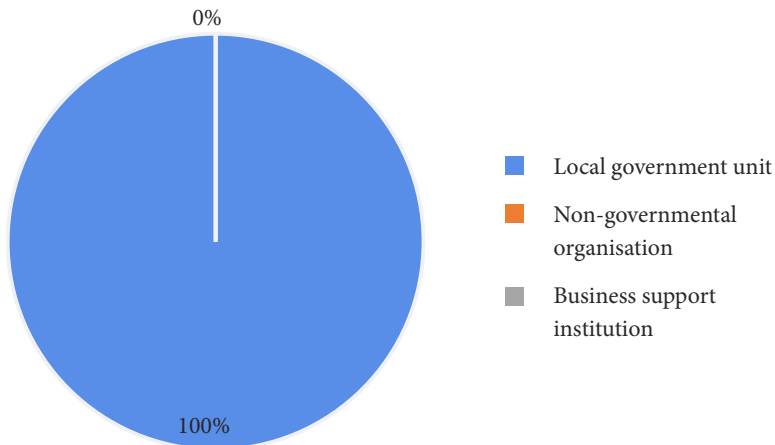
⁴ J. Supernat, *Koncepcja sieci organów administracji publicznej*, in: *Koncepcja systemu prawa administracyjnego*, ed. J. Zimmermann, Warszawa 2007, p. 226.

⁵ M. Szewczak, M. Ganczar, P. Jaszczuk, *Raport badawczy na temat “Współpraca międzynarodowa miast polskich”*, “Badania i raporty”, Narodowy Instytut Samorządu Terytorialnego, Issue 3, 2016, p. 8.

⁶ Cf. M. Szewczak, D. Bis, M. Ganczar, A. Ostrowska, K. Kwiatosz, *Model polsko-węgierskiej samorządowej współpracy międzynarodowej*, TN KUL, Lublin 2019, pp. 59-60.

2) What type of Hungarian entity does your unit cooperate with?

What type of Hungarian entity does your unit cooperate with?
16 responses



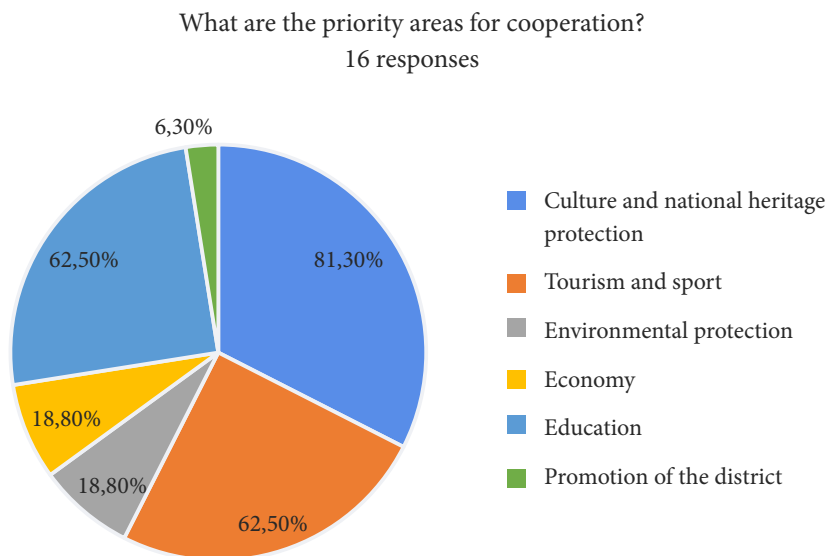
100% of the local authorities surveyed identified the local government unit as the entity with which they carry out cooperation. Probably this has to do with the specificity and nature of the local government units participating in this survey. NGOs and business support institutions received no indications.

It is worth emphasising that local government units repeatedly cooperate with both NGOs and business support institutions while implementing dedicated activities, including those of an international nature. Therefore, it is important to build on local government cooperation to develop new perspectives for cooperation with the involvement of NGOs and business support institutions. Carrying out international cooperation activities is extremely important as it impacts the quality of tourism and recreation services, provides assistance in the development of technical infrastructure, leads to the cultural and educational development of the region, and is also an excellent and effective promotional tool. All that means that it also contributes to increasing the effectiveness of human and economic capital and has a huge impact on raising the political profile and prestige of a particular local government at home and abroad.

Referring to the research analyses included in the 2019 report on the types of entities with which the local government units cooperate, 96% of the local

government units from Poland conducted international cooperation with local government units from Hungary, while the others indicated NGOs, business support institutions or other entities which represent only a small percentage (1-2%)⁷. By contrast, the 2023 data shows that 100% of the surveyed local government units indicated a local government unit as the entity with which they conduct cooperation. This change, consisting in targeting only local government units, may be a result of the 2-year SARS-CoV2 virus pandemic, which affected socio-economic and cultural functioning by limiting opportunities for action and cooperation.

3) What are the priority areas for cooperation?



Among the many responses concerning the priority areas of international cooperation pursued by the local government unit, the respondents first mentioned culture and national heritage protection. This was followed by tourism and sport, and education (the same number of responses). In third place, the representatives of local authorities indicated environmental protection and economy (the same number of responses). In turn, promotion of local government was indicated only once.

As many as 81.3% of the respondents indicated culture and national heritage protection as the most important area of international cooperation.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

The implementation of tasks within the very diverse area of international cultural cooperation is one of the most attractive and socially justifiable directions for foreign cooperation of local government units. The nature of such cooperation allows relationships and ties to be established with representatives of partner local authorities, which often evolves into the creation of a strategy for long-term international cooperation. Through the implementation of joint cultural initiatives, there is an opportunity for the exchange of experience between various groups, including artists, cultural animators and managers, volunteers, teachers, pupils, students and other representatives of the groups involved. It should be emphasised that the specific nature of activities in the field of national heritage protection enable them to be located and staged in border areas, thus showing the common history and tradition of the region (often marked by a difficult historical past). Joint activities in the area of culture foster openness among cooperating actors and institutions, which often makes it possible to modify attitudes and evaluation of events and thus solve problems that have been building up over the years. Diplomacy is therefore of particular importance, especially in the very delicate areas of history, culture and tradition, which concern people. Poland's presence in the European Union structures has made it possible to finance many initiatives in this area, mainly through support as part of cross-border and cultural cooperation (e.g. the European Capital of Culture project)⁸.

It is worth highlighting the significant role of the Polish Institute in Budapest in the promotion of culture and Polish-Hungarian cultural exchange. It has been the oldest cultural institution of its kind in Budapest (operating since 24 May 1939) and one of the oldest Polish Institutes in the world. The Polish Institute conducts various activities in Hungary dedicated to Polish history, tradition and culture as well as to the constantly developing mutual Polish-Hungarian relations⁹.

Among the most important areas for international cooperation between local government units, their employees also indicated tourism and sport, and education – both categories were mentioned by 62.5% of respondents each. Tourism and sport are most often classified as areas that have an impact on solving multidimensional problems of an economic, cultural and social nature. Tourism is one of the economic development imperatives that can contribute to the increased development of a given city or region. Therefore, the development of international cooperation of local governments should

⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹ See <https://www.gov.pl/web/wegry/relacje-dwustronne> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

be supported by the state administration as an element of a widely prepared tourism promotion strategy for Poland. Joint initiatives are frequently undertaken in border areas, having a positive impact on entities on both (or more) sides of the border, promoting a given region, town, area or landscape space in terms of tourism. We can observe an increase in health and spa tourism, which can be an important element of development for many Polish local governments, as well as an increasing number of youth exchanges. In turn, cooperation and international exchanges of teachers and students are important elements of school and academic activities that are gaining in popularity.

In the survey, the respondents selected two other areas: environmental protection and economy (both selected by 18.8% of the respondents), as being important in the international cooperation of local authorities. Due to increasingly global climate change and legislative initiatives, environmental protection is becoming an increasingly primary area in the international cooperation between cities and town. The dynamic environmental changes taking place, which result in threats, problems and environmental disasters, mark an exceptionally broad area and set of research issues, the understanding of which requires interdisciplinary analysis. More and more EU funds are being mobilised and devoted to various forms of environmental protection. The issue of environmental protection is particularly important for local authorities situated in border areas, which can combine it with economic development. Nowadays, distance is no longer a problem for the joint implementation of international activities using common practices in caring for the environment and improving living conditions for people, ecosystems and nature. Crucially, the concept of sustainable development plays a huge role in shaping public attitudes and behaviour and in changing the way of thinking about social-economic-environmental relations. The assumptions of sustainable development imply that in a society the quality of life of all people should be adequate to the level of civilisational development. In turn, civilisation can maintain a sufficiently high and sustainable level of prosperity provided that a balance is maintained in the management between three types of capital: economic, human and natural¹⁰. It is important both to create as well as to develop already existing cooperation networks and positive experiences of cooperation between the scientific community, business and public administration, taking into account the specificity and potential of each of the actors in the field of environmental protection as well as building public awareness of RES internationally.

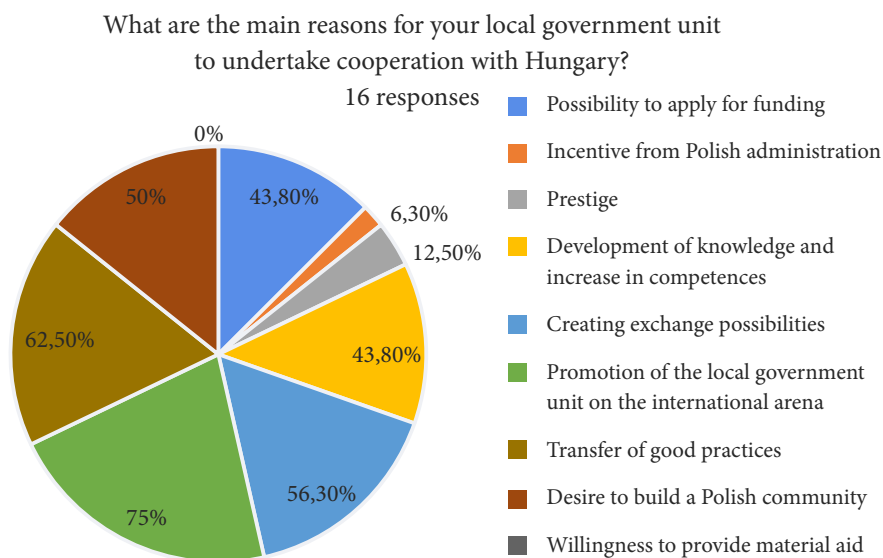
¹⁰ E. Mazur-Wierzbička, *Koncepcja zrównoważonego rozwoju w polskiej polityce społeczno-gospodarczej*, in: *Państwo i rynek w gospodarce*, ed. D. Kopycińska, Szczecin 2003, pp. 15-22.

In international cooperation, economy is not an area where results can be seen as quickly as in the areas of culture or tourism. It is important to emphasise that actions and measures taken within economy have long-term goals and focus on joint activities to support entrepreneurs in establishing contacts and investing in partner regions or cities. Local government has an important role to play in the economic promotion, as it can become an important supporter of entrepreneurship. Building strong and lasting business ties at international level is a long-term, labour-intensive and risky process and requires comprehensive preparation on the part of potential partners. A prerequisite is to know the legal regulations in Hungary and to understand the needs of the market. Attention must also be paid to cultural differences and language barriers between prospective counterparties. It is a risk, but any entrepreneur who wants their products or services to be competitive in a globalised economy on both the domestic and foreign markets should take it and develop their business on the international market. It is also worth taking advantage of the professional assistance that can be provided to entrepreneurs within the framework of the Network of the Three Seas Regions. The network has the opportunity to become a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience, allowing for the identification and resolution of problems perceived by entrepreneurs as major obstacles to their internationalisation. This assistance can have a financial and non-financial dimension. The main pillar of financial support is the Three Seas Fund, part of which can be used to develop entrepreneurship and initiatives based on networking cooperation.

The promotion of local government obtained the lowest result (6.3%) among the local government officials taking part in the survey. This answer gives rise to a cognitive dissonance, as attracting investors is one of the fundamental elements of economic promotion of Polish cities and towns, which over the last few years have considerably contributed to strengthening of the Polish economy. Using international cooperation for the purposes of city promotion is one of the main arguments in undertaking this type of cooperation (recognisability, promotion of what is most valuable and unique). Issues related to city promotion supported by international cooperation usually refer to promotional activities in the area of tourism, culture and economic promotion. An important element of the indicated promotional activities is the elaboration by a city of a long-term promotion strategy, which should be a fundamental document in this area. This is an important indicator because by promoting themselves, cities also promote Poland abroad, which can be used in a broad campaign to promote Poland.

Referring to the research analyses presented in the 2019 report on the priority areas of international cooperation implemented by local government units, there was an increase in each area in 2023. The same order of significant categories was maintained. Overwhelmingly, the surveyed local government units indicated the area of culture and national heritage protection (an increase from 76% to 81.3%), followed by education (an increase from 46% to 62.5%), and tourism and sport in the third place (a significant increase from 37% to 62.5%). Other responses indicated economy (an increase from 11% to 18.8%), environmental protection (a significant increase from 1% to 18.8%) and other areas (4% – 6.3%)¹¹. Based on the above data, it can be assumed that the area of greatest interest should be developed in particular by those local government units that are not currently involved in international cooperation but are interested in it.

4) What are the main reasons for your local government unit to undertake cooperation with Hungary?



In response to the question – *What are the main reasons for your local government unit to undertake cooperation with Hungary?*, the local government employees listed diverse key categories. They most often indicated the promotion of the local government on the international arena. This was followed by the following areas: the transfer of good practices from foreign

¹¹ M. Szewczak, D. Bis, M. Ganczar, A. Ostrowska K. Kwiatosz, *Model polsko-węgierskiej...*, pp. 64-65.

local government units to the domestic use; the creation of opportunities for international exchange for residents; the desire to build a Polish-Hungarian community; the possibility to apply for funds from Polish, European, Polish-Hungarian and international programmes; the development of knowledge and an increase in the competence of officials from both the domestic and partner units through an ongoing exchange; prestige; encouragement from the Polish administration, including the central administration.

The promotion of local government on the international arena was indicated in first place – 75% of responses. It is the promotion of the local government that is the most important objective when undertaking international cooperation and it brings measurable effects, also in terms of inspiring new initiatives of an international nature. Transfer of good practices from foreign local government units to the local context was indicated by 62.5% of the representatives of the local government units surveyed. What is important for undertaking international cooperation is often the specific conditions of local governments and their innovativeness in promoting or transferring good practices. The use of already working solutions and the possibility of applying them in similar circumstances is an important stimulus to use the experience of international cooperation. The survey shows that there is a need for a continuous and efficient process of exchanging good practices between local government units.

Another area of importance for undertaking international cooperation indicated by 56.3% of the respondents is the creation of opportunities for international exchange of residents. This is a great opportunity to involve the community in undertaking and initiating various activities aimed at building the common welfare and developing the local community. The desire to build a Polish-Hungarian community was indicated by 50% of the local government officials surveyed as a reason for undertaking cooperation. This is an important premise for the integration of communities and social groups, the maintenance of historically formed ties and cooperation relations between twin towns, partner cities and local authorities. The international activities of local government units are also part of the process of building a new quality in international relations based on ties between societies, local and regional communities and between individual citizens and members of civic societies. Owing to this activity, interpersonal relations become less formalised and real opportunities are created for citizens of different countries to interact directly, get to know each other, make friends and abandon stereotypes¹².

¹² S. Faliński, *Ewolucja efektywności międzynarodowej polskich samorządów terytorialnych i prawne uwarunkowania tego procesu*, in: *Prawne problemy samorządu terytorialnego z perspektywy 25-lecia*

In the opinion of 43.8% of the respondents, the possibility to apply for funds from Polish, European, Polish-Hungarian and international programmes contributes significantly to international exchange. Undertaking and developing cooperation is currently very favourable for local governments – in 2023, European funding areas have been launched.

The development of knowledge and increase of competencies of officials from both the home unit and the partner unit through constant exchange was indicated by 43.8% of the respondents. Nowadays, public administration is facing new challenges and tasks, such as modernisation of administration, use of modern technologies in daily work, raising the competencies of officials in many areas. It is worth highlighting the emergence of a platform of social responsibility and good practices of the administration, initiated by the Administration Working Group operating within the Team for Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility. The team is a subsidiary body of the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy responsible for shaping public policy that promotes the attitude of social responsibility among various stakeholder groups. The Working Group includes representatives of state government administration and other central offices¹³.

12.6% of the respondents considered that prestige important for a local government unit to undertake international cooperation with Hungary. Prestige is defined as “the esteem and respect that someone or something enjoys in its surroundings”¹⁴, thus it is worth building relations in international cooperation based on such a noble premise. 6.3% of the respondents acknowledged the encouragement from the Polish administration, including the central one, to undertake international cooperation with Hungary. Local government units in Poland may undertake cooperation with their counterparts abroad. International cooperation between communes, districts and voivodeships can take different forms. In order to properly act, it is very important to identify European documents supporting international cooperation of territorial units and to recognise Polish legal provisions regulating the conclusion of cooperation agreements and membership in international associations.

Referring to the research analyses from the 2019 report on the main reasons for local governments to undertake cooperation with Hungary – in both

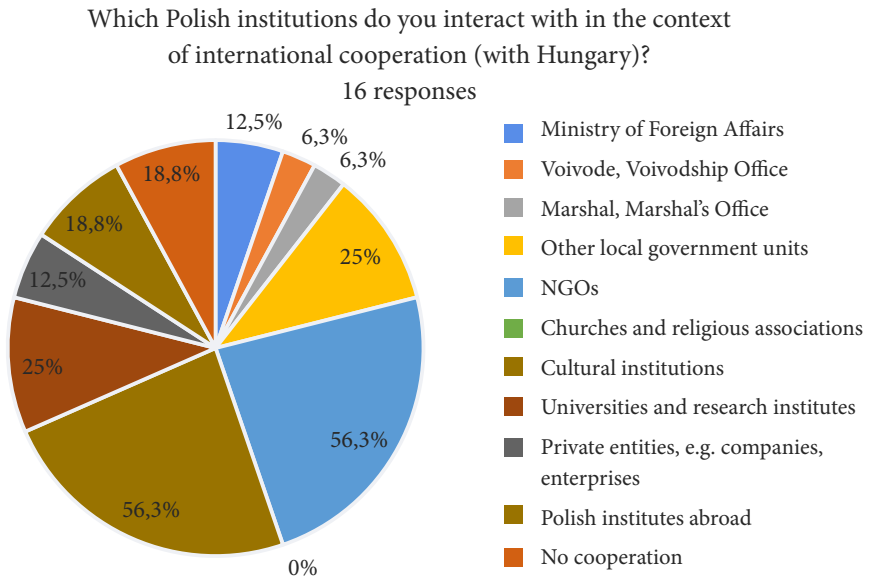
jego funkcjonowania, eds. B. Jaworska-Dębska, R. Budzisz, Warszawa 2016, p. 647; cf. B. Barbera, *Gdyby burmistrzowie rządzili światem. Dysfunkcyjne kraje, rozkwitające miasta*, Warszawa 2014.

¹³ See <https://www.gov.pl/web/baza-wiedzy/podstawowe-informacje>; <https://www.gov.pl/web/baza-wiedzy/baza-dobrych-praktyk> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

¹⁴ See <https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/prestiz;2572402.html> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

surveys, the issue of promoting the local government on the international arena ranked first (an increase from 58% to 75%), the creation of opportunities for international exchange for local government residents ranked second (a convergent response level of 54% – 56.3%), while in third place the local government units indicated the desire to build a Polish-Hungarian community (the same response level of 50% in both surveys). Further on, local government units indicated the following areas: applying for funds (an increase from 31% to 43.8%), the use of good practices (a significant increase from 34% to 62.5%), the development of knowledge and increased competences of the local government officials (also an increase from 21% to 43.8%), followed by prestige (an increase from 3% to 12.5%), and encouragement from the Polish government administration (similar response levels of 4% and 6.3%, respectively)¹⁵. Based on the above results, we can conclude that over a period of 4 years, self-government units cooperating with Hungarian local government units mainly aim at activities in the areas of local government support through: promotion and joint activities, the possibility to support residents through international exchanges and the desire to build community. These are activities that foster the creation of the common welfare and the integration of the local government community.

5) Which Polish institutions do you interact with in the context of international cooperation (with Hungary)?



¹⁵ M. Szewczak, D. Bis, M. Ganczar, A. Ostrowska K. Kwiatosz, *Model polsko-węgierskiej...*, p. 64.

In response to the question – *Which Polish institutions do you interact with in the context of international cooperation (with Hungary)?*, the local government employees indicated numerous response categories. First, they equally highlighted two categories: non-governmental organisations and cultural institutions. This was followed by other local government units, and universities or research institutes. Third most frequent responses included: Polish institutes abroad, and no cooperation with any Polish institutions. Other responses included: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or other central administrative authorities; private entities such as companies, enterprises, travel agencies; the Voivode, the Voivodship Office or other local government authorities; the Marshal of the Voivodship or the Marshal's Office.

Among the Polish institutions with which the local government units interact in the field of international cooperation with Hungary, their employees indicated non-governmental organisations and cultural institutions – both categories mentioned by 56.3% of the respondents. In Polish law, the statutory definition of a non-governmental organisation is stipulated in Article 3(2) of the Act of 24 April 2003 on activities of public interest and voluntary work¹⁶, according to which non-governmental organisations are legal persons or unincorporated entities established on the basis of statutory provisions, including foundations and associations, which are not units of the public finance sector in the understanding of the provisions on public finance, and do not operate for profit. They are usually financed by donations and grants from public funds and their purpose is to fill the gap created by those in power. NGOs in Poland (but also worldwide) have a political or social agenda and operate in various spheres. The largest group of NGO activities in Poland concerns foundations and associations¹⁷. Cultural institutions, on the other hand, are institutions where cultural activities are carried out. The Act of 25 October 1991 on the organisation and conduct of cultural activity¹⁸ introduced two types of cultural institutions: artistic institutions and other cultural institutions¹⁹.

The next two categories: other local government units, and universities or research institutes were both indicated by 25% of the surveyed local government employees. Research institutes are state organisational units,

¹⁶ Journal of Laws, item 571.

¹⁷ See <https://www.wsa.org.pl/czym-sa-organizacje-pozarzadowe-w-polsce-i-ile-ich-dziala-na-tereniekraju/> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

¹⁸ Journal of Laws 2012, item 406.

¹⁹ See <https://www.nck.pl/szkolenia-i-rozwoj/projekty/kultura-sie-liczy-/zarzadzanie-kultura/institucje-kultury> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

distinguished in legal, organisational, economic and financial terms, which conduct scientific research and development work aimed at their implementation and application in practice. Research institutes conduct scientific and research work and provide research-related and analytical services. They are also engaged in standardisation, certification and approval activities as well as scientific, technical and economic information activities. They thus play an important role in the development of innovation, while also supporting enterprises in this respect²⁰. The core activities of the research institutes include conducting scientific research and development work, adapting the results of scientific research and development work to practical needs, as well as implementing the results of scientific research and development work²¹. The Act also defines the obligations of the organiser of a cultural institution, of which one of the most important is to provide the resources necessary to start and conduct cultural activities and to maintain the facility in which these activities are carried out.

Polish institutes abroad and the lack of cooperation with any Polish institutions were each indicated by 18.8% of the respondents. It is worth asking why these local governments do not undertake international cooperation.

Among the Polish institutions with which they interact in the context of international cooperation with Hungary, local government employees indicated the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or other central administration bodies, as well as private entities such as companies, enterprises, travel agencies (12.5% each). 6.3% of local government officials indicated the Voivode, the Voivodship Office and/or other local government authorities, and the Marshal of the Voivodship, the Marshal's Office as institutions with which they interact in the field of international cooperation.

It is puzzling that none of the surveyed representatives of local government units indicated cooperation with churches and religious associations. It would require a deeper reflection why this dimension of international cooperation has not been undertaken and included so far?

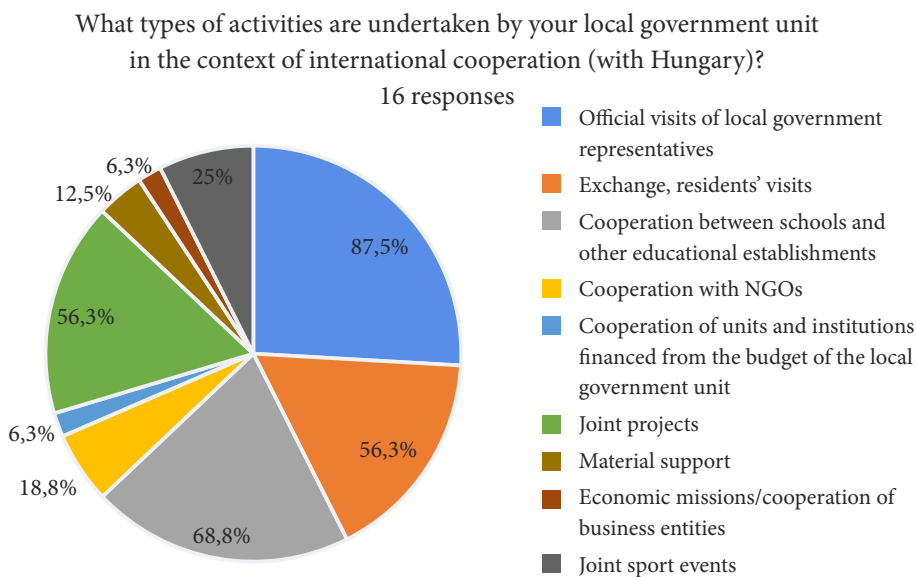
Referring to the research analyses from the 2019 report on Polish institutions with which the local government units interact in terms of international cooperation with Hungary, the highest percentage of responses in both surveys obtained NGOs (an increase from 44% to 56.3%); cultural institutions

²⁰ Legal basis for the operation of research institutes provides the Act of 30 April 2010 on research institutes, *Journal of Laws* 2022, item 498.

²¹ See <https://www.gov.pl/web/aktywa-panstwowe/instituty-badawcze> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

(an increase from 42% to 56.3%) and other local government entities (a decrease from 30% to 25%). Other responses indicated private entities (an increase from 8% to 12.5%); Marshal offices (the same level of 6% and 6.3%); Voivodeship offices (a similar level of 5% and 6.3%); the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (an increase from 6% to 12.5%); universities and research institutions (an increase from 5% to 25%); Polish institutes abroad (an increase from 5% to 18.8%). It is worth noting that the lack of interaction with Polish institutions in the context of cooperation with Hungarian local governments was indicated by fewer respondents in the current year of the survey (a decrease from 26% to 18.8%)²². The presented results provide a kind of a “road map” for developing cooperation with Hungarian local government units. Particularly noteworthy is the high percentage of indications regarding cooperation with NGOs and cultural institutions – it is thus worth developing these proven areas of international cooperation by creating networks of NGO partnerships.

6) What types of activities are undertaken by your local government unit in the context of international cooperation (with Hungary)?



When answering the question concerning the types of activities undertaken by the local government unit within the framework of international cooperation (with Hungary), the representatives of the surveyed local governments

²² M. Szewczak, D. Bis, M. Ganczar, A. Ostrowska K. Kwiatosz, *Model polsko-węgierskiej...*, p. 66.

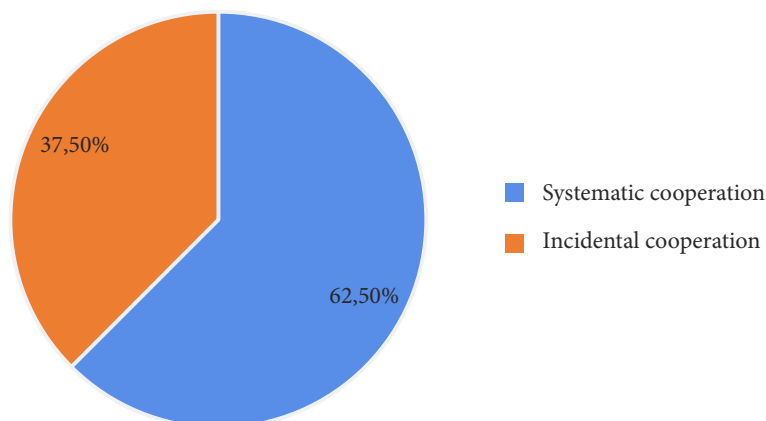
units gave a number of answers. In the first place they mentioned official visits of local government representatives and officials. This was followed by cooperation between schools or other educational institutions; exchange, visits by local residents to the partner city; and joint projects and sporting events. This was further followed by cooperation of NGOs and other units not financed from the budget of the local government unit, and material assistance as types of local government activity undertaken within the framework of international cooperation (with Hungary). The least number of local government officials indicated the categories: cooperation of units and institutions financed from the budget of the local government unit, and economic missions/cooperation of business entities.

Among the types of activities undertaken most frequently by the local government unit as part of international cooperation with Hungary, the local government employees mentioned official visits by local government representatives and officials – 87.5%. This is a form of activity that creates and guides opportunities for the development of the city or town in the area of international cooperation. Equally important in the opinion of 68.8% respondents is the cooperation of schools or other educational institutions. This is particularly important when it comes to the involvement of students as well as teachers in the development of international educational activities. Among local government officials, the same level of 56.3% responses was given to exchanges and visits by residents to the partner city, and joint projects. Exchanges and visits by residents of partner cities and towns are combined with activities under the implemented projects and provide opportunities for development in various dimensions. Another form of activity of an international character, in the opinion of 25% respondents, are joint sports events, which stimulate people to achieve the best results in the sports they practice. For 18.8% of the respondents, cooperation between NGOs and other entities not financed from the budget of the local government unit is also important. The activities carried out by these entities foster their status, generate new inspirations and strengthen social integration. 12.5% of the respondents mentioned material assistance as important for the activity of the local government unit in international cooperation. The fewest number of the local government officials (6.3%) indicated cooperation of units and institutions financed from the budget of the local government unit, and economic missions/cooperation of business entities, as the forms of local government activity undertaken within the framework of international cooperation with Hungary. This may have to do with extensive time and work investment on the part of many entities, and the relatively long waiting time for the results of economic cooperation.

Referring to the research analyses from the 2019 report on the types of activities undertaken by the local government units within the framework of international cooperation with Hungary, it can be stated that the most common type of local government activity is limited to official visits by local government representatives and officials (similar levels of response – 86% and 87.5%, respectively). This was followed by cooperation between schools or other educational institutions (a significant increase from 44% to 68.3%), and the exchange of residents between partner cities (an increase from 42% to 56.3%). This, in turn, was followed by the implementation of joint projects (a substantial increase from 27% to 56.3%), joint sporting events (an increase from 15% to 25%), cooperation with NGOs (an increase from 12% to 18.8%), cooperation between budget units (similar levels of 8% and 6.3%), and economic missions (an increase from 3% to 6.3%)²³. Over the four years, official visits by representatives of local authorities and officials have dominated; therefore, it is worth re-evaluating the activities and directing the actions of the local government towards greater involvement of the residents who represent unlimited potential of opportunities and should be the most numerous and ultimate beneficiaries of the international cooperation carried out.

7) What is the nature of your cooperation with the Partner?

What is the nature of your cooperation with the Partner?
16 responses



When answering about the nature of international cooperation (with Hungary), the local government representatives first emphasised systematic

²³ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

cooperation, followed by incidental cooperation. Systematic cooperation was indicated by 62.5% of the respondents and incidental cooperation by 37.5%. It is worth emphasising the commitment of the majority of local authorities participating in the survey to systematic international cooperation with their partner city or town. Owing to this approach, the objectives that local authorities set themselves before starting cooperation can be realised. At the same time, efforts should be made to develop incidental cooperation, which represents a tangible value and creates new areas for dedicated activities and the involvement of various actors.

Referring to the research analyses included in the 2019 report on the nature of the cooperation carried out, the vast majority of local authorities indicated that the cooperation they carry out is of a systematic nature (a slight decrease from 68% to 62.3%). It is noteworthy that the surveyed local government units that pursue international cooperation with partner cities or towns develop it over many years, creating long-term partnerships. On the other hand, the incidental nature of cooperation was indicated less often (a slight increase from 32% to 37.5%)²⁴. An analysis of the data shows that for the activities to be effective, greater flexibility and a package of comprehensive cooperation offer are needed for Polish local government units cooperating with Hungarian counterparts.

8) What are the main criteria for selecting partner cities or towns from Hungary?

In response to the question concerning the selection criteria for partner cities and towns from Hungary, the surveyed local government units gave numerous and varied answers, which have been grouped for clarity of presentation. Long-standing cooperation, partnership and the use of common experience were the most frequently mentioned criteria. The use of good practices, especially in the area of local government, is always mutually beneficial. Typically, developing cities aim to find partners among developed cities to take advantage of their know-how. Cultural identity and shared history is a very important premise for the selection of partner cities in Hungary. The presence of Poles in Hungary and their activeness is crucial for the Polish national interest and preserving the national heritage. Establishing cooperation with cities and towns where there are Polish communities is a special example of care for Polish history, traditions and culture. Activities carried out jointly

²⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

enable the Polish community to support the preservation of its identity, while the residents of Polish towns and cities are reminded of their obligations towards those whom history has forced to leave their homeland.

An important criterion is the geographical area and its proximity. It is easier to establish contacts with an international partner if it is located in the same border area or in close proximity to it. Geographical proximity also affects other criteria such as the possibility of obtaining European Union funding under international programmes co-financed by the European Union, common elements of history and culture, contacts maintained between the regions in which the cities or towns are located and recommendations from regional authorities.

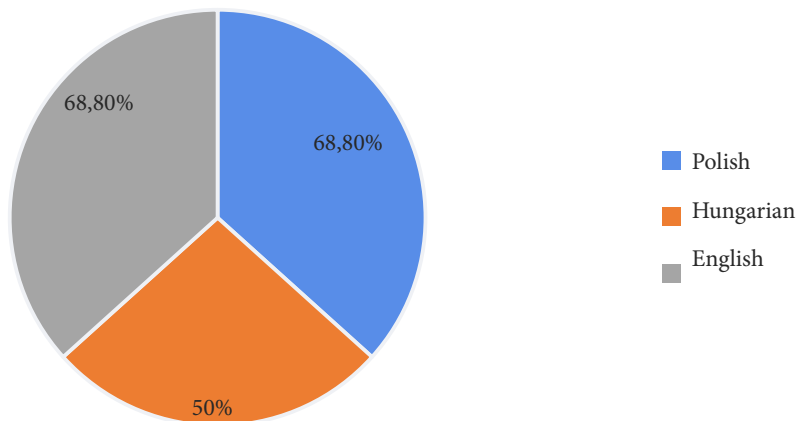
The next criterion is the territorial size of the local government unit. This is usually a particularly important factor in the process of reconnaissance and selection of a partner city or town, when we are looking for as many similarities to our city as possible, opportunities for development, promotion at the international level. Another criterion is the city's similar profile, common areas of activity and its potential. This similarity manifests itself in the following areas: similar territorial size, similar industrial profile, similarity in the area of education, university city, culture, religion and tradition, similar tourism potential.

Of the remaining answers, school exchanges of students and teachers were mentioned. There were also answers that indicated that there were no clearly defined criteria for the selection of partner city and towns in Hungary, or that no action is taken in this regard.

9) What language do you use for communicating with your partner?

What language do you use for communicating with your partner?

16 responses



Undertaking international activities with a foreign partner requires knowledge of a foreign language. In response to the question – *What language do you use for communicating with your partner?*, the representatives of the local government units listed primarily Polish and English, followed by Hungarian.

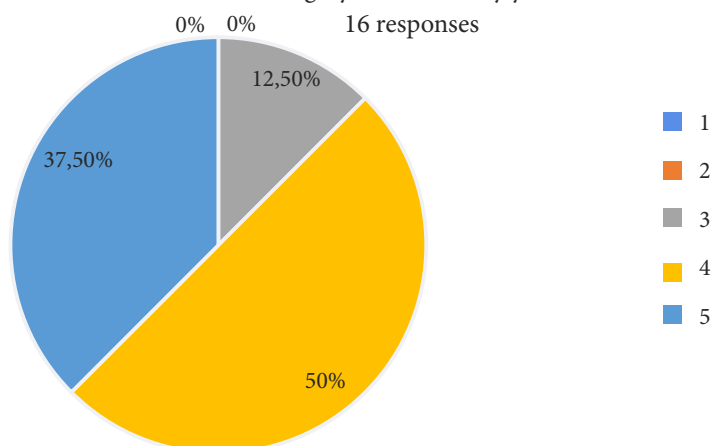
Most often the respondents indicated that they communicate in Polish or English (68.8%). The use of Polish is probably attributable to the proximity of Poland and Hungary and the fact that many Poles live in Hungary, which also makes it easier to establish cooperation at the local government level. Communication in Hungarian was indicated by 50% of the local government officials. It may be concluded that the Hungarian language courses organised in Poland by the Waław Felczak Institute for Polish-Hungarian Cooperation are increasingly bearing fruit.

Referring to the research analyses from the 2019 report on the language in which local governments communicate with their Hungarian partner, it can be stated that the vast majority of participants in local government cooperation speak English (an increase from 42% to 68.8%); Polish (a major increase from 28% to 68.8%); and Hungarian (a significant increase from 22%

to 50%)²⁵. Linguistic communication is not a problem for local authorities that are already involved in international cooperation. It is noteworthy that the number of local governments that use Hungarian to communicate with their Hungarian local government partners is increasing.

10) How do you assess (on a scale from 1 to 5) the effectiveness of the international cooperation with Hungary carried out by your unit?²⁶

How do you assess (on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 – very good cooperation, 1 – very bad cooperation) the effectiveness of the international cooperation with Hungary carried out by your unit?



In response to the question – *How do you assess the effectiveness of the international cooperation with Hungary carried out by your unit?*, most local government units surveyed considered the quality of the cooperation to be good, followed by very good, and sufficient in the third place.

Half of the local government units surveyed (50%) rated the international cooperation of their units as good. This means that the objectives adopted by the local governments in terms of international cooperation are realised, but it is worth analysing them and introducing improvements and new solutions in an innovative context. It is worth noting that a significant number of the surveyed local government officials (37.5%) believe that the effectiveness of international cooperation in the units they represent is at a very good

²⁵ Ibid., p. 69.

²⁶ Answers are selected on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means very good cooperation, and 1 means very bad cooperation.

level. In this case, there is no need to introduce changes, but only to continue the implemented policy and maintain its best quality. It is worth introducing on-going monitoring and evaluation of the activities carried out and to remain open to possible changes if there are such social needs.

The effectiveness of international cooperation was assessed as sufficient by 12.5% of the representatives of the local government units participating in the survey. It is worth analysing why specific local authorities do not make effective use of international cooperation as a tool for the development of their own unit. Reflecting on the reasons for this assessment, which depends on many factors, makes it possible to take corrective actions. Firstly, the initial and preparatory process, which consists of the preparation of an international cooperation strategy, the selection of partners, and a clear indication of the goals and tasks to be implemented. Secondly, the implementation process; even the best-designed cooperation plan may be negatively affected by an inadequate implementation process. At this stage, efficient management, responsibility of the unit leader and the ability to overcome emerging difficulties or crises are indispensable. The correct implementation of the above stages should have a positive impact on the increase in effectiveness of the international cooperation carried out. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that none of the local government units rated the effectiveness of international cooperation with Hungary as bad or very bad. This fact fills us with optimism and allows us to anticipate effective and satisfactory cooperation in the future.

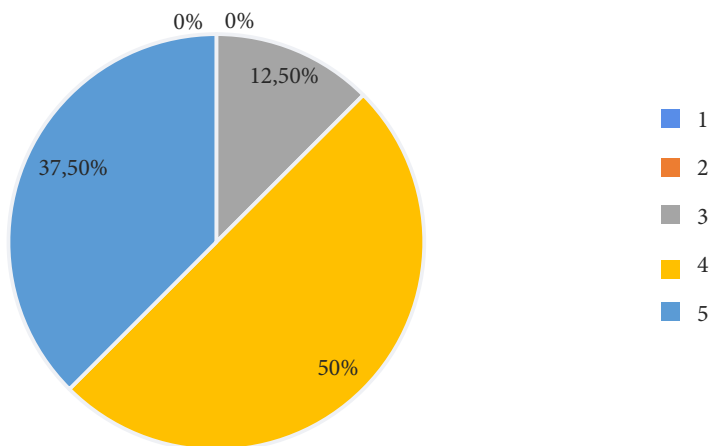
Referring to the research analyses presented in the 2019 report on the effectiveness of international cooperation with Hungary, it is important to point out the changes that have taken place over the last 4 years. The surveyed local government units indicated that their cooperation with Hungarian counterparts is very good (a decrease from 53% to 35.7%), good (an increase from 27% to 50%) and sufficient (similar levels – 14% and 12.5%). It is noteworthy that, despite a decrease in the rating of cooperation as very good in 2023, no one assessed it as bad or very bad, which was the case in 2019: 4% of the local government units assessed their cooperation with the Hungarian partner as bad, while 2% rated it as very bad²⁷. The analyses indicate that the level of satisfaction with the cooperation is largely assessed positively and quite highly, but areas where the effectiveness of the cooperation needs to be improved should be verified.

²⁷ M. Szewczak, D. Bis, M. Ganczar, A. Ostrowska K. Kwiatosz, *Model polsko-węgierskiej...*, p. 71.

11) How do you assess (on a scale from 1 to 5) the sustainability of your cooperation with the Hungarian partner?

How do you assess (on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 – very good, 1 – very bad) the sustainability of your cooperation with the Hungarian partner?

16 responses



In response to the question – *How do you assess the sustainability of your cooperation with the Hungarian partner?*, most respondents considered the sustainability to be good, followed by very good, and in third place average (i.e. sufficient).

Half of the self-government units surveyed (50%) assess the effectiveness of international cooperation implemented by their units well. This means that the assumptions adopted by local governments in terms of sustainability and continuity of international cooperation are being realised, but it is worth analysing them and introducing new solutions to foster its effectiveness. It is worth emphasising that a significant percentage of the local government officials surveyed (37.5%) claim that the sustainability of international cooperation in the units they represent is at a very good level. In this case, there is no need to introduce changes, but rather to continue the implemented policy and maintain its best quality through monitoring and evaluation of the sustainability of the activities carried out.

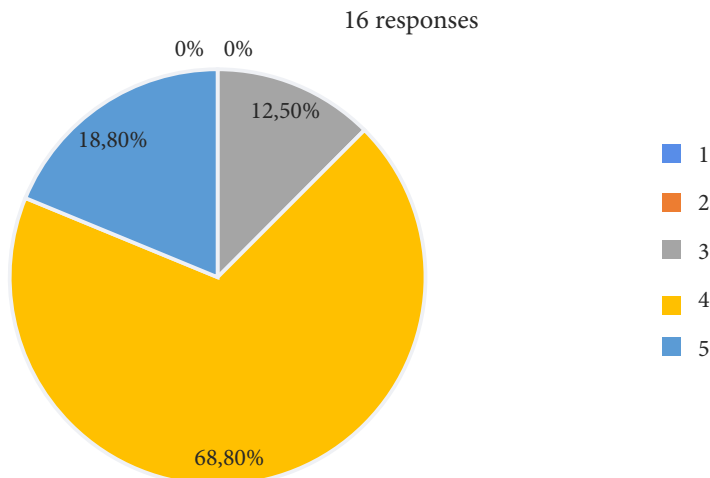
The sustainability of cooperation with the Hungarian partner was considered sufficient by 12.5% of the representatives of the local government units participating in the survey. It is worth analysing why specific local authorities do not ensure the sustainability of international cooperation as a tool for the development

of their own unit. Finding out the reasons for such an assessment, which probably is contingent upon many factors, makes it possible to take corrective measures. Firstly, the initial and preparatory process, which consists of the preparation of an international cooperation strategy, the selection of partners, a clear identification of goals and tasks to be implemented. Secondly, the implementation process; even the best-designed cooperation plan may be negatively affected by an inadequate implementation process. At this stage, efficient management, responsibility of the unit leader and the ability to overcome emerging difficulties or crises are essential. Proper implementation of the above stages should positively increase the sustainability of the international cooperation carried out.

It should be further emphasised that none of the local government units surveyed assessed the sustainability of their cooperation with the Hungarian partner as bad or very bad. This fact is a cause for optimism and raises hopes for the continuation of cooperation, ensuring its best possible sustainability.

12) How do you assess (on a scale from 1 to 5) the impact of Hungarian cooperation on the quality of the implemented projects?

How do you assess (on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 – very good, 1 – very bad) the impact of Hungarian cooperation on the quality of the implemented projects?



When answering the question – *How do you assess the impact of international cooperation on the quality of implemented projects?*, the vast majority of the local government officials gave a positive assessment. Most local government respondents rated the implementation of projects as good, followed by very good, and in the third place – sufficient.

The majority of the local government units surveyed (68.8%) described, using a 5-grade Likert scale, the impact of international cooperation on the quality of implemented projects as good and 18.8% as very good. It should be emphasised that in total, this gives a very good result of 87.6% of the responses confirming the positive impact of cooperation on implemented projects. It seems, therefore, that the vast majority of the cooperation carried out by the local government units had a positive impact on the quality of the projects implemented. This is primarily due to the fact that, when deciding to implement joint activities at the international level, local government units are in the vast majority diligent in their execution. This is also a result of regulations (especially in the area of projects with EU co-financing), which oblige the beneficiaries to implement a project correctly and diligently, with due attention to its quality. These correlate with the answers to the question concerning the sustainability of cooperation with partners, because the sustainability of cooperation also influences the quality of implemented activities.

On the other hand, 12.5% of the respondents assessed the analysed impact of cooperation to be at a sufficient level. This may be the result of a lack of experience in implementing tasks in the field of international cooperation, which in turn translates into low quality of implemented activities, as well as – despite the good intentions of the local government unit and its foreign partner – this may lead to various situations negatively influencing the quality of the implementation of the project process. Very often, this is the result of a poor selection or lack of preparation of administrative staff responsible for the implemented international cooperation. An insufficient and excessively low quality level may result from insufficient attention to the implemented “project-related” activities, which affect the overall quality, including promotional activities, use of good practices or ensuring the effect of project sustainability. It should be emphasised that a condition for the quality of implemented projects is their comprehensive and correct implementation in the area of international cooperation, fulfilling previous objectives arising from strategic documents. In order to increase the effectiveness and quality of cooperation in the implementation of international projects, it is worthwhile for the local government to become more involved in the dissemination of information on the current calls for project proposals and the submission of applications in the Polish-Hungarian cooperation programme organised, inter alia, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary. Non-governmental organisations, schools and universities, church institutions and legal entities are invited to participate in the competition. A prerequisite for participation is the establishment of cooperation

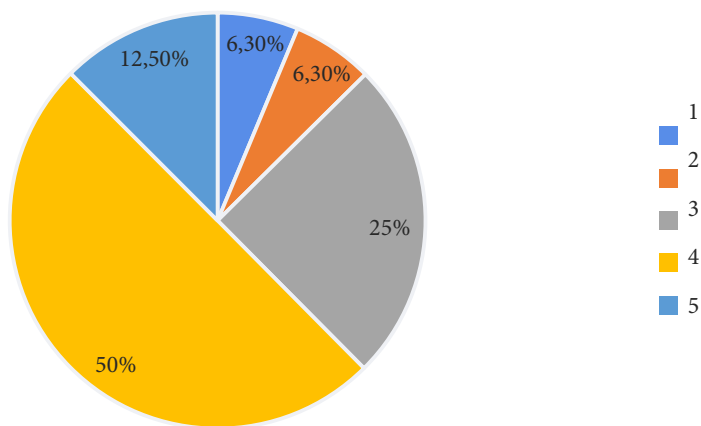
with an entity from Hungary, as applications are to be submitted within the framework of partnerships. Project activities may concern social and civic innovations increasing the competitiveness of Poland and Hungary and changing the way these countries are perceived in Europe. Projects may concern activities supporting Polish-Hungarian traditions and heritage, and involving the promotion of learning both languages. It would also be a good idea to carry out tasks in the field of broadly understood education²⁸.

In conclusion, it is worth pointing out that none of the local government units participating in the survey rated the impact of Hungarian cooperation on the quality of the projects implemented as bad or very bad. This fact is cause for optimism and raises hopes for the continuation of cooperation in the preparation and implementation of projects in the current funding period. It is worth remembering that at the moment, due to the new programming period for European funds, there is a very favourable time for the preparation and implementation of projects, as there are significant funds available for the development of many areas²⁹.

13) How do you assess (on a scale from 1 to 5) the use of Hungarian good practices in carrying out your own tasks?

How do you assess (on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 – very good, 1 – very bad) the use of Hungarian good practices in carrying out your own tasks?

16 responses



²⁸ See <https://aktywizuj.pl/program-wsparcia-polsko-wegierskiej-wspolpracy-obywatelskiej/> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

²⁹ See <https://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl/strony/o-funduszach/fundusze-2021-2027/aktualnosci/polska-inauguruje-programy-europejskie-na-lata-2021-2027/> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

In response to the question – *How do you assess the use of Hungarian good practices in the implementation of your own tasks?*, the vast majority of the local government officials gave a positive assessment. The largest number of respondents among the local governments rated the Hungarian good practices as good, followed by very good, and in the third place – sufficient. Unfortunately, however, there were also respondents who assessed the use of Hungarian good practices by their local government units as bad or very bad.

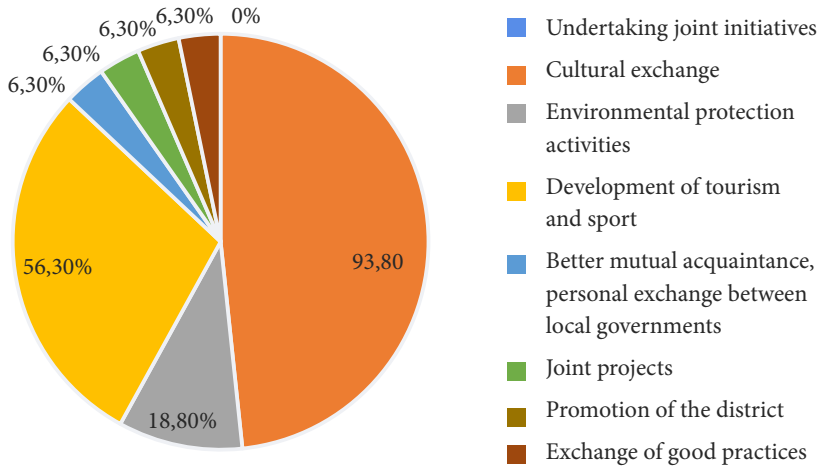
In the analysed survey, half of the respondents (50%) assessed the use of good Hungarian practices in the implementation of own tasks as good. A significantly smaller number of local government officials (12.5%) indicated that they were implemented as their own tasks very well. The data shows that a total of 62.5% of the surveyed local government units gave a positive assessment of the use of Hungarian good practices. On the other hand, as many as 25% of local government officials said that the use of Hungarian good practices was sufficient. This means that a quarter of the surveyed local government units see opportunities to use good practices, but for various reasons the implementation is not satisfactory. In addition, 6.3% of the respondents indicated that the use of good practices is bad or very bad. The above results indicate that corrective measures should be taken for more effective use of good practices by some local governments participating in the survey.

A particularly important issue for better performance of the local government unit's own tasks is the use of good practices from Hungarian local authorities. "Good practices" can be defined as activities that have been proven effective in a given local government unit and are characterised by positive features, which allows for their implementation in an analogous or similar entity. Good practices as a tool for the development of local government units are particularly important if they derive from international cooperation³⁰.

³⁰ M. Szewczak, M. Ganczar, P. Jaszczuk, *Raport badawczy...*, pp. 14-15.

14) What are the main benefits of international cooperation with Hungary?

What are the main benefits of international cooperation with Hungary?
16 responses



The surveyed local government units were asked to answer the question – *What are the most important benefits of international cooperation with Hungary?* In order of selection, the respondents indicated: cultural exchange, development of tourism and sport, activities related to environmental protection, mutual acquaintance, personal exchange between local governments, joint projects, promotion of the district, and exchange of good practices. It is puzzling that none of the respondents indicated undertaking joint economic initiatives. This is a complex and long-term initiative, but one with tangible benefits for the development of the local government unit and business.

Of the local government units surveyed, by far the largest number (93.8%) pointed to the benefits of cultural exchange. The development of culture, combined with the preservation of national heritage, are related to both the individual and shared history of both nations and constitute their identity.

Poland and Hungary have shaped the history of Central and Eastern Europe for long centuries, pursuing economic, cultural and political relations. Their many common heroes are an excellent point of reference for building contemporary friendly relations. The combination of tradition and modernity can be a good basis for undertaking and implementing further joint ventures by local government units.

56.3% of the respondents indicated the development of tourism and sport as the most important benefit of the ongoing international cooperation with the Hungarian local government unit. The scenic qualities, the beauty of nature, the increasingly better transport routes between Poland and Hungary are conducive to the development of tourism and sport. These are also conducive to taking initiatives and organising events in which the local government communities are willingly involved, as they foster integration and cooperation.

In turn, environmental protection activities are an important benefit of international cooperation with Hungary for 18.5% of the respondents. It is important to both create and develop already existing cooperation networks and positive experiences of cooperation between the scientific community, business and public administration, taking into account the specificity and potential of each actor in terms of environmental protection and building public awareness of RES. The concept of sustainable development plays a huge role in shaping public attitudes and behaviour and in changing the way of thinking about the relationships between society, economy and natural environment. It has generated a new approach to man's place in the surrounding reality and has prompted many re-evaluations concerning the use of renewable and non-renewable environmental resources. The assumptions of sustainable development imply that in a society, the quality of life of all people should be adequate to the level of civilisational development. In turn, civilisation can maintain a sufficiently high and sustainable level of welfare provided that a balance is maintained in the management between three types of capital: economic, human and natural³¹, which should be borne in mind while planning activities.

Respondents listed four more categories (6.3% each): getting to know each other, personal exchange between self-governments; joint projects; promotion of the district; exchange of good practices. Undertaking more effective cooperation in the above-mentioned areas requires much greater interest on the part of local government representatives and the inclusion of non-governmental organisations in these activities, which, through their involvement and human potential, can contribute to the successful implementation of many tasks that will foster the promotion and development of international cooperation with Hungary. It is also worth engaging local entrepreneurs

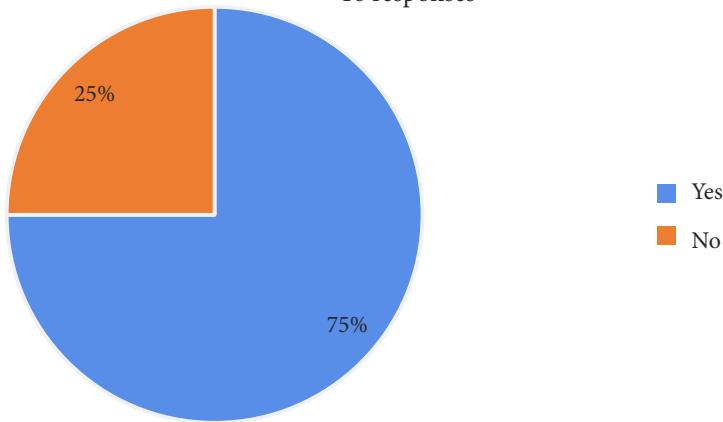
³¹ E. Mazur-Wierzbička, *Koncepcja zrównoważonego rozwoju...*, pp. 15-22.

and joining forces together in order to identify, plan and realise cooperation opportunities in the best and multifaceted way.

15) Is there any visible sign/symbol in your local government unit that displays cooperation with a foreign local government unit (e.g. a plaque, commemorative statue)?

Is there any visible sign/symbol in your local government unit that displays cooperation with a foreign local government unit (e.g. a plaque, commemorative statue)?

16 responses



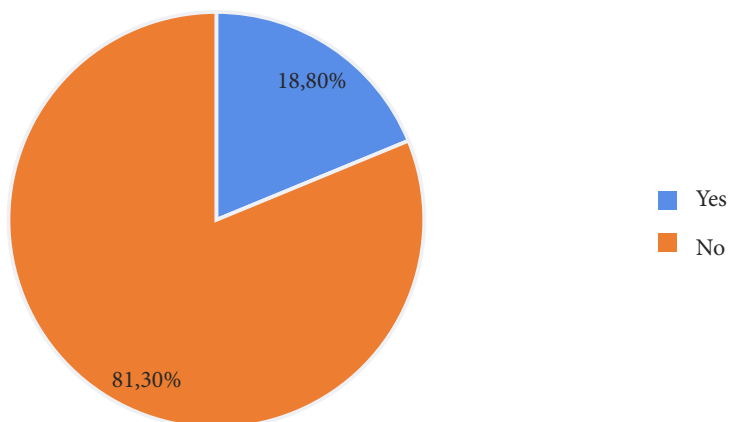
In response to the question – *Is there any visible sign/symbol in your local government unit that displays cooperation with a foreign local government unit (e.g. a plaque, commemorative statue)?*, 75% of the respondents indicated that there is a visible symbol. On the other hand, 25% of the respondents answered that there was no visible sign in their local government unit to indicate cooperation with a foreign counterpart. Therefore, it is worth encouraging entities involved in international cooperation between local government units to use the visual symbols of Hungarian partners as often as possible and, at the same time, to ensure the presence of the symbols of Polish local governments in Hungary. It seems that in the case of Polish-Hungarian international cooperation, a nationwide sign/symbol could be developed which local government units could use when initiating and implementing such cooperation. This sign could be developed, for example, by launching a competition for a sign symbolising Polish-Hungarian cooperation at the local government level.

Referring to the 2019 survey analyses, an increase in labelled and visible signs/symbols showing cooperation with a foreign local government unit from Hungary can be observed. Among the surveyed local governments, there is a visible sign/symbol of the ongoing international cooperation (an increase from 58% to 75%). conversely, there are far fewer local government units that lack a sign/symbol indicating international cooperation (a decrease from 42% to 25%). The presentation of a sign or symbol of international cooperation, on the one hand, serves to emphasise the importance of this form of cooperation and, on the other hand, constitutes a promotional element³².

16) Does your unit have a separate strategy or programme document that directly addresses international cooperation with Hungary?

Does your unit have a separate strategy or programme document that directly addresses international cooperation with Hungary?

16 responses



In response to the question – *Does your unit have a separate strategic or programme document that directly addresses international cooperation with Hungary?*, as many as 81.3% of the surveyed local government units gave a negative answer, while only 18.3% gave a positive answer. It can be assumed that the high percentage of negative answers given by the respondents is due to the fact that the surveyed units mostly do not have separate strategic documents for international cooperation. This does not mean, however, that they do not have any regulations defining the forms of this cooperation, as they are often outlined in the development strategy. International cooperation is not

³² M. Szewczak, D. Bis, M. Ganczar, A. Ostrowska K. Kwiatosz, *Model polsko-węgierskiej...*, pp. 74-75.

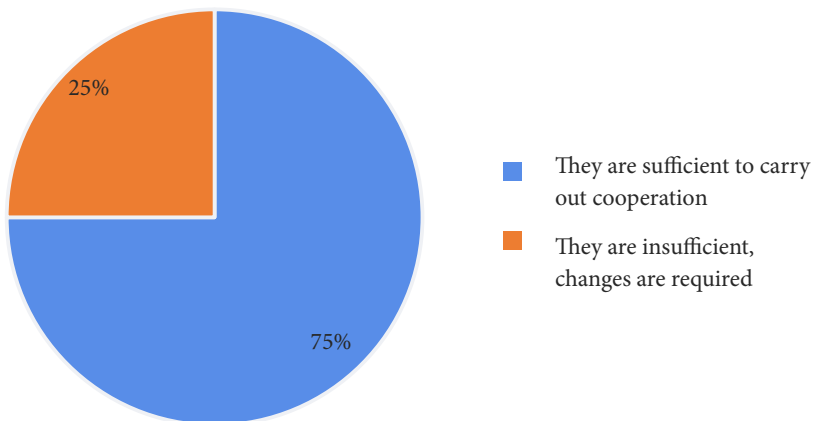
a priority issue for the local government unit, although in the face of Poland's membership in the European Union and the possibility of applying for various financial resources, it is becoming an issue that complements the operation of the local government. Creating opportunities for the inhabitants of the commune/city to cooperate internationally (e.g. in the fields of tourism, youth and student exchange, use of good practices) is a manifestation of care for the common good of the inhabitants. The result of this study indicates the need for a strategic prioritisation of the directions of international cooperation conducted by local government units.

Referring to the analyses from the 2019 survey regarding the preparation of a separate strategic or programme document by the local government unit that directly relates to the ongoing international cooperation with Hungary, we can notice similar results concerning the absence of such a document (77% and 81.3%, respectively) or having such a document/programme (a slight decrease from 23% to 18.8%). The comparison of the data from 2019 and 2023 is somewhat surprising, as it seems that for efficiency and transparency of activities, issues related to international cooperation should be formally regulated by separate documents/programmes. Having such documents in place is essential when defining the objectives of the international cooperation pursued, e.g. in the area of business development, tourism, educational and cultural exchanges.

17) Are the existing legal provisions governing the initiation and conduct of international cooperation by local government units sufficient?

Are the existing legal provisions governing the initiation and conduct of international cooperation by local government units sufficient?

16 responses



In response to the question – *Are the current legal regulations governing the initiation and conduct of international cooperation by local government units sufficient?*, a vast majority of the surveyed local government units (as many as 75%) replied that the current legal regulations governing the initiation and conduct of international cooperation by local government units are sufficient. Conversely, 25% of the local government units surveyed stated that the current legal regulations are not sufficient and that changes are necessary. The answer to this question may turn out to be a trap, as the importance of this question is measured by the number of negative answers. A quarter of the respondents indicated that there is a need for changes, thus perhaps this is the right time to review the existing legal acts, especially those regulating Polish-Hungarian international cooperation. It seems that as a result of significant and multidimensional socio-economic changes in the world around us, and especially in the area of international cooperation of local government units, legal regulations are necessary for proper functioning of these.

International norms provide an external legal framework for local government and its administration, but each national solution is situated in a specific constitutional order and should be considered in that order. International cooperation allows both the exchange of experience and the acquisition of financial, technical or human resources, which help to increase the quality of public services provided to society in its local and regional dimension. Local government units are not able to achieve all their objectives on their own and thus they have to look for new forms of realising them, including those related to internationalisation³³. The basic standards of local and territorial government are usually defined in the constitutions of particular states. These orders are also to some extent influenced by international obligations, usually based on treaties, which also define the states' systems of government within the framework of the EU and the Council of Europe. Nowadays we are dealing with the coexistence of many international orders, which in constitutional terms should be normalized as harmoniously as possible³⁴. In a relatively short period of time, a multi-level and orderly set of rules and standards has been formed to secure international cooperation and to protect the actors involved in it. It can also be noted that the activities of the local government administration in the area of international cooperation, especially within

³³ M. Karpiuk, *Członkostwo jednostki samorządu terytorialnego w europejskim ugrupowaniu współpracy terytorialnej*, in: *Wybrane aspekty współpracy transgranicznej polskich samorządów*, eds. I. Wieczorek, M. Ganczar, Łódź 2016, p. 54.

³⁴ J. Sozański, *Międzynarodowe ramy normatywne administracji samorządowej – zarys zagadnienia*, "Rocznik Administracji i Prawa" 14 (2014), Issue 1, pp. 33-55.

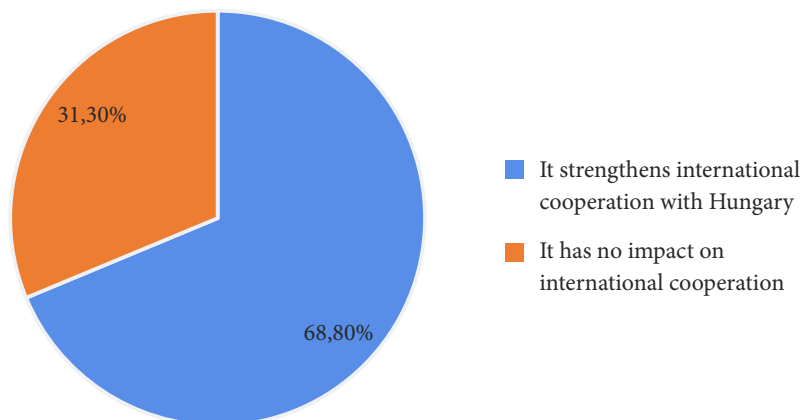
the framework of the European Union, consist in the introduction of new forms of cooperation (e.g. EGTC) as well as the intensification of existing ones. Furthermore, EU law has a direct and indirect impact on Polish law.

Referring to the analyses presented in the 2019 report concerning the sufficiency of the existing legal provisions for undertaking and implementing international cooperation by local government units, the vast majority of the surveyed local government units gave a positive answer (an increase from 67% to 75%), as opposed to the negative answer (a decrease from 33% to 25%). The vast majority of local authorities that are actively engaged in international cooperation with Hungarian local government units believe that the current regulations are sufficient for cooperation³⁵.

18) Is the Via Carpathia international route an instrument used by your local government unit to strengthen international cooperation with Hungary?

Is the Via Carpathia international route an instrument used by your local government unit to strengthen international cooperation with Hungary?

16 responses



In response to the question – *Is the Via Carpathia international route an instrument used by your local government unit to strengthen international cooperation with Hungary?*, the vast majority of local government officials (68.8%) gave a positive answer. In contrast, 31.3% of the respondents felt that the expressway does not affect their international cooperation. The question was asked one year after the Via Carpathia international route was completed. The Via Carpathia road is part of the activities of the Three Seas Initiative,

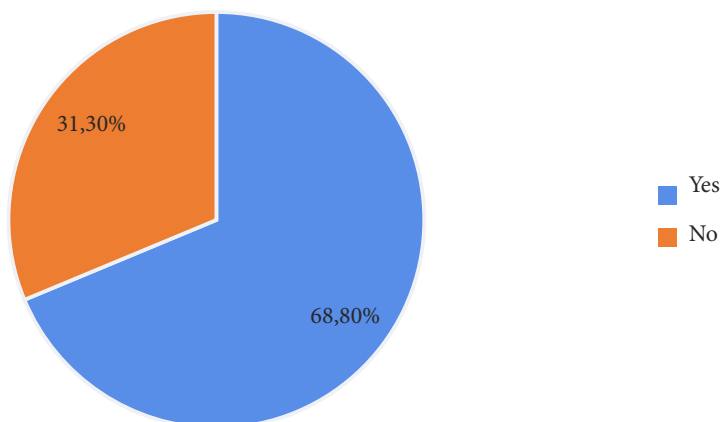
³⁵ M. Szewczak, D. Bis, M. Ganczar, A. Ostrowska K. Kwiatosz, *Model polsko-węgierskiej...*, p. 91.

the implementation of which is generating increasingly significant socio-economic effects for the countries and regions of Central and Eastern Europe. This upward trend provides a basis for the development of international cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units, which should be strengthened through promotional activities related to local government undertakings.

It is worth referring to the 2019 report³⁶, in which the question was asked to determine whether the Via Carpathia international route, under construction then, would be an instrument for the local government unit to strengthen international cooperation with Hungary or not. In response to this question, 51% of the surveyed local government officials stated that the planned Via Carpathia road would not affect ongoing international cooperation. On the other hand, 49% of the respondents stated that the upgraded road route would be an instrument that strengthens their cooperation with Hungary. It should be emphasised that the war in Ukraine has made the importance of the construction of the Via Carpathia road even more evident, as it has become one of the most important transport routes in Europe and in the world due to the fact that it runs along the eastern border of the European Union and along the border with Ukraine.

19) Has the SARS-CoV2 virus pandemic affected the quality and effectiveness of your cooperation with Hungary?

Has the SARS-CoV2 virus pandemic affected the quality and effectiveness of your cooperation with Hungary?
16 responses



³⁶ Ibid., p. 77.

In response to the question – *Did the SARS-CoV2 virus pandemic affect the quality and effectiveness of your cooperation with Hungary?*, the respondents detailed the key areas in which, due to the restrictions introduced and their duration, they experienced difficulties in implementing international cooperation.

The analyses show that 68.8% of the respondents experienced a decrease in the quality and effectiveness of cooperation with Hungary. The local government officials most severely experienced a change in the quality and effectiveness of cooperation with Hungary in the area of culture. During the almost two-year pandemic period, there was a significant weakening of the implementation of historical and cultural activities, which reduced the scale of cooperation, in the initial period even making it impossible to meet and exchange experiences, and in the following periods making it more difficult through indirect contact using the latest communication technologies. It should be remembered that issues related to culture and the protection of national heritage in international relations between local government units are a measurable indicator of this cooperation, as they foster the creation of links and close personal relations. The development of effective cooperation has been hampered by the lack of opportunities for face-to-face visits – they were repeatedly suspended and postponed due to the inability to organise events aimed at promoting both local governments. The most common form of maintaining contact between the partner cities and towns in Poland and Hungary were initiatives that could be implemented via an online platform. Very often, the representatives of the local government units pointed to the difficulty of not being able to have direct contact, discussions and joint activities.

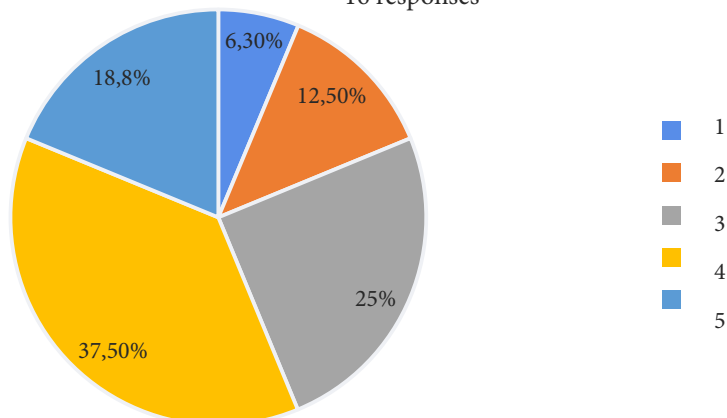
It is noteworthy that over the last year, when all restrictions due to the SARS-CoV2 virus pandemic were lifted, local governments have pointed to a new opening and a return to best practices, which is conducive to developing and deepening relations. Now is a convenient time to undertake new initiatives and develop international cooperation with Hungary, as there is an opportunity to apply for EU funds in areas such as digital transformation, education, culture, social innovation, entrepreneurship, healthcare, energy efficiency, climate, transport, tourism and post-Covid-19 reconstruction, or mitigating the effects of the security crisis and war in Ukraine³⁷.

³⁷ The negotiations concerning the Partnership Agreement between the European Commission and the Polish government officially concluded on 30 June 2022: <https://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl/strony/o-funduszach/fundusze-2021-2027/aktualnosci/polska-inauguruje-programy-europejskie-na-lata-2021-2027/> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

20) Please indicate to what extent the war in Ukraine and the current security crisis in the European Union may affect the level of international cooperation with Hungary?

Please indicate to what extent the war in Ukraine and the current security crisis in the European Union may affect the level of international cooperation with Hungary (5 – a major impact, 1 – a marginal impact)

16 responses



The next question referred to the current socio-political situation – *To what extent may the war in Ukraine and the current security crisis in the European Union affect the level of international cooperation with Hungary?* The largest number of the respondents felt that the war in Ukraine and the current security crisis in the European Union could affect the level of international cooperation with Hungary to a considerable degree, followed by a moderate degree, and a major degree. Unfortunately, there were also respondents who felt that the war in Ukraine and the current security crisis in the European Union could affect the level of international cooperation with Hungary only to a small or marginal degree.

In the analysed survey, 37.5% of the respondents assessed that the war in Ukraine and the current security crisis in the European Union could affect the level of international cooperation with Hungary to a considerable degree, while 25% of local government officials rated their impact as moderate. A relatively small number of local government units (18.8%) thought that the war in Ukraine and the current security crisis in the European Union could affect the level of international cooperation with Hungary to a major degree. This is a good starting point for analysing the opportunities presented by the current economic and political situation. Significantly fewer local government officials

(12.5%) believed that the existing situation affects the level of international cooperation with Hungary to a small degree and 6.3% thought it to be a marginal degree. The above results indicate that action should be taken to identify opportunities for international activities of the individual local government units participating in the survey.

This question was introduced into the survey because the war in Ukraine, fought since 24 February 2022, and the accompanying broader security crisis which we are currently witnessing within the European Union have a significant impact on the process of international cooperation of local authorities. On the one hand, we are talking about cooperation between local government units from the European Union Member States. On the other hand, we are talking about cooperation between cities from the European Union Member States and those located in candidate or associated countries. An example of the impact of the security crisis is the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the seizure of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions³⁸. In their responses, the surveyed local government units indicated that the war in Ukraine and the security crisis in the European Union have affected the level of international cooperation with Hungary to a diverse degree. The analysed data reveal a Gaussian distribution.

21) What solutions would you introduce at the local level to improve international cooperation with Hungary?

In response to the question – *What solutions would you introduce at the local level to improve international cooperation with Hungary?*, most of the surveyed local government units indicated the possibility of applying for funds from Polish, European, Polish-Hungarian and international programmes, which enable the implementation of projects. It is very important to create programmes that finance or co-finance various forms of international cooperation with Hungary.

Some local governments would like to establish a Polish-Hungarian cooperation in order to build a Polish-Hungarian community with a special focus on the needs of the partners in the social and cultural sphere, as well as to create opportunities for international exchanges of residents. Strengthening the network of links through, inter alia, Hungarian language courses, promoting the cultural, economic and tourist areas of the partner city, as well as intensifying cooperation between schools at different levels of education.

³⁸ See M. Szewczak, M. Ganczar, P. Jaszczuk, *Raport badawczy...*, p. 17.

Polish and Hungarian universities and research institutions cooperate with each other both directly and as part of wider international projects, but the cooperation is often not formalised and there are no signed bilateral agreements. The mutual recognition of education and the possibility for Polish citizens in Hungary and Hungarian citizens in Poland to study is regulated by generally accepted EU rules. Practice shows that these processes do not pose major problems³⁹.

Further, the respondents indicated the possibility of using good practices from foreign local government units in their Polish counterparts and promoting the local government unit internationally. An important platform for cooperation are the twin institutions that have existed since 2018: the Waław Felczak Institute in Poland and the Waław Felczak Foundation (Waław Felczak Alapítvány) in Hungary. They were established by the Polish and Hungarian governments to nurture the tradition of Polish-Hungarian cooperation, to strengthen it in various aspects – language, history, culture, science, art, education, sport, politics, and to support initiatives in these areas⁴⁰. It should be emphasised that a very important issue in establishing and developing international cooperation with Hungary is the support of diplomatic missions in stimulating cooperation between local government units. The Liszt Institute – Hungarian Cultural Centre can also be invoked as an example. The Institute's task is to promote Hungarian culture, science and art, knowledge of Hungarian history throughout the Republic of Poland, to promote Hungarian national heritage, to promote the country and to care for the image of the Hungarian nation as a whole. The Institute endeavours to present the fullest possible picture of Hungarian cultural achievements – from dance, gastronomy and sport to social sciences. It nurtures the rich tradition of a thousand years of friendship and shared Polish-Hungarian history. The Institute has often initiated and supported the publication of valuable works of Hungarian literature and organised visits to Poland by well-known and respected Hungarian writers or poets. It always cooperates closely with translators of Hungarian literature, and is present at book fairs throughout Poland⁴¹. The Institute acts as a liaison in the field of science and education⁴². It conducts classes in primary and secondary schools, maintains contact with numerous research centres, and provides Hungarian courses. By decision

³⁹ See <https://www.gov.pl/web/wegry/relacje-dwustronne> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

⁴⁰ See <https://www.institutfelczaka.info.pl> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

⁴¹ See <https://culture.hu/pl/warszawa/o-nas> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

⁴² The Institute's building houses the Adorján Divéký Hungarian School, which has been in operation since 1999.

of the Hungarian government, a Year of Hungarian Culture was organised by the Institute in 2016-2017, during which a cross-section of broadly defined Hungarian culture was presented throughout Poland.

Individual answers provided by the surveyed local government units indicated that the existing forms of cooperation were sufficient and that there was no need for changing them. It is worth considering why these local governments do not see the need for the dynamics of change or innovation in the area of international cooperation with Hungary.

In summary, it should be pointed out that Polish local government units mostly want to establish or develop cooperation with Hungarian local government units, specifying the areas requiring financial support. However, it is important to re-evaluate and reflect on how individual local government units can contribute to building international cooperation using their existing potential and capital. It is therefore worth preparing, especially for small local government units, a schedule of activities and a support plan in the area of establishing international cooperation with Hungarian local authorities. One of the more effective forms of support for local governments, which will help to overcome difficulties and acquire competences, is the organisation of trainings on acquiring external funds or forms of communication and conducting international cooperation as well as promotion of local government units, conducted among others by entities implementing foreign policy (voivodeship offices or provincial governments).

This study presents scientifically and practically interesting data on cooperation between local government units from Poland and Hungary. The current geopolitical situation in Europe and the world redefines the need to outline the perspectives and importance of cooperation between local government units. The foreign contacts that local government units establish and maintain are complementary to the state government's foreign policy. They support, deepen and sustain the directions, objectives and guidelines set by the state government in foreign relations, playing the role of a forerunner of government policy, testing, as it were, what the reception of intergovernmental contacts might be, or what tools should be used, or creating the so-called second track of foreign policy, resulting from the division of tasks between central and local government bodies and government administration bodies⁴³. The research analysis makes it possible to identify the needs and perspectives for the development of international cooperation between local governments,

⁴³ A. Trzcielińska-Polus, *Samorządowy wymiar polityki zagranicznej regionów (na przykładzie Śląska Polskiego)*, "Pogranicze. Polish Borderlands Studies" 3 (2015), Issue 2, p. 122.

taking into account the current geopolitical situation and the challenges facing local government units.

The research was conducted among local government units located in the current areas of cooperation, e.g. along the Via Carpathia route, seen as a key investment for strengthening international cooperation and developing tourism and cultural cooperation between Poland and Hungary. The data presented above made it possible to analyse the conditions, needs and perspectives for joint activities of local government units from the countries of the Three Seas Initiative, with particular emphasis on the perspective of local governments from Poland and Hungary. The presentation of the analyses may contribute to an increase in cooperation between local governments and thus translate into an increased promotion of Poland and our local government units in Hungary.

CHAPTER 3

Conclusions and recommendations for the implementation of international cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units

The results of the research on the current status and assessment of international cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units obtained from Polish local government units allow us to draw final conclusions and to propose recommendations which could certainly enhance the effectiveness of activities undertaken to intensify the international cooperation between these local government units.

Below we present the key findings from our survey of Polish local government units conducted in July and August 2023.

- Only 11.2% of the surveyed local government units are involved in international cooperation with Hungarian local authorities.
- 87.5% of the surveyed local government units conduct their international cooperation with Hungarian local authorities on the basis of permanent bilateral partnerships based on an agreement or a letter of intent.
- 100% of the local government units surveyed identified a local government unit as a cooperation partner on the Hungarian side.
- 81.3% of the respondents indicated culture and national heritage protection as the key area of international cooperation, followed by tourism and sport, and education – with both categories indicated by 62.5% of the respondents. Two other areas identified as important for international cooperation between local government units were environmental protection and economy – both indicated by 18.8% of the respondents.

- For 75% of the respondents, the promotion of local government is the most important objective when undertaking international cooperation as it brings tangible results, also in terms of inspiring new international initiatives. For 62.5% of the respondents it is important to take advantage of good practices used by foreign local government units and transfer them to the local unit. 56.3% of local government employees also indicated the practices from non-governmental organisations and cultural institutions with which they cooperate, while 25% indicated other local government units or universities and research institutions.
- For 75% of the local government units, the main area of cooperation concerns the promotion of the local government on the international arena. For 62.5% the use of good practices from foreign local government units in the local context is important, while for 56.3% the creation of opportunities for international exchange for residents. The desire to build a Polish-Hungarian community as a reason for cooperation was indicated by 50% of the surveyed local government officials, while 43.8% of respondents mentioned the possibility of applying for funds from Polish, European, Polish-Hungarian and international programmes.
- Among the Polish institutions with which the surveyed local government units interact within the cooperation with Hungarian units were non-governmental organisations and cultural institutions (56% each) as well as other local government units or universities and research institutions (25% each).
- Most local government employees (87.5%) mentioned cooperation with representatives of local authorities and officials on the Hungarian side to be the most important type of activity undertaken by the local government unit as part of international cooperation with Hungary. This was followed by cooperation between schools or other educational establishments (65.8%), and areas such as exchange, residents' visits to the partner city as well as joint projects (56.3%).
- Systematic cooperation with a Hungarian local government unit was indicated by 62.5% of the local government officials surveyed.
- 68.8% of the respondents communicate with their Hungarian partner in Polish or English, while 50% in Hungarian.
- 50% of the local government officials assess the international cooperation carried out by their units positively, 37.5% assess it as very good, whereas 12.5% perceive it as sufficient.

- 50% of the respondents assessed the use of good Hungarian practices in the implementation of their own tasks as good. Significantly fewer local government officials (12.5%) indicated that they are implemented very well, while 25% – only sufficiently.
- 93.8% of the local government officials indicated the benefits of cultural exchange, while 56.3% indicated the development of tourism and sport as the most important benefit of international cooperation with a Hungarian local government unit; 18.5% indicated environmental protection activities as a significant benefit of international cooperation with Hungary.
- 75% confirmed that there is a visible symbol of Polish-Hungarian cooperation in their local government unit.
- Only 18.8% of local authorities have a separate strategic or programme document regulating Polish-Hungarian cooperation.
- 75% of the local government officials felt that the existing legal provisions concerning the undertaking and implementation of international cooperation by local government units were sufficient.
- For 68.8% of the local government units surveyed, the Via Carpathia international route is an instrument for strengthening international cooperation with Hungary.
- 68.8% of the local government officials responded that the SARS-CoV2 virus pandemic affected the quality and effectiveness of cooperation with Hungary, and that they experienced this change most acutely in the area of culture.
- 37.5% of the respondents indicated that the war in Ukraine and the current security crisis in the European Union affects the level of international cooperation with Hungary to a considerable degree, 25% to a major degree. 18.8% of the local government officials assessed the current level of cooperation as only marginally affected by the socio-political mentioned above.

In summary, the research carried out in combination with the officially available data allow us to draw the following conclusions, which also correspond with the postulates from the 2019 report¹.

1) In order to intensify international cooperation between Poland and Hungary, it is necessary to create a system of institutional support

¹ Cf. M. Szewczak, D. Bis, M. Ganczar, A. Ostrowska, K. Kwiatosz, *Model polsko-węgierskiej samorządowej współpracy międzynarodowej*, TN KUL, Lublin 2019, pp. 99-102.

for local governments, involving assistance in establishing contacts, conducting economic and tourist promotion activities. An innovative solution would be to involve the regional governments at the voivodeship level that implement foreign policy priorities and to create contact points in all voivodeships, in which appropriately prepared persons would provide support in establishing and implementing international cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units in various areas.

2) There is a need to develop, with the participation of representatives of both state administration and local governments, the basis for strategic documents for conducting Polish-Hungarian cooperation at the local government level. The key issues include those concerning cultural, educational, economic cooperation of the regions which desire to cooperate with each other (partner regions) or which would be united by a common initiative. The creation of a strategy for the development of the Three Seas Initiative regions, encompassing many key areas, such as the Via Carpathia route, could be one of the key elements in the deepening of Polish-Hungarian cooperation. It should be pointed out here that an important issue should be the final adoption by the European institutions of the draft macro-regional Carpathian Strategy². Mention should also be made of the Visegrad Group, which is a regional association of four Central European countries – Poland, Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia, and a very important actor in international cooperation. The grouping was formally established in 1991, but its roots date back to the congress held in 1338 by three rulers representing Poland, Hungary and Czechia. The Visegrad Group sought the entry of its members into the European Union, which was achieved in 2004. Despite the difficult periods in history, the complicated geopolitical situation or the divergent positions of the individual states, the nations should not reject the common achievements of the Visegrad Group. The Foundation Institute for Eastern Studies considers cooperation with the V4 countries to be very important, as exemplified by the organisation of conferences devoted to Poland's bilateral relations with individual V4 countries. Since 2019, the Foundation Institute for Eastern Studies has been organising conferences on Polish-Hungarian relations. The first Poland-Hungary Forum was organised in Stary Sącz. The second edition of the Forum took place in Karpacz, and the third Poland-Hungary Forum was held online in Warsaw in 2021. The 2022 Economic Forum was accompanied by the Polish-Hungarian Local Government

² For more details, see: https://www.euroreg.uw.edu.pl/dane/web_euroreg_publications_files/9661/raport_final_pl_rev_fin_cover_1_fin.pdf [accessed on 20 September 2023].

Forum. It culminated with the signing of a Joint Declaration of partners from the Visegrad Group countries by the Council of Slovak Exporters, the Czech Association of Exporters, the Hungarians in the Market Club and the Foundation Institute for Eastern Studies³. It is worth noting that the Visegrad Group Programme enables young people from different socio-economic backgrounds to participate in the Economic Forum and other conferences of the Institute, such as the Economic Forum and the European Congress of Local Governments, on preferential terms. Active young people can participate in and contribute to panel discussions in order to increase the sense of social solidarity and the desire to constrain the development of the negative phenomenon which Garrett Hardin refers to as “common pasture”⁴. The benefits of such an approach are manifold: 1) involving talented and “enterprising young people” from different backgrounds in the discussion during the Economic Forum, 2) increasing the diversity of intergenerational discussion, 3) integrating representatives of different youth communities during the Forum, 4) supporting worldview pluralism and the pursuit of consensus in public discourse, 5) comprehensively supporting partner organisations in the periods between conferences.

With a view to the economic development of both countries, it is important to highlight the support tasks performed by the Hungarian Commercial Counsellors’ Offices in Poland⁵. The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade sets the direction for trade development and investment promotion, which are carried out by the Commercial Counsellors’ Offices operating at the diplomatic posts. There are currently two Commercial Counsellor Offices in Poland: one at the Hungarian Embassy in Warsaw and the other at the Consulate General in Kraków. Both offices were established to support Hungarian companies, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, in their internationalisation process. The offices also deal with the issues of Polish-Hungarian economic cooperation. Special emphasis is put on promotional activities. The basic tasks of the Commercial Counsellors’ Offices include providing free-of-charge assistance to Hungarian and Polish entrepreneurs interested in trade exchange between the two countries, with particular emphasis on the development of sales of Hungarian products in Poland. These offices are also responsible for supporting activities to encourage Polish

³ See <https://www.forum-ekonomiczne.pl/grupa-wyszehradzka/> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

⁴ See <https://www.forum-ekonomiczne.pl/mlodzi-na-forum/> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

⁵ See <https://varso.mfa.gov.hu/pol/page/wydzial-handlowy-ambasady-wegier-w-warszawie> [accessed on 20 September 2023].

partners to invest in Hungary. The main tasks and objectives of Polish trade offices include: 1) promoting Hungary and the Hungarian economy in Poland, 2) supporting and advising Hungarian exporters looking for a market in Poland, 3) taking action to encourage Polish companies to invest in Hungary, 4) providing the necessary commercial information to Hungarian business entities planning investment, production, trade and service activities in Poland, 5) providing up-to-date market information needed to plan, organise export and/or investment in Poland, identify local market risks, and participation in promotional undertakings, 6) assistance in establishing trade contacts between Hungarian and Polish companies, 7) searching for appropriate distributors, importers and exporters on the basis of the databases, 8) preparing companies for trade negotiations, 9) providing information on trade fairs and exhibition events, 10) participation in important trade fairs in Poland, 11) advising and assisting missions of Polish exporters visiting trade fairs, 12) organising seminars on the promotion of industries, regions and investment opportunities in Poland. It is worth mentioning that 37 projects were submitted to the competition announced by the Hungarian Embassy in Poland in 2023, out of which the eleven highest rated by representatives of the Hungarian Embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland were awarded grants for a total amount of EUR 30,000⁶.

3) An important element is the further development of international cooperation in the field of education and science within the framework of the established Three Seas University Network. It was established during the 3rd edition of the Three Seas Local Government Congress, which took place in May 2023 in Lublin. An international agreement on the establishment of the Three Seas University Network was signed by twelve universities from the Three Seas states. The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin became the leader of the Network. Among other things, the Network's objective was to work towards the internationalisation of scientific cooperation by creation of an internal system of exchange of academic staff and students, joint implementation of international conferences and summer schools, joint preparation of international projects as well as cooperation with the socio-economic environment⁷.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Three Seas University Network will internationalise scientific cooperation, https://www.kul.pl/siec-uniwerytetow-trojmorza-umiedzynarodowi-wspolprace-naukowa,art_102924.html [accessed on 30 September 2023].

It should be added that the contemporary development of universities is determined, inter alia, by internationalisation of both the research and teaching process. The area of the Three Seas Initiative requires support in terms of intellectual development, exchange of research staff and joint study programmes. It is worth noting that analogous initiatives are emerging in the academic area. An example is the Collegium Carpathicum (since 2018) linking the University of Warsaw, the State College of East European Studies in Przemyśl, the Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University in Ivano-Frankivsk (Ukraine), University of Prešov (Slovakia), University of Ostrava (Czech Republic), Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava (Romania) and Péter Pázmány Catholic University of Budapest⁸. Another example presents the Via Carpathia Technical Network named after Polish President Lech Kaczyński (Lublin University of Technology, Rzeszów University of Technology, Białystok University of Technology)⁹.

The Three Seas University Network is an excellent tool for developing Polish-Hungarian cooperation. Important areas of cooperation in this respect could be health and medicine, technical sciences, social sciences, legal sciences and local government¹⁰. A natural consequence of cooperation in the academic area is cooperation in the area of local government and business.

It should be pointed out that “the development of cooperation between Polish and Hungarian local government units should be based on two spheres: subjective and objective. The subjective sphere refers to processes in the area of administration, initiation and implementation of international cooperation in the context of: 1) getting acquainted with current legal regulations concerning international cooperation between local government units, 2) creating an independent position in the local government unit for conducting international cooperation, 3) employing a person with language skills (English, Hungarian), 4) determining priorities for conducting international cooperation in the local government unit, 5) selection of foreign partners and establishing cooperation with them, 6) elaboration of a joint strategy for the development of international cooperation, preferably in line with other strategic documents, 7) cooperation with other units of central and local government

⁸ See <https://observatorium.pnu.edu.ua/pl/category/collegium-carpathicum> [accessed on 30 September 2023].

⁹ See <https://wz.prz.edu.pl/aktualnosci/politechniczna-siec-via-carpatia-im-prezydenta-rp-lecha-kaczynskiego-911.html> [accessed on 30 September 2023].

¹⁰ For more details, see W. Gizicki, J. Dobkowski, G. Grzywaczewski, A. Ostrowska, I. Szewczak, *Network of the Three Seas regions. A tool for cooperation between local governments in Central Europe*, Lublin 2022, p. 45.

administration that support the implementation of international cooperation. In turn, the objective sphere should focus on the essence of the objective of cooperation in three key areas: 1) culture and national heritage protection, 2) tourism and sport, 3) environmental protection. It seems that at present these are the most important areas that should be implemented within the framework of international cooperation between local governments. The presented model of cooperation requires primarily a systemic approach to the relations which have been or will be established between the entities conducting the cooperation¹¹”.

In the opinion of the research team, successful implementation of the model of Polish-Hungarian cooperation between local governments requires attention to the development and building of a Polish-Hungarian community. According to the survey results, a relatively high percentage of the interviewed local government units indicated this issue. This is very important from the perspective of historical and cultural relations between Hungary and Poland. Despite the dynamic geopolitical changes, it is the process of building and sustaining community on the basis of legal culture, ethical principles that is part of the strategic partnership in the Central and Eastern Europe and constitutes the value of the common presence of both nations in the European Union.

The implementation of the envisaged undertakings aims at achieving the following objectives: a) to popularise Polish-Hungarian relations, in particular in Lubelskie Voivodeship, through the presentation of the common history and the development opportunities for the future, such as the Three Seas Initiative and the Via Carpathia route; b) to popularise knowledge of the culture, traditions, tourist and natural values in Poland and Hungary; c) to show the need to build lasting relations through international cooperation between local government units; d) to popularise and present Polish-Hungarian local products in each of the segments of the proposed programme; e) to popularise interesting tourist sites in Poland and Hungary; f) to disseminate information on the possibilities of cooperation between local government partners from Poland and Hungary; g) to disseminate information on good practices of international cooperation between Poland and Hungary; h) to exchange experience and to build cooperation networks between local government units from Poland and Hungary; i) to create conditions conducive to establishing partnerships between local government units; j) to prepare a scientific study

¹¹ For more detail, see M. Szewczak, D. Bis, M. Ganczar, A. Ostrowska, K. Kwiatosz, *Model polsko-węgierskiej samorządowej współpracy międzynarodowej*.

on current needs and challenges of conducting Polish-Hungarian cooperation between local government units.

The recommendations and final conclusions thus outlined should become a contribution to significant changes in the implementation of Polish-Hungarian cooperation at the local government level.

CONCLUSION

The dynamic progression of globalisation processes within economy as well as the intensification of political integration have translated into increased foreign contacts between local and regional authorities. On the one hand, the progress of globalisation facilitates international cooperation between European regions; on the other hand, it indirectly forces them to internationalise their current activities. Globalisation processes, which are one of the effects of the development of communication and information technologies, reducing the barriers associated with the need to travel long distances as well as lowering the costs involved, have contributed to a shift in thinking about development from the national to the global level and, at the same time, have strengthened the importance of activities undertaken at the regional or even local level¹. The second factor is the development of socio-economic life in cross-border areas, which has intensified the development of international relations between local government units. An important objective for the development of international relations is also the efficient management of a local government unit through the exchange of experience, as well as the acquisition of financial, technical or personnel resources, which contributes to an increase in the quality of public services provided to society in its local (municipal and district) and regional (voivodeship) dimensions. This objective focuses on three priorities: cross-border cooperation, transnational cooperation, interregional cooperation². Initiating and developing international relations is nowadays becoming an increasingly important component of efficient local government management. The reasons for the increased interest of local authorities in cooperation with foreign partners and participation in international organisations include structural integration, which is the reaction of local authorities to the emergence of supranational structures, and functional integration, which is expressed in the desire of local governments to satisfy their own needs within the framework of foreign cooperation³. The ongoing

¹ J. Chądzyński, A. Nowakowska, Z. Przygodzki, *Region i jego rozwój w warunkach globalizacji*, Warszawa 2007, p. 9.

² M. Karpiuk, *Członkostwo jednostki samorządu terytorialnego w europejskim ugrupowaniu współpracy terytorialnej*, in: *Wybrane aspekty współpracy transgranicznej polskich samorządów*, eds. I. Wieczorek, M. Ganczar, Łódź 2016, p. 53.

³ Ł. Buczkowski, L.J. Żukowski, *Formy współpracy międzynarodowej lokalnych jednostek samorządu terytorialnego*, <https://wspia.eu/media/11kpjjwb/05-buczkowski-%C5%BCukowski.pdf> [accessed on 30 September 2023].

socio-economic changes in the surrounding world, indicate a growing tendency towards networking of various entities and organisations, which poses a challenge for the development and promotion of international cooperation between local government units.

The conducted research has shown the diversity in the implementation of Polish-Hungarian cooperation between local government units. The identified differences are attributable to a variety of factors that have greater or lesser impact on the quality, intensity and effectiveness of this cooperation. As far as international cooperation is concerned, special emphasis should be placed on institutional cooperation and the implementation of various forms of diplomacy, including classical, economic, scientific, cultural etc. diplomacy, all of which enable the implementation of multidimensional activities by Polish and Hungarian local government units. It is worth recalling that the conduct of international cooperation between local government units is also accomplished through the involvement and participation of non-state actors from the business sector and non-governmental organisations, which contribute, inter alia, good practices and external contacts, commitment and human potential, ideas and innovations, and are sources of co-financing. Their involvement helps to build the common good and improve the quality of life of the local community, which is invaluable. Cooperation between entrepreneurs and other actors from the business environment also brings benefits for the region; for example by providing access to potential foreign investors, greater competitiveness, higher ranking position and increased exports, higher levels of external funding for initiatives and a higher return on investment from EU programmes. International cooperation enables the exchange of experience and the acquisition of financial, technical and human capital, which contributes to an increase in the quality of public services provided to the community in its local (commune and district) and regional dimension. Not all of the objectives of local governments can be realised by these units on their own. Therefore, they must look for new forms of implementing them, including those related to internationalisation and obtaining EU funds⁴. The basic standards of local and regional government are usually defined in the constitutions of the particular states.

We would like to express our conviction that the proposals for a model of cooperation presented by the research team, based on the results of the conducted study, will become a useful tool in the development of international

⁴ M. Karpiuk, *Członkostwo jednostki samorządu...*, p. 5.

cooperation between Poland and Hungary, and the presented material will be used by the representatives of state and local government administration in their attempts to more effectively develop various forms of support for cooperation activity. We are aware of the fact that the presented study is not a complete analysis of the broad issue, but it only constitutes a contribution to more in-depth analyses, which will increase the effectiveness of Polish-Hungarian cooperation at the local government level.

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