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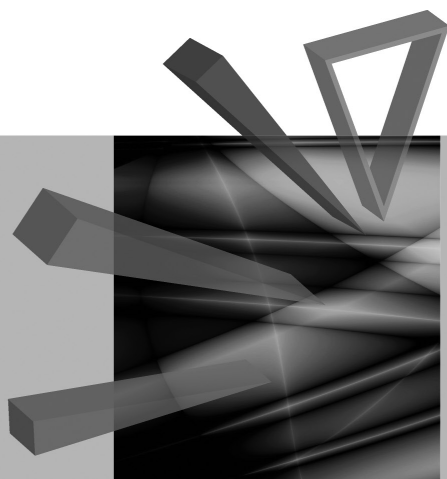
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Ryszard Brol

Andrzej Sztando



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Joanna Kenc

The Witelon University of Applied Sciences in Legnica

THE EFFECTS OF TOWN TWINNING IN THE LOWER SILESIA VOIVODESHIP – A COMPARISON OF THE SITUATION IN SMALL, MEDIUM AND LARGE TOWNS

Summary: Town twinning cooperation has been an important element of development policy since the formation of Polish democracy. In this article the effects of town twinning in small, medium and large towns of Lower Silesia were analysed. In the conclusion, local governments' expectations related to receiving help in creating and keeping contacts with municipalities from abroad were presented.

Keywords: international cooperation of local governments, town twinning, Lower Silesia.

1. Introduction

In this article, the results of research which was carried out at the beginning of 2010 in the Lower Silesia voivodeship are presented concerning the effects of town twinning cooperation in small, medium and large towns¹. Local governments' expectations according to receiving help in creating and keeping contacts with municipalities from abroad were presented in the conclusion.

A total of 79 questionnaires out of all 91 towns in Lower Silesia were completed. All the conclusions presented in this article are based on the answers representing 87% of the researched population (86% of small, 88% of medium and 100% of large towns were studied) and reflect the real situation in the whole Lower Silesia voivodeship².

¹ Complete research (including for example cultural, social and economic spheres of cooperation) was carried out within PhD dissertation: J. Kenc, *Town twinning as one of local development factors in Poland*. The research embraced all the town authorities in Lower Silesia, 91 questionnaires were made available. The research was carried out using the standardized phone interview with the use of a questionnaire. Originally the interview was carried out with local government representatives with an appropriate knowledge of the international cooperation of local units.

² In 12 towns it was impossible to carry out the research, mainly because of the reluctance of town clerks, they were: Chocianów, Lubin, Międzybórz, Oborniki Śląskie, Piława Górna, Sobótka, Syców, Ścinawa, Świebodzice, Twardogóra, Wleń, Ząbkowice Śląskie.

2. A very brief history of town twinning

International partnerships of municipalities are said to be one of the formal or informal ways to satisfy their need to cooperate with towns or cities from abroad [Ziółkowski 2006, p. 274]. They lead to mutual understanding and friendly relations between local societies from various countries, enable the increased flow of information, people, capital and goods between them and have a favourable influence on their development [Zięba-Załużka 2008, p. 63].

The concept of town twinning was established in 1951, together with creating the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). It was decided that this was to become the way to strengthen the activity leading to the restoration of normal order and interpersonal relations in Europe which had been destroyed by the Second World War. Town twinning became an idea which was to help European societies to create a Europe without borders, a Europe of citizens [Pancer-Cybulska 2005, pp. 180–181; Pancer-Cybulska 2004, p. 293].

The dynamic development of the international cooperation between territorial units of various countries took place after the Second World War, and especially in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The geopolitical changes on the continent, the development of the integration processes, the increasing role of the competing local governments and the development of the European programmes supporting the cooperation beyond borders, led to creating the saying about “a Europe of cooperating regions, towns and municipalities” [Kaczmarek 2005, pp. 266–267; Kenc 2012, pp. 210–211].

This sort of cooperation proved already invaluable during the change of the political system and renewing local government in Poland [*Wrocław u progu...* 2002, p. 167]. Many towns and regions started cooperating with their foreign counterparts and it had a profitable impact on their development [Szromnik 2009, p. 34]. Town twinning cooperation was not only an important element of development policy during the formation of Polish democracy, but it is also an important factor of this development nowadays [Kaczmarek 2005, pp. 230–231].

3. Town twinning cooperation in Lower Silesia – a comparison of identified effects

The effects of international cooperation of small, medium and large towns in the Lower Silesia voivodeship were analyzed on the basis of selected variables and are presented below.

3.1. Carrying out the cooperation on the strength of the signed agreement and according to specially formulated plans

Although town twinning can have various formal basis, in 72% of town in Lower Silesia it takes place on the basis of a proper town twinning agreement with every partner town. This is very profitable for towns, because signing the agreement very often helps to finance common projects from the European Union budget. In the Lower Silesia voivodeship there are also towns which did not sign any formal agreements although they have partners (3%) or their cooperation was regulated in a different way (for example on the basis of the intention letter – 4%).

Among towns in which town twinning cooperation is carried out on the basis of a formal agreement with every partner town, there are all the large towns, 79% of medium and 69% of small ones. Among the large and medium towns there are none without the formal agreements signed, or their cooperation would be regulated in a different way. Such cases were identified only in small towns (in 3% out of them no formal agreement has ever been signed and in 5% the cooperation is regulated in a different way).

Town twinning can be carried out on the basis of a specially formulated plan. Thanks to planning the future activities within international cooperation, each partner feels like they are being treated seriously and has the chance to let the other side know in particular the main intentions of the cooperation. In Lower Silesia, nearly every fourth town declares that this sort of plan was formulated in the case of every partnership (22% of small and 29% of medium towns; there are no large towns in this group). In every third town of this region, nobody formulated any plans of cooperation and such a situation was observed mostly in medium towns (43%). There are also 29% of small and 25% of large towns in this group.

3.2. The reasons for establishing the cooperation with towns from abroad

The partner cooperation of towns situated in Lower Silesia has so far been set up mostly thanks to the Polish towns' initiative (79%). In establishing nearly a half of the partnerships, partners' initiatives and inhabitants' private contacts have also been very important. This proves that in many cases single people can play a significant role, which can give either positive or negative results. This is why it is so profitable to establish the associations of twinned towns which coordinate their activity and do not depend on the change of local authorities³.

Another reason for which nearly every third town in Lower Silesia established international cooperation within town twinning agreements, was searching for a partner willing to carry out a common international project (39%). Nowadays more

³ In Poland, 26 non-governmental organizations coordinating town twinning partnerships have been created so far. The largest number, but still not large enough, exists in 2 voivodeships: Warmia and Mazury (4) and Lower Silesia (3). The only two voivodeships which are inactive in this area are the Łódź and Zachodniopomorskie voivodeships.

and more partnerships are being established just for the duration of undertaking common projects, mainly because it is easier for towns' authorities to put aside a certain amount of money in advance, rather than looking for the money in their own budgets.

While analyzing the results of the research, it is easy to notice some differences concerning the reasons for establishing the cooperation with international partners in certain categories of towns. In medium towns this cooperation has usually been established thanks to the Polish towns' initiative (100%) or, additionally, thanks to the international partner's initiative (64%) and with a little help of another Polish municipality/*powiat*/voivodeship (14%). Moreover, 28% of medium towns undertook cooperation while looking for a partner to carry out common international projects, or thanks to inhabitants' personal contacts – 21%. In large towns, the inhabitants' personal contacts (75%), own initiative (75%) and international partner's initiative played the most important role while town twinning cooperation was established. Only one large town undertook the cooperation while looking for a partner to carry out a common international project, whilst in small towns from this region the most cases of establishing the cooperation for this reason were noticed – 43%. Furthermore, cooperation in small towns was established mainly thanks to own initiative (74%), partner's initiative (45%) and thanks to inhabitants' personal contacts (53%).

3.3. The range of cooperation and benefits received thanks to town twinning, with the vocational groups which benefit from it most

The range of towns' partnership cooperation can be very wide: from the local authorities' cooperation, through cooperation in such areas as sport, culture, education, tourism which are said to be the traditional dimension of town twinning, to cooperation in the area of economy, which is treated as the modern dimension of this sort of cooperation.

As the results of the research show, nearly every Lower Silesian town cooperates with partners in the area of: culture (97% of towns, out of which there are 97% of small and 100% of medium and large towns). This sort of cooperation is very characteristic for most partner contacts, not only in Lower Silesia but also in Poland as a whole. Within this area of cooperation, towns exchange folk groups, dance and music bands, coordinate the cooperation of libraries and community centers and organize the exhibitions of local artists. Towns cooperate in this area, no matter where they are from or how long the partnership involving young people in common ventures lasts. Most of the Lower Silesia towns cooperate in such areas as: sport (76% of towns, out of which there are 74% of small, 79% of medium and 100% of large towns), tourism (75% of towns, out of which there are 76% of small, 64% of medium and 100% of large towns) and organizing common ventures within the so called "days of towns" (74% of towns, out of which there are 72% of small, 71% of medium and 100% of large towns).

It is possible to notice that more and more often, towns cooperate in the area of the economy. Every third town declares their cooperation in this area (out of which there are 29% of small, 43% of medium and 75% of large towns). Chambers of commerce and private entrepreneurs most often cooperate within this area organizing, for instance, various seminars and conferences on trade exchange. It is also easy to point out the examples of the local authorities' cooperation in the area of planning, urban development and town renewal.

One fourth of partner contacts are made up of training for local authorities and clerks (in 24% of small, 21% of medium and 50% of large towns). Cooperation within this area allows people who are responsible for town management get better qualifications and gives clerks the chance for the exchange of knowledge about working methods, the reduction of mistakes made or their elimination in the future.

In the opinion of nearly every local authority, town twinning brings very many benefits, out of which the most important is the promotion of Polish municipalities abroad. The most profitable is the growth of the towns' importance on the international scale and the growth of their competitiveness among other municipalities. Also significant, and highlighted in over 80% of towns, are the benefits gained in such areas as: tourism, sport, recreation, the exchange of students and teachers, the exchange of culture and the exchange of local authorities' experience, which has a positive influence on the development of towns. The percentage table of the answers is very similar in particular categories of towns.

From the local development point of view, it is very important that in nearly every third municipality the economic benefits are singled out from among all the benefits which represent the positive aspects of town twinning cooperation. Such benefits were noticed in 75% of large towns, 29% of medium and 35% of small ones.

In one of the towns (Prusice), the authorities do not see any benefits coming from town twinning although they have had a German partner for over 8 years now. They underline that the reason for this situation is mainly the lack of financial resources and knowledge of foreign languages, and the too great a distance between the twinned towns.

3.4. Difficulties in maintaining town twinning cooperation and inhabitants' interest in it

When we consider the barriers in setting up and carrying out international cooperation of towns, it is easy to notice that nearly 40% of Lower Silesian towns declare that they have no difficulties of this kind. This is the largest number of small towns in this group (48%). Other towns most often list such problems as: too great a distance between twinned towns and the lack of financial resources, which very often make various ventures impossible. The most important difficulty for all large towns and most medium ones (79%), is the large distance between twinned towns. A reason for that could be a tendency (noticed in medium and large towns) to establish partnerships which seem to be the effect of the excessive ambition of local politicians. This

difficulty was least often pointed out in small towns, whose partnerships seem to be more reasonable.

Small towns in Lower Silesia usually establish their international partnerships to carry out common international projects. Because their authorities obviously try to estimate the real abilities of towns before signing any agreements, it should not be surprising that in nearly half of the towns in this region there are no difficulties at all. This is even more optimistic when we think that small towns make up the largest group of towns in this region.

In nearly 30% of towns the lack of knowledge of foreign languages is still singled out among other difficulties in establishing and maintaining international contacts. In about 20% of towns, the international partner is blamed for that and only in about 4% of towns it is agreed that difficulties in maintaining the cooperation are mainly connected with the inertia of Polish people. It does not matter who initiated the cooperation, but both sides' initiative is necessary to reach the expected effects of cooperation.

In the local authorities' opinion, the majority of inhabitants are interested in the international cooperation maintained by their towns and they are willing to take part in events organized together with international partners.

3.5. The influence of Poland's EU membership on town twinning and the exchange of international cooperation experience with other Polish municipalities

Polish accession to the EU has had a profitable influence on town twinning cooperation in Lower Silesia. It even seemed to be a stimulating factor for local authorities who started looking for new partners and undertaking new ventures, especially that there have been more and more EU programmes allowing them to finance many common international ventures within the town twinning strategy. None of the local authorities noticed any negative influence of Polish membership in the EU on town twinning.

Quite a few Lower Silesian towns cooperate with other Polish municipalities, exchanging their experience concerning international cooperation. Exactly half of the towns cooperate with others within the same *powiat*, fewer of them declare the cooperation with towns within the same voivodeship or other regions. There are also towns which do not cooperate with any of the Polish municipalities. The table of percentages in particular categories of towns is very similar.

3.6. Financial resources of the cooperation

Nearly all the towns in Lower Silesia finance their town twinning ventures from their own budgets. This is really important from the local development point of view and that of the real independence of municipalities [Koszyk-Białobrzeska, Szybicka 2005, pp. 42–43]. Nearly every second town uses EU money to develop their cooperation and nearly every third town accepts help from international partners.

In the current programming period 2007–2013, the EU supports town twinning mainly through the *Europe for citizens* programme. It was checked what percentage of towns benefits from this programme. Polish municipalities take third or fourth place among all the EU municipalities when they compete with one another to finance their projects within this programme. Meanwhile over 70% of Lower Silesian towns do not use this programme although it was created specially to support the development of the town twinning idea and European citizenship. The highest number of Lower Silesian towns which benefit from the *Europe for citizens* is the category of medium towns – 43% of all towns in this group. However the percentage of towns which benefit from this programme in the group of small and large towns is 33 and 18 percentage points lower respectively.

The reason for so few towns using this EU programme is probably connected with the voivodeship's location next to the country's borders. Thanks to this location, twinned towns can also apply for financial resources within the European Territorial Cooperation and the cross-border cooperation operational programmes. Sometimes it is difficult to consider these two kinds of cooperation separately.

3.7. The existence of international cooperation positions and the frequency of meetings with international partners, including the exchange of specialist knowledge

In every town it is declared that there is a special organizational unit responsible for carrying out town twinning cooperation. In about 50% of towns the promotional position/office/department additionally takes care of town twinning. There is always a slight fear that this sort of cooperation will eventually be changed to only promotional, but it is very positive that also proper international cooperation positions have been created.

The frequency of meetings with international partners, organized not only in Poland but also abroad, reflects the dynamism of the cooperation's development. Most towns in Lower Silesia meet with their international partners 2–5 times a year, but Polish representatives' visits are a bit more frequent than those of their foreign partners in Poland. These meetings usually concern: bank holidays, anniversaries of signing the contracts, training, undertaking common projects and talking about future projects. It is worth underlining that the highest number of towns whose representatives meet with their partners about 2–5 times a year is related to small towns (60%). Their representatives also create the largest group visiting partners abroad but the percentage is about 5 points higher.

The exchange of specialist knowledge is very important from the local development point of view, especially in the situation of technological backwardness, organizational problems and the lack of proper experience. In this situation technical, financial and organizational advice and also supplementing the personnel's education or their retraining with the international partner's help can be very helpful. In over 60% of Lower Silesian towns it was confirmed that meetings with specialists from

abroad were organized (in 55% of small, 79% of medium and 100% of large towns). But in about 40% of towns such meetings have never taken place.

3.8. Undertaking common investments on the Polish municipalities' territory within town twinning agreements

The measurable effect of town twinning, which is also one of the modern aspects of this sort of cooperation, and one of the basic factors determining local development, is the investment undertaken by the twinned towns within international agreements. The situation of Lower Silesian towns turned out to be very optimistic because more than half of the local authorities emphasize that infrastructural investments have been undertaken within the international cooperation of towns which proves that town twinning has an influence on stimulating local development.

The largest amount of investment has been undertaken so far in the category of small towns (55% of this category of towns). However, the percentage of large and medium towns in which infrastructural investment has been undertaken as the effect of town twinning, is 30 and 5 percentage points lower respectively compared to the group of small towns.

Because undertaking, for instance, infrastructural investment is often connected with gaining financial resources from the EU, those towns which made the investment were analyzed carefully. It turned out that most of them are situated in the area eligible for EU funds within the cross-border cooperation operational programmes: Lower Silesia – The Czech Republic and Lower Silesia – Saxony. Moreover they make up 95% of all the towns in the area where the investment was noted and 79% of them belong to the group of small, 18% – medium and 3% of large towns.

It was then checked if the rest of the towns in which the investment has not been carried out, are really situated in areas not eligible for funding within European Territorial Cooperation. It was noted that 46% of the towns are situated outside the eligible area, but 54% of towns could easily apply for EU financial resources to undertake infrastructural investment together with their international partners⁴. The partner town also has to be situated in its country's eligible area, but nowadays this does not seem to be an obstacle, but even one of the encouraging factors in looking for partners situated not too far away from Polish municipalities with whom it would be possible to carry out common international projects. Thanks to such considerations of town twinning, the cooperation would be more efficient because one of the most common barriers would be eliminated from the beginning [Kenc 2011, p. 151].

3.9. Breaking off partner contacts in the researched region

The development of town twinning in Lower Silesia is very dynamic, but it happens that contacts with international partners are broken off because of different reasons.

⁴ Towns situated outside the European Territorial Cooperation eligible area make up 18% of all Lower Silesia towns.

This is quite natural and does not mean that the towns will completely stop international cooperation. The situation of breaking off town twinning agreements was noted in 13 Lower Silesian towns, and in 10 of them the international partner was blamed for not being involved and interested enough in the cooperation.

It is worth underlining that among towns in which international contacts have not been broken off, the largest group is made up of small towns (86%). However, the percentage of large and medium towns is 11 and 15 percentage points lower, respectively. In the case of small towns the situations of breaking off international contacts are very rare.

4. Conclusions

An essential advantage for the authorities of higher than local level, is the knowledge and opinions of the clerks dealing with international cooperation of their towns. As the people who know best the background of cooperation and work with two sides of the agreement, they possess practical expertise and are able to advise as to possible activities which would make establishing and carrying out town twinning agreements much easier, including pointing out the entities which could be helpful in this sphere. In this conclusion, it is highlighted what local governments expect with regard to receiving help in creating and keeping contacts with municipalities from abroad.

In nearly 50% of the towns in Lower Silesia it is emphasized that this kind of help should first of all come from the authorities of the regional and national level. In over 14% of towns it was declared that they do not need any help because they manage their international contacts very well. Moreover, in nearly 16% of towns, help is really necessary but local authorities do not really know where and who to get it from.

In towns which do not have any partners (16% of the Lower Silesia towns), it is emphasized that international authorities' help would be very valuable, just as the assistance of any other institutions' possessing practical experience in conducting international cooperation of towns. In about 26% of towns it is advised to organize more meetings with twinned towns' representatives, in about 18% of towns it is said that the learning of foreign languages is the main key to the partnerships' success, and in nearly 16% of the researched municipalities, local authorities have no idea what could be done to make the cooperation more effective.

Additionally, a data base created by the Lower Silesia Regional Council could be very useful because it would give towns the opportunity to look for partners among various types of municipalities. It could even be used for matching the towns, especially if specialists were involved in this process. If this idea came into existence, it would mean the functioning of the so called "town twinning market of Lower Silesia", which would be similar to the one created by The Council of European Municipalities and Regions in the European dimension.

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EFEKTY WSPÓŁPRACY PARTNERSKIEJ W WOJEWÓDZTWIE DOLNOŚLĄSKIM – PORÓWNANIE SYTUACJI W MAŁYCH, ŚREDNICH I DUŻYCH MIASTACH

Streszczenie: Współpraca miast partnerskich uważana jest za istotny element polityki rozwoju od czasów formowania się polskiej demokracji. W niniejszym artykule zaprezentowano efekty współpracy partnerskiej małych, średnich i dużych miast Dolnego Śląska. We wnioskach zawarto oczekiwania władz miejskich w zakresie udzielania pomocy przy nawiązywaniu i utrzymywaniu kontaktów z gminami za granicą.

Słowa kluczowe: współpraca zagraniczna samorządów, partnerstwo miast, Dolny Śląsk.