

THE EUROREGION AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING SPORT AND TOURISM IN POLAND

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- cross-border tourism
- cross-border region
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Abstract:

This paper raises the issue of tourism and sport development in cross-border areas in view of the operation of euroregions situated on the Polish borders. As the analysis of literature has shown, there are many definitions and, in consequence, interpretations of the term "euroregion". This term is used both for transnational structures as well as national components. The latter operate in Poland as associations and therefore they have legal personality. Having obtained the consent of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, they develop cross-border cooperation within applicable domestic and EU law.

In order to analyse the role of euroregions in the development of tourism and sport, a research model has been created. Internal regulations (statutes of euroregions) and external regulations (EU regulations on territorial cooperation programmes) have been identified as the key determinants of sport and tourism development. Sport and tourism are mainly developed thanks to internal and external funds, which are used for the implementation of projects. Both euroregions and other entities qualifying for aid funds coordinate such projects. As this paper shows, sport and tourism are treated as priority tasks by all 16 euroregions. This concerns both the declared provisions stipulated in their statutes and activities. This thesis has been confirmed by a case study. It has been proven that the support obtained from EU funds and other funds enabled to develop social forms of tourism as well as recreational activities. The infrastructure has been improved, the staff has been trained, sporting and tourist events have been organised, and marketing activities have been implemented. A strong focus has been put on the development of eligible tourism based on natural and anthropogenic local assets. Both the residents and tourists visiting a cross-border area must be considered beneficiaries of the project.

INTRODUCTION

There are many definitions of euroregions in literature, which results from an ambiguous legal interpretation of this term [Medeiros 2011: 141]. Both organisations and cross-border entities which do not have legal personality are called euroregions. Further analysis focused on the euroregions operating in Poland as organisations which have obtained the consent of the Minister of Foreign Affairs as required by Polish law [Ustawa 2000].

The concept of a euroregion implies a shift from the traditional understanding of the border as an area where a territory ends. In view of euroregional cooperation, the role of the border is limited to a purely administrative meaning [Borys, Panasiewicz 1996: 7].

A euroregion refers to a specific geographical area covering regions of two or more countries which agreed to coordinate actions for the benefit of their border areas. The euroregion conducts activities as an institutionalised formal union, concluded between state

organisations or local authorities [Właźlak 2010: 362]. Apart from euroregions, "eurogroupings" deal with cross-border activities, as they are European groupings of territorial cooperation operating as European legal persons under EU and domestic law. As the research has shown, the development of tourism is the most common objective of all 50 eurogroupings registered by the Committee of the Regions by the end of 2014 [Studzeniecki 2015a: 52].

THE DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION OF EUROREGIONS IN POLAND

When analysing the development of border cooperation in Poland, two stages must be distinguished:

1. *The 1991-1999 stage: the birth of national and local government euroregions.*

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR led to a new order in Europe. The Polish government signed the Treaties of Good Neighbourship with the new neighbours and developed the legal framework of cross-border cooperation in the form of bilateral agreements [Studzeniecki 2003: 41].

At that time Poland consisted of 49 provinces. The factual territorial executive power belonged to provincial governors. Thanks to their initiatives, agreements establishing euroregions were signed. Nysa Euroregion, established in 1991, was a pioneer. The decade of the 1990s was a period of learning cross-border cooperation, overcoming barriers and developing legal regulations. At that time 13 euroregions were founded [Masz 1999: 686].

2. *The 2000-2004 stage: the development of self-governing regions.*

The local government reform in Poland led to a change in the organisation of euroregions. Most euroregional agreements needed to be approved by the authorities of newly established provinces. All three levels of local government joined cross-border cooperation. Although 18 euroregions have been established in Poland in total, only 16 operate (fig. 1).

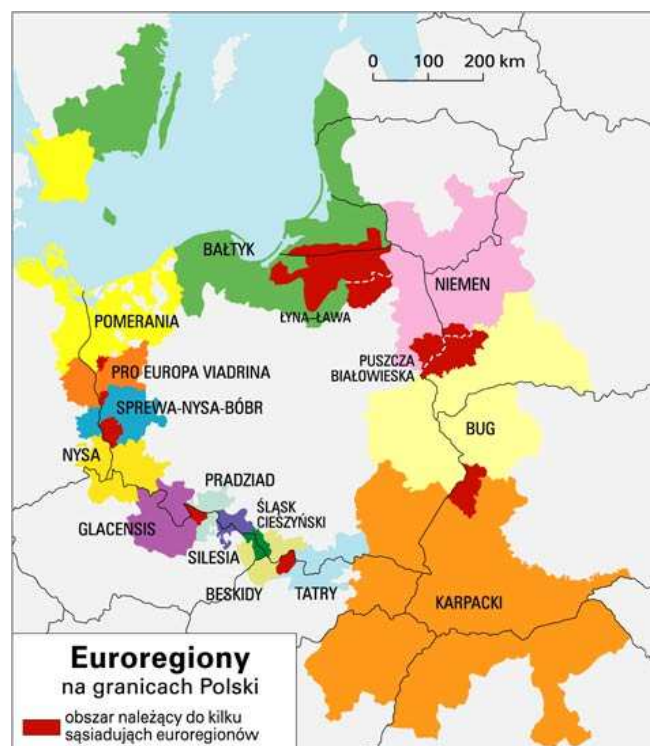


Figure 1. Map of euroregions in Poland in the early 21st century
Source: <http://www.euroregion-silesia.pl/index,euroregiony-w-polsce,1.html>

One of the euroregions, i.e. Dobrava, has been dissolved because a foreign partner withdrew from cooperation. Another euroregion, Sesupe, has suspended its activity as it was not given consent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for operating in Poland. The development of euroregions is presented in fig. 2.

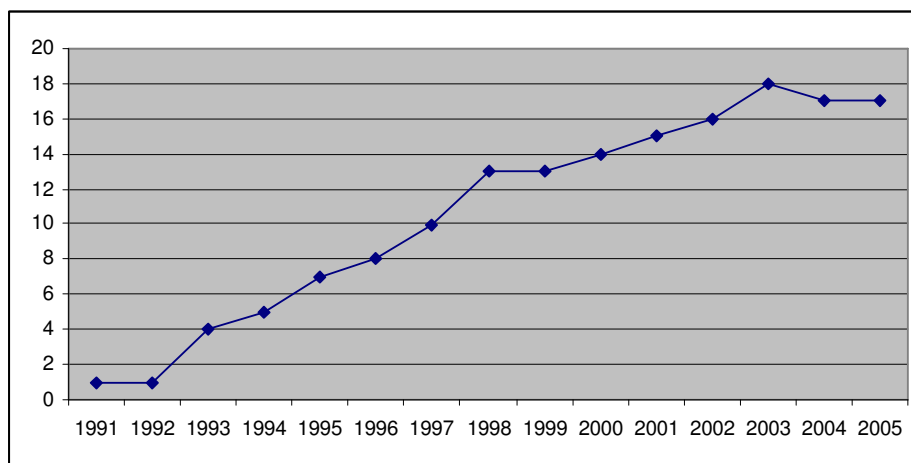


Figure 2. Number of euroregions in Poland

Source: own work

As transnational organisations, euroregions do not have legal personality, which is a major barrier to their development. Only "national components" have legal personality. Out of 16 euroregions, 15 have the status of associations of local government units. Only the "national component" of the Carpathian Euroregion operates as an association of natural persons [Studzieniecki 2015b: 17].

SPORT AND TOURISM IN THE SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES OF EUROREGIONS

Sport and tourism in cross-border areas are developed through projects implemented by euroregions and the "eligible entities" of EU programmes. Sports and tourism projects may also be supported by the funds of euroregions (fig. 3).

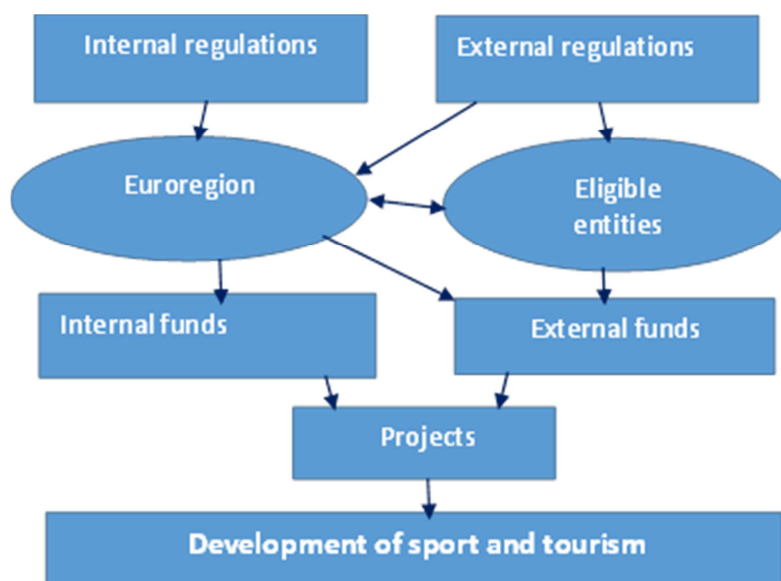


Figure 3. A model of sport and tourism development in euroregions established in Poland

Source: own work

The key determinants of tourism development are the statutes of euroregions and EU regulations, including regulations on financing cross-border cooperation. The development of sport and tourism in a euroregion thus depends, on the one hand, on the regulations stipulated in the statutes, which are a specific declaration of the course of action; on the other hand, on the funding opportunities for such actions. Such funds may come from EU programmes and other programmes. This paper further presents euroregions established on the borders of Poland, analysing selected projects that contribute to the development of sport and tourism. The analysis focuses on issues such as the coordination of a project, its sources of financing, budget, and effects.

Euroregion Baltic

Euroregion Baltic was founded in 1997. It brings together entities from Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden and Denmark. Originally, it was to be called "Jantar" but in the end the founders adopted the name "Baltic". The partner from Latvia soon withdrew from this euroregional structure.

In Poland, the Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic was established, with its registered office in Elbląg. In 2012-2014 this association implemented the project entitled "TOURAGE – Developing senior tourism in remote regions". This interregional cooperation project brought together twelve partners from Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Spain, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary.

The main objective of the project was to boost the regional economy by developing tourism for elderly people and supporting an active and healthy lifestyle. This objective was achieved through the exchange of solutions and experiences related to the regional development policy on senior tourism. The budget of the project was EUR 113,734 [<http://www.eurobalt.org.pl> (access 10 September 2015)].

Łyna-Ława Euroregion

Łyna-Ława Euroregion is a Polish and Russian association of local communities, founded in 2003 in the border areas of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province and the Kaliningrad Oblast. Its registered office is located in Bartoszyce.

Canoeing trips on the Łyna and Ława are regularly held in this euroregion. The objective of this project is to enhance cooperation between Polish and Russian local authorities. Canoeing promotes healthy holidays and the landscape of the Łyna River and its catchment area. This euroregion is not supported by EU funds [<http://www.powiatlidzbarski.pl/xv-miedzynarodowy-splyw-kajakowy-lyna-lawe-7699> (access 10 September 2015)].

Euroregion Neman

Euroregion Neman was founded in 1997 under a trilateral agreement between Poland, Lithuania and Belarus. It was established to enable the regions to cooperate and intensify social, economic and political contacts within the areas sharing a common geographical, historical and cultural heritage. In Poland, the Association of Euroregion Neman was established, with its registered office in Suwałki.

In 2010 the project entitled "Development of professional competencies and skills related to the tourism industry" was implemented by the Association. As part of this project trainings for catering positions such as cook, bartender and waiter were organised. The aim of these trainings was to improve the competencies of people working or planning to take up a job in the tourism industry in this region. The project was financed from the European Social Fund. The budget of the project was PLN 741,559.66 [http://www.suwalki.info/informacje-7939-Kompetentni_w_turystyce.html (10 December 2016)].

Euroregion Bug

Euroregion Bug was established in 1995. It covers the borderlands of eastern Poland (at that time the Lubelskie, Chełmskie, Tarnobrzeskie and Zamojskie Provinces, and the Białkopodlaskie Province since 1998) [*Euroregion Bug* 1994: 120], Ukraine (the Volyn Oblast) and Belarus (the Brest Oblast since 1998). Its Polish registered office is located in Chełmno, the Ukrainian one is in Lutsk, and the Belorussian one is in Brest.

In 2009 the project entitled "Support for the Bug River eco-tourism as an element of the sustainable development of Eastern Lubelszczyzna" was implemented by Euroregion Bug. The main objective of the project was to support the sustainable development of agritourism farms in rural areas of Eastern Lubelszczyzna. The project enabled to gain knowledge on how to run an agritourism farm focused on supporting and developing ecological solutions. The budget of the project was PLN 380,973

[http://www.agroturystykabug.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5&Itemid=11 (access 10 September 2015)].

Carpathian Euroregion

The Carpathian Euroregion was founded in 1993 by the representatives of local authorities of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Ukraine, who signed an agreement on establishing the Interregional Association "Carpathian" Euroregion. Romania soon joined this euroregion.

The association Carpathian Euroregion Poland was founded, with its registered office in Rzeszów, following the implementation of the administrative reform in Poland.

This euroregion has developed a cross-border brand. The project entitled "The Alpine and Carpathian Cooperation Bridge", implemented as part of the Swiss and Polish Cooperation Programme, has contributed to the development of this brand. The tourist offer provided by "Carpathia" is based on traditional regional assets such as culture, customs, hospitality, local cuisine, an unpolluted environment, dresses and music. The budget of the project was CHF 5,488,588 [http://www.alp-carp.com/idea_projektu/wprowadzenie (access 10 September 2015)].

Tatra Euroregion

The Polish and Slovak Tatra Euroregion was established in 1994 under a declaration signed in Nowy Targ. Its structure consists of two similar entities from Poland and Slovakia. In Poland, tasks are coordinated by the Association "Tatra" Euroregion, with its registered office in Nowy Targ.

In 2014-2015 the Association "Tatra" Euroregion carried out the project "The historical, cultural and natural route in the Tatras". The main objective of the project was to improve transport accessibility in small towns on the Polish-Slovak border, which would increase the attractiveness of this region. The project has enhanced cooperation between the communes on the Polish-Slovak border in terms of development of infrastructure improving accessibility in the borderlands for citizens, tourists and investors. The budget of the project was EUR 6,765,996

[http://www.euroregiontatra.eu/projekt_pt_historycznokulturowoprzyrodniczy_szlak_w_okol_tatr_w_ramach_pwt_plsk_20072013,240,p.html (access 10 September 2015)].

Białowieża Forest Euroregion

Białowieża Forest Euroregion was established in 2002 as an international association of local communities in the Polish and Belorussian border area. The coordinator of the tasks is the Association of Local Authorities of Białowieża Forest Euroregion based in Hajnówka.

The project entitled "Together we protect the Białowieża Forest" has been carried out in this euroregion. The most important aims of this project, implemented in the cross-border area of the Białowieża Forest in Poland and Belarus, include improvement of tourist safety by enhancing cooperation between Polish and Belorussian rescue services. Specialist equipment has been purchased for fire departments in Poland and Belarus, and demonstrations and trainings have been organised. The enhanced cooperation between local authorities and the tourism industry is an additional effect of this project. The budget of the project was EUR 3,942,343 [<https://www.cpe.gov.pl/pliki/2601-zal-2-teksty-i-wytyczne.pdf>], (access 2 December 2016)].

Beskids Euroregion

The Beskids Euroregion was established in 2000 under the agreement "The Beskids without borders" as an initiative of the local authorities of communes in the Beskids, in the Polish, Slovak and Czech border area. The Beskids Euroregion is an organisation consisting of three associations. Their members are local government units from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The office of the Association "The Beskids Region" is located in Bielsko Biała.

The Association "The Beskids Region", together with its Czech counterpart, has carried out the project entitled "Welcome to the Beskids Euroregion". The aim of the project was to modernise the regional tourist offer and improve the flow of information. This aim has been achieved by publishing a guidebook and creating the system of an interactive map of the Beskids Euroregion. Additionally, the Beskids Euroregion has been promoted at international tourism trade fairs. The budget of the project was EUR 210,612 [<https://ewt.slaskie.pl/files/zalaczniki/2014/08/01/1312371145/1406885855.pdf>] (access 02 December 2016)].

Silesia Euroregion

Silesia Euroregion is situated in the Polish and Czech border area. It was established in 1998 under an agreement between the Polish Association of Communes of the Upper Odra River Basin and the Regional Association of Czech and Polish Cooperation of Śląsk Opolski. The registered office of the Association of Communes of the Upper Odra River Basin is located in Racibórz.

In 2013-2014 Silesia Euroregion implemented the project "A Weekend in Silesia Euroregion". The aim of this project was to promote Silesia Euroregion as an attractive tourist destination. The project has contributed to the development of tourist traffic. Offers of active leisure using the assets of regional and local tourist attractions have emerged. The budget of the project was EUR 34,511 [<http://www.euroregion-silesia.pl>] (access 10 September 2015)].

Cieszyn Silesia Euroregion

This euroregion was established in 1998. It is located in the north-east part of the Czech Republic and southern Poland. The Olza River flows through this euroregion, and the towns of Cieszyn and Český Těšín are situated on the Olza. In Poland, the tasks of this euroregion are supervised by the Regional Association for Development and Co-operation "Olza" with its registered office in Cieszyn.

The Association, together with its Czech partner, has carried out the project "INFOTUR – 4. Establishment of an integrated transport system for tourist traffic in ER SC-TS". The main aim of the project was to improve the regional attractiveness for tourists through the development of tourist products in the Polish and Czech border area. Plans and a local agreement on a uniform system of promotion and visualisation have been prepared. The budget of the project was EUR 25,712 [<http://www.euregio-teschinensis.eu/blog/archiwum->

ukonczonych-projektow/infotur-4tworzenie-zintegrowanego-systemu-komunikacji-dla-potrzeb-ruchu-turystycznego-w-er-sc-ts-2/ (access 04 December 2016)].

Pradziad Euroregion

This euroregion was founded under a framework agreement signed in 1997 by the Polish Association for the Development of Communes of the Osobłoga River Basin and the Tourist Union of Nysa Land as well as the Association of Towns and Villages of the Czech Bruntál and Jesionik Districts. In order to facilitate the operation of the Pradziad Euroregion, the Association of the Polish Communes of the Pradziad Euroregion was established, its registered office is located in Prudnik. The communes which supported the Association for the Development of Communes of the Osobłoga River Basin joined the above-mentioned association.

During the first years of this euroregion, projects promoting the development of tourism were already carried out thanks to the PHARE pre-accession funds, e.g. the project "A film about the Pradziad Euroregion". The budget of the project was EUR 2,240 [http://www.tygodnikprudnicki.pl/tygodnik-art-913-jubileusz_dorzecza.html, (access 8 December 2016)].

Glacensis Euroregion

This euroregion was established under an agreement signed in 1996. The Association of Cities and Communes of the Czech-Moravian-Kłodzko Borderland evolved into the Association of Polish Communes of the Glacensis Euroregion with its registered office in Kłodzko.

The association has carried out the project entitled "15 years of the Glacensis Euroregion and joint promotion". The aim of the project was to promote the destination as a tourist region and encourage the residents to visit the neighbouring country. The budget of the project was EUR 31,076 [<http://www.euro-glacensis.cz/15-let-cinnosti-euroregionu-glacensis-a-spolecna-propagace.html?lang=10> (access 7 December 2016)].

Nysa Euroregion

Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion is the oldest Polish euroregion. It was established in 1991. It covers three border areas of Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany. In Poland, the tasks of this euroregion are supervised by the Association of Polish Communes of Nysa Euroregion with its registered office in Jelenia Góra.

The project entitled "Euroregion Go" has been carried out in this euroregion. The aim of the project was to present offers of active and eligible tourism to the residents of the borderland. As part of the project, 12 recreational events have been held in the Polish, Saxon and Czech border area. The budget of the project was EUR 13,515 [<http://www.euroregion-nysa.eu/wydarzenia/euroregion-go> (access 7 December 2016)].

Spree – Nysa – Bóbr Euroregion

"Spree-Nysa-Bóbr" Euroregion was established in 1993 on the initiative of Polish and German communes. The Association of Polish Communes – Spree-Nysa-Bóbr Euroregion was constituted in Poland. Its registered office is located in Gubin.

In 2010 the project "Polish and German seniors on a common bike route" was carried out in this euroregion. As part of the project, a three-day cycling tour for seniors was held. It included visiting historic sites, discussing the common history and cross-border integration. The budget of the project was EUR 2,686 [<http://euroregion-snb.pl/program/plsn/projekty> (access 10 September 2015)].

Pro Europa Viadrina Euroregion

This euroregion was established in 1993 [Dolnicki 2012: 408] by the communes which were members of the Association of Lubuskie Communes and the Association of Gorzów Communes (today's Association of Polish Communes of Pro-Europa Viadrina Euroregion) and entities brought together by the Municipal Workers' Community "Central Oder" in Brandenburg. The Polish office of this euroregion is located in Gorzów Wielkopolski.

In 2012 the project entitled "Polish-German sightseeing and cooking meetings" was carried out in this euroregion. The aim of this project was to improve cooking knowledge and language skills as well as skills necessary for functioning on the tourist and catering market and develop knowledge about the border region and its assets. The project also provided attractions such as cooking competitions and sports games. The budget of the project was EUR 6,977 [<http://www.euroregion-viadrina.pl/content/polsko-%E2%80%93-niemieckie-spotkania-turystyczno-kulinarne>],(access 8 December 2016)].

Pomerania Euroregion

Pomerania Euroregion was established in 1995 to support the international cooperation of local authorities in the border areas of Poland, Sweden and Germany. In 2013 Sweden withdrew from this euroregional cooperation. In Poland, the tasks of this euroregion are supervised by the Association of Polish Communes of Pomerania Euroregion and the city of Szczecin.

In 2012 Pomerania Euroregion carried out the project "Polish-German adventurous sightseeing tours in the natural park of the Valley of Love". The aim of the project was to promote tourism and regional recreational assets through running and Nordic Walking. The budget of the project was EUR 7,251 [<http://www.pomerania.org.pl/project/list/2/0/cat/2>](access 10 September 2015)].

CONCLUSIONS

Polish euroregions as structures of cross-border cooperation have played an important role in the development of sport and tourism in cross-border areas. The analysis of the statutes of these 16 euroregions has shown that the development of sport and tourism was a statutory activity for all of them. Prior to the accession of Poland to the European Union, such projects were supported mainly by the PHARE fund. Following the accession to the European Union, the development of sport and tourism in cross-border areas is financially supported by territorial cooperation programmes. As this paper has shown, the role of euroregions is not limited only to the distribution of funds because euroregions also carry out their own projects. The coordinators and partners of these projects mainly included non-governmental organisations. The projects that have been presented vary significantly in terms of budget, the character of a project and its effects. The budgets of these projects ranged from a few thousand euros to several million euros. Most of these projects were "soft" non-investment projects. Their effects mainly included sporting and tourism events as well as marketing activities promoting the region and its assets. The projects also enabled to develop concepts and plans and organise trainings and workshops. It should be noted that the sources of financing were diversified. Some of the euroregions obtained funds from the Funding Mechanism of the European Economic Area, the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme. Most of the projects were carried out within territorial cooperation programmes (mainly cross-border cooperation). Such projects allowed to share experiences and enhance bilateral cooperation with neighbours.

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