

THE POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN-POLISH CROSS-BORDER REGION

ABSTRACT. The problems of the formation of international regions on the borders of Russian Federation and EU countries after the deterioration of relations between them in 2014 became more complicated due to the reduction of mutual economic, social, political and other cross-border ties. However, such links remain, especially at the local level, as both sides benefit from them. Polish and Russian authors are trying to find common approaches in assessing the situation and explaining the need in the development of relations between cities, territories and businesses located on both sides of the border, which contributes to the formation of cross-border regions. The authors use literature, materials of cross-border cooperation programs and their own research experience, identifying factors and features of cross-border interactions at the Russian-Polish border. The article presents a SWOT analysis of the formation of the Russian-Polish cross-border region – a comparison, on the one hand, of strengths and weaknesses, and on the other, opportunities and threats to its development. It is shown that in 2014–2019 political factors prevailed over socio-economic ones, which negatively affected the development of the regions along the border. Nevertheless, in 2018 the implementation of joint projects within the framework of the Russia-Poland cross-border cooperation program co-financed by the EU and both countries continued. Although the number of mutual crossings of the border has decreased, it remains quite important. In Kaliningrad, there is a Polish visa center that promptly issues Schengen visas, free of charge for scientists and teachers, students and some other categories of the population. In the summer 2019, free electronic visas were established in Kaliningrad region, which increased the influx of tourists, including Polish. The authors hope that the objective laws of the world market will lead to the intensification of mutual relations and the formation of the Russian-Polish cross-border region, which would contribute to increasing the international competitiveness of its parts on both sides of the border.

KEY WORDS: cross-border region, Russian-Polish relations, South-Eastern Baltic, Kaliningrad region, Warmian-Masurian voivodeship, Pomeranian voivodeship

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INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that the increasing regionalisation of the late 20th century, including the formation of international regions of various hierarchical levels, was caused by growing globalisation. In Eastern Europe, globalisation and the fall of the Iron Curtain between capitalist and socialist countries in the late 1980s/early 1990s weakened the barrier functions of borders and strengthened the contact ones. However, there were significant differences between countries (Herrschel 2011). Fundamental changes in favour of weakening the barrier and enhancing the contact function of the border between states have occurred within the European Union. The specifics of the situation in different countries are revealed by Kolosov and Więckowski (2018), who have identified a number of areas in cross-border research. In our article, we add another aspect that generalizes many others: the formation of a cross-border Russian-Polish region. New transnational and cross-border regions were emerging. However, the euphoria surrounding this process, which was felt by many researchers, was replaced by equivocal expert statements. A barometer of these changes was the transparency of the Russian-Polish border. Since the 1990s, it has been alternating between stronger contact function and predominant barrier function. Kolosov et al. (2018a, 2018b) give a clear picture of the dynamics of change,

which was caused by shifts in political relations between the parties, at the Russia-EU and accordingly the Russian-Polish border. These changes affected the conditions in which the Russian-Polish cross-border region comprising Russia's Kaliningrad region and Poland's Warmian-Masurian and partly Pomeranian voivodeships was developing.

In this article, we consider the factors that determine the dynamics of Russian-Polish cross-border relations. We pay special attention to the balance between strengths and weaknesses and opportunities and threats to the development of cooperation and the formation of a cross-border Russian-Polish region. To give a practical perspective to our theoretical framework, we analyse cases of successful, failed, and promising cooperation projects.

METHODS

Methodologically, our work relies on a systemic approach to studying socio-economic processes taking place in border regions of cooperating countries. We consider cross-border regions and other spatially localised entities (euroregions, clusters, and others) as territorial socio-economic systems that have strong internal ties and respond to external stimuli as a single whole.

Socio-economic infrastructure, people, and authorities on either side of a border are engaged in more or less active

collaborations. Researchers have identified various spatial forms of cross-border cooperation: euroregions, associations of local authorities and regions, large regions, growth triangles, arches, development corridors, mega-corridors, cross-border corridors and bridges, cross-border districts and clusters, bipolar and tripolar cross-border systems, and cross-border cities (Association 2004; Druzhinin 2017; Kaledin et al. 2008; Kivikari 2001; Klemeshev et al. 2006; Lechevalier et al. 2013; Mikhaylov 2014; Palmowski 2010; Sohn et al. 2009). The most general term to refer to a territory brought together by mutual ties is cross-border region (Fedorov et al. 2009; Ganster et al. 1994; Ganster et al. 1994; Groß et al. 1994; Perkmann 2003; Schmitt-Egner 1996; Scott 1999; Van der Velde et al. 1997). Sometimes, cross-border regions are viewed as part of a single geosystem, which includes both socioeconomic and environmental components (Baklanov et al. 2008). The theory of cross-border region formation, which has introduced these terms, is the methodological framework of this study.

National regions theory distinguishes between homogeneous and coherent regions. Cross-border regions are usually defined as a range of areas belonging to neighbouring countries and brought together either by territorial homogeneity (homogeneous regions) or by strong ties between administrative units of bordering states (coherent regions). Comprising homogeneous border territories, cross-border regions are very similar to homogeneous national regions. A region with homogeneous physiographical characteristics that creates a physiographical continuum is the Baltic / Vistula Spit divided by the Russian–Polish border.

Common natural features are shared by the sections of the South-Eastern Baltic on either side of the Russian–Polish border. Stretching across the northwest of the Baltic Upland towards the Baltic Sea through coastal lowlands, this area can be considered a homogeneous cross-border region. Sustained by internal connections, coherent cross-border regions (most of which belong to the socio-economic type) differ dramatically from coherent national regions. The primary distinction is that their agents (companies, institutions, organisations) have closer ties with national rather than international partners (Fedorov et al. 2009; Klemeshev et al. 2015). At the same time, relations between the territories of the neighbouring states are developing quite successfully in the Russian–Polish region, whereas the contact function of the border between the two countries, according to the authors of this article, is stronger than the barrier one.

The formation of cross-border regions is most intensive in the countries of the EU, where Union bodies encourage closer cross-border ties between territorial units and municipalities and facilitate the development of cross-border territorial communities – euroregions. The very first one, called EUREGIO, appeared at the German–Dutch border as early as 1958 (EUREGIO 2019).

Increasing globalisation intensifies regionalisation. The EU has used this process to expand and strengthen cross-border ties. The first half of the 1990s saw a surge of publications portraying the EU as a 'Europe of regions'. They stressed that cross-border cooperation at a regional and municipal level would contribute to a stronger integration of the EU.

After the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, as the barrier function of national borders weakened and the contact function strengthened, cross-border ties started to develop along the borders between all European countries, particularly, between EU member states and their neighbours, including Russia. Economic and social relations between Russian regions and neighbouring countries were established along other

Russian borders. Similar processes were taking place across the world. Cross-border ties are the key to the development of many border regions. Studies into cross-border ties gained momentum in the mid-1990s, facilitating the emergence of a theory of cross-border regional formation (Gabbe 1997; Kolosov et al. 1997; Perkmann 1997, 2003; Raich 1995; Rees 1997; Van der Velde et al. 1997).

In the Baltic, cross-border regions are rapidly emerging at the borders of Sweden and Denmark, Germany and Poland. A favourable situation for their formation is within the Russia–Finland–Estonia and Russia–Poland–Lithuania border area triangles. Earlier, they had a good chance to develop between Russia and Finland, Russia and Estonia, Russia and Poland, and Russia and Lithuania. Cross-border cooperation is increasing between the neighbouring regions of the EU and Russia. In geographical terms, such cooperation compensates for the shortcomings of the peripheral position occupied by border regions in their countries. Border territories of neighbouring countries may evolve into international development corridors (Fedorov 2018a; Fedorov et al. 2015; Klemeshev et al. 2004), which follow Friedmann's model of national development corridors (Friedmann 1966) connecting core regions within one country.

Cross-border regions have an objective foundation: benefits for production through cooperation, which increase the competitiveness of economic entities on either side of the border, benefits for the social sphere, and exchange of experience in governance. At the same time, their formation is spurred by subjective factors: actions taken by the authorities, NGOs, and non-profits to develop international cooperation.

Cross-border regions emerge at meso- and micro-territorial levels (Fedorov and Korneyevets 2009; Korneyevets 2010; Kropinova 2016; Palmowski 2006; Studzieniecki et al. 2016). A mesoregion is developing along the Russian–Polish border, where almost all spatial forms of cross-border relations are either present or likely to appear. This region is identified based on an assessment of the density of mutual connections between the Russian (Kaliningrad region) and the Polish (Warmian-Masurian and Pomeranian voivodeships) agents of cooperation. In this article, we describe the factors that determine the rate of cooperation development and discuss emerging cross-border forms of economic organization, as well as the most productive joint projects. Based on this, we carry out a SWOT analysis of the conditions and factors behind the development of a Russian–Polish region and assess the prospects for its development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before 1945, the territories of the Kaliningrad region and the Warmian-Masurian and most of the Pomeranian voivodeships were part of German East Prussia. On either side of the border, there are remnants of the past era – elements of the architectural environment, the settlement system, and the transport networks. Thus, the South-Eastern Baltic, which is a homogenous region in this respect, has distinctive cultural and historical commonalities. However, when identifying this region, we focus primarily on the socio-economic ties between the border parts of Russia and Poland. That is, we consider it as a coherent region.

To evaluate the factors behind the formation of a Russian–Polish cross-border region, we carried out SWOT analysis. Initially, a technique used in strategic management (Andrews 1971), it is employed today in strategic planning (Table 1).¹ A two-by-two matrix was chosen as its most proper modification (Chermack et al. 2007; Lowy et al. (2019).

¹ SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis is a technique in which the factors of development of the object studied are analysed.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of the conditions and factors behind the formation of a Russian–Polish cross-border region

SWOT analysis (by K.Andrews)	<i>Strengths (internal)</i> S1. Benefits through cross-border industrial cooperation S2. The development of a cross-border regional market S3. The parties are interested in cooperation in the social sphere (education, research, healthcare, culture, sports) S4. The parties cooperate in solving common environmental problems.	<i>Weaknesses (internal)</i> W1. The barrier function is stronger than the contact one W2. The legacy of the command economy W3. Relatively poor development of the 10–15 km border area
<i>Opportunities (external)</i> O1. Integration of transport infrastructure O2. Proximity between economic agents ready to cooperate O3. A wider market for sales O4. Bilateral and multilateral documents and cooperation development programmes	<i>Opportunities for employing strengths</i> O1-S1. Joint participation in the maintenance of the North–South and East–West traffic O2-S2. Business clusters specialising in shipbuilding, furniture production, agriculture, innovative enterprises and tourism O3-S2. More goods and services produced O4-S3. Development of cross-border socio-cultural relations. O4-S4. Creation of cross-border conservation areas	<i>Opportunities for overcoming weaknesses</i> O1-W1. Increasing throughput and building new border crossings. The effective operation of the Polish Visa Application Center in Kaliningrad; introduction of free electronic tourist visas to the Kaliningrad region by the Russian authorities. O2-W2. Exchange of experience between regional and municipal authorities, international conferences, organization of foreign student practices, international summer schools O4-W3. Joint development of projects for the development of border areas, objects.
Threats (external) T1. Instability in Russian-Polish political relations	T1-S1. Employing strengths to eliminate threats T1-S2. Joint efforts in the arena of Baltic international organisations (Council of Baltic Sea States, HELCOM, etc.) T1-S3. Reciprocal visits by representatives of regional, municipal authorities and representatives of socio-cultural organizations.	Eliminating weaknesses to reduce threats T1-W1. A visa-free regime (starting with the resumption of local border traffic) T1-W2. Broader cultural exchange T3-W3. Joint programmes for the development of cross-border territories (including as part of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland-Russia)

Using the «two by two» matrix, we compared, on the one hand, the strengths and weaknesses of the territory, and on the other hand, the external opportunities and threats that were identified as a result of studies conducted by the authors. Then we compared external capabilities with internal forces (O-S) and weaknesses (O-W), external threats with internal forces (T-S) and weaknesses (T-W). We determined how the emerging Russian-Polish cross-border region can benefit from its strengths and overcome disadvantages of the weaknesses as well as benefit from the strengths and eliminate the weaknesses to reduce threats.

In fact, there is only one major threat: instability in Russian-Polish political relations. It negates the effects of positive factors. Only the development of mutually beneficial economic and cultural ties, the expansion of contacts between authorities, business, social institutions, public organizations of neighboring territories of the two countries can counteract political differences and ensure the formation of a cross-border Russian-Polish region.

Below, we will analyse two cases, one of them demonstrating how the potential for cooperation can be exploited amid political tensions and the other showing how an earlier successful project was terminated for political reasons.

Case 1. Cross-border cooperation programme

Projects launched within cross-border cooperation programmes help to identify promising areas for collaboration in solving problems of mutual interest, as well as to develop joint actions. In Europe, these projects are initiated by the European Regional Development Fund, which has been running the Interreg programme since 1989. Scheduled for 2014–2020, Interreg V brings together the twenty-eight countries of the EU and twenty-seven non-EU partners, including Russia. All the non-EU members (both the states and their organisations involved in the project, although the latter to a much lesser extent) take part in co-financing the programmes (Interreg 2019).

The Kaliningrad region is covered by the Baltic Sea region sub-programme and Russia–Poland cross-border cooperation programme. As of the beginning of 2019, all the projects of the Baltic Sea Region programme were approved and underway (Russian 2019). Particularly, several projects involve Russian and Polish regions, as well as those of other Baltic Sea countries.

In the first half of 2019, a call for projects for the Poland–Russia 2014–2020 cross-border cooperation programme was concluded. The programme priorities include (Russia-EU 2019):

1. cooperation to promote historical, natural, and cultural heritage and cross-border development;
2. protection of the environment in the cross-border region;
3. accessibility of the regions and reliable cross-border traffic and communications;
4. joint action to ensure the efficiency and security of borders.

Fig. 1 shows the territorial scope of the programme.

Hatching indicates the areas of bordering regions supporting the cooperation mechanisms, which were developed within earlier programmes (Poland ... 2019).

Case 2. Local border traffic

For many years, the Polish–Russian border served as a major physical and intellectual barrier. The situation changed in the 1990s. In 1991–2003 (until October 2003), a visa-free regime existed there (Agreement 2003). A new attempt at a visa-free regime (this time, for the Kaliningrad region and the neighbouring Polish territories [fig. 2]) was local border traffic, which was in effect from July 27, 2012, to July 3, 2016 (Ministry 2019a, 2019b).

The visa-free regime was a chance for the residents of the border area to improve their material prosperity, since the novelty granted access to cheaper goods available across



Fig. 1. The territorial scope of the Poland–Russia 2014–2020 cross-border cooperation programme



Fig. 2. The area of local border traffic between Russia and Poland

Source: (Local 2019).

the border. Moreover, it gave Kaliningraders an opportunity to earn extra cash. Growing cross-border travel contributed to brisk economic activity and the development of small enterprises. The border had a major effect on the functioning of the territories on its either side. The opening of the border boosted the socio-economic development of the borderland towns and villages (Studzińska 2014).

The Polish–Russian borderlands are a special territory from a historical, social, and economic perspective, as well as in terms of their geopolitical position. On the one hand, the Polish–Russian border is local, since it is crossed primarily by the residents of the border areas. On the other hand, it serves as a mirror of Russian–Polish bilateral relations and the EU policy towards its neighbours. The four years of the local border traffic regime were a success. Moreover, changes to the EU rules extended the local border traffic area to the whole territory of the Kaliningrad region and the major urban and academic (Tricity) and tourism centres (the Masurian Lakes in Poland and the seacoast of the Kaliningrad region). The benefits from expanding the local border traffic exceeded all expectations and made a significant contribution to cross-border integration (Kolosov et al. (2018a)). In 2014–2015, local border traffic ID cards were used for half of the crossings of the Russian–Polish border. There were fewer than 2.5 million crossings of the border in 2011 and more than 6.5 million in 2014 (Anisiewicz et al. 2016). In 2017, after the termination of the local border traffic, only 3.9 million people crossed the border, including 2.5 from the Russian side (Biuletyn 2017; Gumenyuk et al. 2018).

The local border traffic regime has received a positive response on either side of the border. Nevertheless, on July 3, 2016, the Polish authorities decided to suspend the regime, and the Russian authorities responded accordingly. In this case, the political factor had a negative effect on the development of cross-border ties. There is still hope that the local border traffic regime will be restored over time.

The contribution of the Kaliningrad region and the authorities of the Pomeranian and Warmian–Masurian voivodeships to the launch of local border traffic and the role they played in its functioning are a good example of how the efforts of all levels of authorities can work together. The local border traffic area could have become the touchstone of cooperation between state and local authorities in borderlands. However, the decision of the Polish authorities to suspend the local border traffic regime prevented this. Thus, socio-economic initiatives in border areas depend on the decisions of central authorities. However, in April 2019, Poland started to discuss the possibility of resuming the local border traffic regime with Russia: the Civic Platform party declared that it would resume local border traffic with the Kaliningrad region as soon as it came to power (In Poland 2019).

Case 3. New spatial forms of organization of the economy.

The cross-border region is a new spatial form of economic organisation. Its most common types are euroregions, growth triangles, cross-border clusters, and bi-, tri-, and multipolar systems of international cities. All of them are developing in the Baltic region, many with Russian and Polish participation. These forms bring together regions, municipalities, economic entities, businesses, social welfare institutions, and non-profit organisations.

Euroregions coordinate the joint activities of their constituents, primarily so in social welfare and environmental protection. They rely on the European Outline Convention on Trans-border Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities. Joint efforts are coordinated by special bodies making non-binding decisions. Russia and Poland together

participate in four euroregions: Baltic, Łyna–Ława, Šešupė, and Neman (On the activity 2019).

An active player is the euroregion Baltic established in 1998. It brings together the Kaliningrad region of Russia, the Pomeranian and Warmian–Masurian voivodeships of Poland, and administrative units of Lithuania, Sweden, and Denmark. Their collaborations cover environmental protection, youth projects, small entrepreneurship, living standards improvement, and sharing experience in support for disadvantaged social groups.

The Neman euroregion, which was established in 1997, comprises the Podlaskie voivodeship of Poland, the eastern municipalities of the Kaliningrad region (since 2002), and some regions and municipalities of Lithuania and Belarus. The euroregion Łyna–Ława (2003) includes Russian and Polish border territories. A remarkable event is the annual canoeing regatta on the River Łyna–Ława, which gave its name to the euroregion.

As a combination of proximate and horizontally linked economic entities of two or more countries, trans-border clustering has occurred in tourism only. However, clusters may emerge in shipbuilding, furniture production, and agriculture (Druzhinin 2017; Mikhaylov 2014).

Under certain conditions, a bipolar city/agglomeration system may connect Tricity (Gdansk – Gdynia – Sopot) and Kaliningrad (Palmowski 2006). Collaborations are possible in manufacturing (shipbuilding and the food industry), transport, tourism, education and science (particularly, ocean studies), and healthcare. This system may incorporate Klaipėda, thus becoming a tripolar structure (Fedorov 2010).

Growth triangles are the joint efforts of three partners that have different kinds of resources (natural, human, or investment ones) and create together somewhat of a manufacturing cluster. Whereas Russia, represented by the Kaliningrad region, has the necessary natural resources, Poland has the human resources. Thus, the structure is lacking a partner with investment resources. This may be Germany, Sweden, or Denmark. In this case, the idea of a growth triangle in the South-Eastern Baltic will become viable (Kivikari 2001).

CONCLUSION

Amid increasing competition in the world market and growing inter-civilisation tensions, Cross-border cooperation is, firstly, an important factor enhancing the competitiveness of border regions and, secondly, a means to learn about the culture and everyday life of neighbours and thus to ensure mutual understanding. Although Poles and Russians are associated with different civilisations (the Western and Orthodox ones), they speak similar Slavic languages, have similar tastes in food and a similar mindset. All this contributes to international contacts (although some pages of the common history complicate them).

The South-Eastern Baltic, where a Russian–Polish cross-border region is developing, has a very beneficial economic and geographical position (fig. 3). Transport routes running along the southern and eastern coast of the Baltic Sea meet there. This territory may once carry the traffic of the New Silk Road (Druzhinin et al. 2018; Fedorov 2018a; Kolosov et al. 2017). However, this will require the modernisation of roads, railways, port facilities, and checkpoints at the Russian–Polish border.

Enhancing the transport component of the South-East Baltic and the area taking part in transcontinental traffic may boost the development of manufacturing companies processing cargoes and contribute to the formation of industrial clusters, which will be more effective than isolated businesses. Clusters are likely to emerge in agriculture, the fishing industry, and shipbuilding.



Fig. 3. The geographical location of the South-East Baltic: Baltic Crossroad

Joint projects within cross-border cooperation projects and bilateral Russian–Polish agreements will facilitate the development of industrial and social infrastructure, the creation of international tourist routes, and growing expertise of social workers and managers.

Objective market patterns and subjective efforts made by authorities, economic entities, and non-profits should ultimately result in constructive political relations and the formation of a globally competitive cross-border Russian–Polish region in the South-East Baltic.

In any case, although mutual investment in the economy does not increase remaining very poor, in 2017 – 2018 trade between the two countries increased. In the years 2000 – 2015 Poland's share in the volume of Russian foreign trade turnover declined from 8% to 2.6%, and then in 2016 and 2017 it increased to 2.8%, and in 2018 to 3.2%. Russia is on the third place in Poland's foreign trade, preceded by

Germany and China. Despite the fact that the local border traffic between the Kaliningrad region and neighboring Polish regions, which operated in 2012 – 2016, has not been restored, there are large mutual tourist flows. Visas are issued promptly by the Polish Visa Application Center in Kaliningrad. Since July 1, 2019 free electronic visas have been operating in the Kaliningrad region. This fact contributes to a significant increase in the number of foreign tourists, including Polish, arriving in the region.

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