

Cross-border cooperation in tourism between the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region

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**CROSS-BORDER
COOPERATION
IN TOURISM BETWEEN
THE WARMIAN-MASURIAN
VOIVODESHIP
AND THE KALININGRAD
REGION**

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The border location of the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region is a prerequisite for their active cooperation at different institutional levels. Cross-border cooperation between the two regions started in 1992, when the first joint agreements were signed. So far, a considerable emphasis placed on cross-border cooperation between the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region has manifested itself in a series of partnership agreements and contracts. The local border traffic agreement between the Kaliningrad region and the selected areas of the Republic of Poland will give an additional impetus to the development of the economies, services sectors and tourism industries of the border territories and facilitate the development of these regions on the whole. The article makes an attempt to identify the determinants of cross-border cooperation between the Kaliningrad region and the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship that contribute to the development of tourism between the regions, as well as to outline barriers to their cooperation. The results of the survey presented in the article indicate that the current activities aimed at ensuring cross-border cooperation between the Kaliningrad region and the border regions of Poland are not sufficient. Based on the survey, the authors identify the main barriers to cross-border cooperation as seen by the regions' residents and authorities. The removal of these barriers can form a basis for effective measures to improve the situation.

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Due to their geographical position, the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region form the Polish-Russian border area; this territorial proximity is a factor of promising interaction. In

essence, cross-border cooperation¹ facilitates economic integration, and the coalescence of industries and economic sectors. It ensures interregional interdependence, which is also supported in the European Union by agreements on the free movement of workforce, capital, and goods across borders. Among the advantages of integration are the improvement of environmental conditions, infrastructure modernisation, business development, tourism intensification, capital and technology inflow, and cultural exchange [1, pp. 11—14].

Our study aims to identify characteristic features of tourism development in the border regions of the Republic of Poland (the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship) and the Russian Federation (the Kaliningrad region). We assume that the recognition of tourism as a priority in cross-border cooperation can stimulate the development of not only ‘purely’ tourist elements, but also the related branches of the economies of the Kaliningrad region and the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship.

The relevance of the topic lies, first and foremost, in the fact that tourism has been identified as one of the development priorities in the Kaliningrad region, whereas it is one of the key industries in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship. In this article, we will try to answer the questions as to what features are characteristic of tourism development in border regions and what factors help increase tourist flow or, on the contrary, cause problems in mutual tourist exchange on the part of both Russian and Polish residents.

Political, administrative and economic conditions of the Polish-Russian cross-border cooperation

A characteristic feature of the international trade conducted by the European states is the involvement of actors at both regional and local levels. Cross-border cooperation as a research area has been examined by many authors — both in Russia and abroad. The founder of the cross-border cooperation concept defined cross-border regions as united by common history, environment, ethnic group, and economic possibilities, but divided by sovereignty of governments ruling on both sides of the border [19, p. 61]. At the moment, there are different opinions on a question to what degree a border position affects the development of a region. Some scholars define this fac-

¹ According to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, cross-border cooperation is ‘any concerted action designed to reinforce and foster neighbourly relations between territorial communities or authorities within the jurisdiction of two or more Contracting Parties and the conclusion of any agreement and arrangement necessary for this purpose’. In the Russian Federation, cross-border cooperation is any concerted action of federal and regional authorities or municipalities aimed at reinforcing interaction between the Russian Federation and the neighbouring states in addressing the issues of sustainable development of the border territories of the Russian Federation and the neighbouring countries, promoting welfare of population of the border territories of the Russian Federation and the neighbouring states, and encouraging friendship and good-neighbourly relations between these states [17; 18].

tor as one of the key elements that can both stimulate and hamper the development of border territories (L.B. Vardomsky, A. Ye. Belov, A.P. Klemeshev, V.S. Korneevets, etc.). However, other researchers maintain that cross-border cooperation has a significant effect on the development of a territory. Prof N.M. Mezhevich stresses: “Cross-border cooperation as a type of interregional interaction is becoming a significant factor in socioeconomic development of border regions... Cross-border cooperation is a special kind of interregional interaction determined by territorial vicinity (neighbourhood) of regions (administrative units) of different states; it is a combination of interaction within the nature — population — economy triad, as well as the corresponding structures relating to the adjacent border regions of two states” [22, pp. 27—28].

Since the 1990s, transboundary and interregional relations have been a principal element of Polish international activities [10, p. 23]. In the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship, interregional cooperation — not only that with the countries of the European Community, but with all states willing to cooperate — is an important aspect of the regional policy. Foundation for efficient cooperation was provided by the political changes in Central and Eastern Europe that took place in 1989 [1, s. 16]. Rapid development of cross-border contacts, common historical heritage, and some functional and structural similarities between the cooperating regions led to weakening the state border impact as well as strengthening border regions [2, pp. 7—8]. Poland, being a member of the European Union since 2004, joined the Schengen Area on December 21, 2007, which ensured free movement of goods and services among the EU member states and reinforced cooperation in the field of security through the introduction of common border control rules and visa requirements [16, s. 9].

The first agreements on cooperation between Poland’s voivodeships and Russia’s regions were concluded on May 22, 1992 — the Agreement for Cooperation between the regions of St Petersburg and the regions of the Republic of Poland, and the Agreement for Cooperation between the Kaliningrad region of Russia and the Northwestern voivodeships of Poland [9, p. 62]. International cooperation of the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship with other regions, including the Kaliningrad region, is regulated by a document entitled ‘The Priorities for the Development of International Cooperation in the Region’. It identifies the key objectives of international interaction, namely:

- further economic integration — primarily, through establishing business contacts;
- using the advantages of European integration, which helps not only adopt best practices, but also implement projects in tourism through exploiting financial resources of the EU;
- promotion of economic, cultural, and tourism development in the region.

New opportunities for cooperation between the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region arose after the signing of an agreement on local border traffic on July 27, 2010. This agreement establishes a

simplified border crossing procedure for residents of border regions of the two countries. In Russia, it applies to all residents of the Kaliningrad region; in Poland — to the population of a number of counties: Puck, Nowy Dwór, Malbork, Gdansk, Gdynia, Sopot, Elblag, Braniewo, Lidzbark Warmiński, Bartoszyce, Olsztyn, Kętrzyn, Mrągowo, Węgorzewo, Giżycko, Gołdap, and Olecko. For the residents of both the Republic of Poland and the Kaliningrad region, this agreement opens up numerous opportunities for contacts in business, tourism, etc. Moreover, interregional cooperation should contribute to removing barriers to movement of goods and services, tourism development, and trade. Joint projects are also meant to support technology and knowledge exchange.

The optimum use of the existing and arising opportunities in Polish-Russian economic cooperation requires intensified activities at all three levels: the macro-level, the regional level, and the level of enterprises. At the macro-level, it should manifest itself in employing a wide spectrum of foreign economic policy, including bilateral contractual relations, multilateral cooperation between international organisations, external and internal export support systems, etc. At the regional level, the selection of partner regions should be preceded by analysis of competitive advantages. The development of cooperation between Polish and Russian enterprises requires a comprehensive study into current and prospective economic opportunities of certain regions, including special economic zones.

In the future, greater significance will be attached to Polish-Russian relations in the field of services. Poland can become an exporter of services in tourism, construction, transport, and medicine.

Cooperation between the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region in tourism

Tourism is one of the key factors of economic development for many countries and regions in the world, which produces a powerful effect on economic activities within various business areas. Relations between the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region have an impact on their reciprocal development — both in tourism and other branches of economy, namely, the production infrastructure and the service industry. Tourism contributes to the national wealth by producing material values through putting tourist facilities into operation, developing infrastructure, etc. [7, pp. 158—159].

The economic benefits of tourism include an inflow of financial resources and investment in tourism infrastructure, generation of income from tourism activities, business development in the field of tourism and related industries, and creation of new jobs [13].

It is worth stressing that there are great similarities between the south-eastern part of the Kaliningrad region and the Polish Masurian Lake District in terms of natural and climatic conditions, historical heritage, and architecture. The Warmian-Masurian region is a land of lakes and forests. It is full of greenery and very popular with both local tourists and international visitors.

The geographical position and climatic features make it possible to develop different types of tourism focusing on agriculture, sports (including water sports — sailing, rowing, canoeing), culture and education, business, and winter sports. Although the Kaliningrad region has no less diverse landscape, its potential has not been fully unlocked for the development of similar types of tourism.

In 2001, the Council of Warmia and Masuria drew up a strategy for the development of tourism in the province. It identified tourism as a priority of regional development. As a result, in 2005, the Regional Council formulated the Strategy for the Social and Economic Development of Warmia and Masuria until 2020, which determined priorities in tourism development:

- full-scale development of tourism potential of the Great Masurian Lakes;
- improvement of the region's image;
- development of a broad range of tourism services;
- participation in tourism fairs and exhibitions;
- extension of the tourist season through new tourist offers.

The above-mentioned cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Tourism of the Kaliningrad region and the Administration of the Marshall of the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship helped devise a cooperation plan in tourism for 2012—2014, which included the following objectives:

- *tourism development:*
 - development of event tourism and organization of international events: the international Kętrzyn-Pravdinsk bicycle race, international kayaking events on the river Łyna (Lava) and the river Angrapa,
 - participation in international exhibitions (e. g. the 'Yantur' spring fair),
 - promotion of joint exhibition booths displayed at international fairs in Moscow (MITT) and Poznan (Tour Salon);
- *joint project implementation:*
 - support for projects implemented in the framework of international programmes (the Baltic Sea Region, the Lithuania-Poland-Russia Cross-border Cooperation Programme for 2007—2013, etc.)
 - promotion of tourism products: Immanuel Kant, Nicolaus Copernicus, Gothic Castles, and Napoleon Routes,
 - implementation of projects aimed at preservation and development of the Rominten Heath park,
 - establishment of the Baltic Tourist Information Centre;
- *mutual tourism service promotion:*
 - development of advertising materials and information on tourist attractions to be placed at tourist information offices,
 - support for development and distribution of tourist products,
 - organisation of study tours to the Kaliningrad region and the Republic of Poland for journalists and tourist agency employees from Kaliningrad and Poland;
 - preparation and publication of newsletters promoting common interests of the regions,

— development of training opportunities for professionals employed in tourism: workshops, etc.

At the initiative of Moscow's office of the Polish Tourist Organisation, the Polish Club was established in Kaliningrad in 2004. It aims to bring together tourist agencies interested in cooperation with Polish tourist organisations. The key objectives of the Club are as follows:

- to strengthen and develop relations within the Polish tourism industry in the framework of cross-border cooperation development;
- to promote tourism, recreational, and healthcare opportunities offered in Poland to the residents of the Kaliningrad region and the Russian Federation,
- to facilitate the implementation of joint projects in tourism;
- to encourage mutual exchange of experience in tourism development;
- to ensure cooperation with mass media.

The unlocking of tourism potential in cross-border cooperation between the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region offers good prospects for the regions' development. At the same time, it poses a number of problems awaiting solution:

- development of the transport system (road, rail, and water communications);
- protection of waterways and river basins;
- study into minimisation of environmental risks;
- creation of a transboundary protected area, including the basin of the Vistula Lagoon.

Barriers to cross-border cooperation between the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region

A number of administrative and legal barriers, and differences in the level of economic development have proved to be major obstacles to cross-border cooperation between the Kaliningrad region and the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship. Also, there is a certain lack of trust on the part of foreign partners, as well as negative stereotypes and a poor command of foreign languages typical of both Russian and Polish businesspeople. In both regions, a serious barrier to efficiency is centralised public administration, which slows down the approval of initiatives. The border municipalities of Warmia and Masuria are characterised by a lower economic growth rate and population density, as well as a small number of tour operators.

Other limitations to cooperation include the poorly developed border infrastructure, insufficient transport communications between the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region, low standard of living in both regions, etc.

A survey of representatives of local authorities and business carried out in 2001 in all municipalities of the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and in the Kaliningrad region helped identify the current trends and a rate of change taking place in the course of economic transformations.

The Polish respondents mentioned legal and administrative restrictions, low awareness of opportunities for cooperation with Russian partners, and psychological barriers as factors hindering cross-border cooperation. For the Russian party, as seen by the Polish respondents, most difficulties relate to legal and administrative barriers, poor support of business initiatives, insufficient financial resources, limited access to information about potential partners, and lack of international cooperation experience [10, p. 23].

The Russian respondents were approached with similar questions. In their responses, they mentioned legal and administrative problems, difficulties relating to the search for a cooperation partner, limited access to information about potential partners, and lack of cooperation experience as the main obstacles to cooperation on the part of Polish partners. It is worth noting that the Russian respondents did not mention such factors as lack of state support or a poor command of the Russian language in relation to the problems faced by their Polish partners. On the other hand, most Russian respondents mentioned legal and administrative barriers, lack of financial support from the government, and difficulties in searching for cooperation partners as the main obstacles on the part of the Russian Federation. Other significant barriers included lack of international cooperation, a poor command of the Polish language, and psychological barriers [10, p. 23].

In the framework of a research project aimed at identifying the attitude of residents of the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region to international cooperation, a similar survey was conducted in all local municipalities (city halls and other administrative bodies) in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship (21 counties and 116 municipalities) in 2011. The research results proved the earlier obtained data. Most municipalities cooperate with the Kaliningrad partners on the basis of bilateral agreements. The main areas of cooperation are culture, sports, and tourism. All respondents acknowledge the advantages of cross-border cooperation: cultural links, opportunities for joint participation in EU-financed projects, tourism development, and exchange of experience in the field of local democracy.

The respondents were asked to list obstacles in international cooperation for Russian and Polish partners. The main problems were identified as queues at the crossing points and limited financial opportunities for more active cooperation. Also, they mentioned lack of government support, an insufficient number of crossing points, and a poor command of the Russian language. A complicated visa regime was also considered a serious obstacle.

In relation to the Russian party, the Polish respondents mentioned bureaucracy, queues at the crossing points, and insufficient government support. An insufficient number of border crossing points, poor condition of infrastructure, or a language barrier were not put on the list.

Conclusion

Summing up this overview of cross-border cooperation between the Kaliningrad region and the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship in tourism, one should stress that it is affected by a number of external and internal factors.

These factors include border crossing restrictions, complicated administrative procedures, economic disparities, different standards of living and cultural differences. They have a significant impact on development of trade and services, particularly those relating to tourism. Tourism is considered a form of cross-border cooperation that contributes to the improvement of standard of living in the Kaliningrad region and the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship.

Despite the existing barriers, cooperation between the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship and the Kaliningrad region is beneficial for both regions and their residents. It facilitates the economic and social development of each region, raises standards of living, and ensures a better understanding of foreign partners, which, in its turn, destroys barriers and stereotypes. A local border traffic regime introduced on July 27, 2012 has further contributed to strengthening cross-border cooperation and developing new forms of business. On the whole, cooperation between the Kaliningrad region and the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship can be viewed as an example to other border regions.

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