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Investigating Non-Governmental Organisations cooperating across the European Union external border : examples from Polish-Russian (Kaliningrad Oblast) and Polish-Ukrainian border regions

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**INVESTIGATING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS
COOPERATING ACROSS THE EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL BORDER.
EXAMPLES FROM POLISH-RUSSIAN (KALININGRAD OBLAST)
AND POLISH-UKRAINIAN BORDER REGIONS**

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ABSTRACT. The aim of the paper is to recognize and to assess the scope of Non-Governmental Organisations cooperating across the Polish Eastern border. Non-Governmental Organisations as the vital element of civil society may play a significant role in stimulating social and economic relations between citizens from bordering countries.

This paper is focused on the Polish – Russian (Kaliningrad Oblast) and Polish – Ukrainian border region and is based on empirical data from over 150 questionnaire surveys conducted on both sides of the border.

The gathered information shows not only how organisations operate but also partly indicates the nature of local border society.

KEY WORDS: Cross Border Cooperation, Border Regions, EU Borders, Civil Society Organisations, Social Networks.

INTRODUCTION

During recent years in Poland we can notice the development of activities between governmental and market sectors. This often called the “third sector” is known as civil society and it is so wide and touches so many disciplines that it is hard to define it precisely. According to various publications we may incorporate in it a large set of entities like: social clubs, day care centre, non-governmental organisations, universities, environmental groups, sports clubs, job training centre, community associations, self-health groups, religious congregations and so on (Salamon *et al.* 2003).

Despite this diversity we may specify their common features. They are organisations – with structure; they are private – separated from the state; they are non-profit; they are self-governing – with full control of their own affairs; and they are voluntary – membership is not legally required (Salamon *et al.* 1999). Those features are included as well in a United Nations *Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts* (2003) as typical for the nonprofit sector. The Handbook also types organisations included in this nonprofit group. They are: nonprofit service providers, nongovernmental organisations, arts and culture organisations, sports clubs, advocacy groups (that work to promote civil and others rights), foundations, community based or grass-roots associations, political parties, social clubs and unions, business and professional associations.

The “social” sector is very often shown as an essence of democracy and a value in itself (Herbst, 2005). It works outside of market and political logic and helps to create a social solidarity space. J. Forbig (in Herbst, 2005) defined that those kinds of activities serve among other things government control and social integration.

The same definition of civil capital was used by F. Fukuyama (1999), who called that the *sine qua non* of stable liberal democracy. Fukuyama showed apart from the social stimulation of activity also the economic importance of civil society organisations (CSO) saying that their role “is to reduce the transaction costs associated with formal coordination mechanisms like contracts, hierarchies, bureaucratic rules, and the like”.

According to Douglas (in Frączak, 2004), the nongovernmental sector is significant in present time democracy and gives to citizens the opportunity to satisfy their needs. Drążkiewicz formulated (in Frączak, 2004) the same opinion saying that civil participation in local development activities is important and can be key in decision processes, being an opinion and advice giver taking over governmental tasks.

On the other hand Jałowicki (2002) argues in part with those statements claiming that local economic development depends only on the local leader and the elite (including local businessman) concentrated around him and the society’s participation and activity are a non-important element. Social activity as a condition of local development is called the “ideological myth”.

Opposite opinion and large number of elaboration about civil society influence and role in modern economy but especially in social development is often elaborated in civic organisations publications, newspapers and newsletters like Borussia series, Library of local activities, Kompas series, The Third Sector, Pozarządowiec, Klon/Jawor publications, LOS publications, Batory Foundation publications and many others.

Non-governmental organisations (NGO) are a significant part of civil society and play an important role in present Polish “third sector” development. In literature they are defined often by the same features as CSOs in general. So they are: voluntary, private but in public affairs, of a grass-roots origin and independent (in opposition to quangos – quasi NGOs; gongos – governmental organisation; dongos – donor organisation; bongos – business organisation) (Gliński, 2006).

According to the Polish law definition an NGO is a unit not being a part of public finances sector and not working for financial profits (*Ustawa o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie*, 2003).

Borders as a factor of border regions’ development were often raised in geographic and economic studies but not in the context of NGOs’ collaboration across them. If we agree with Douglas and Drażkiewicz that civil society and its organisations have an influence on local and regional development we may study them and investigate their features, barriers of development and cooperation as well as their impact in the economy and integration.

Also publications by Miszczuk (1996, 2005) and Palmowski (2007 and previous in Coastal Regions) as well as analysis prepared by Miszczuk, Palmowski and Kawalko for Polish Ministry of Regional Development (2007) are focused on issue of cross-border cooperation. Nevertheless in all of the mentioned publications the civil society aspect is elaborated in marginal way.

In the case of this paper more important than defining the term border (no matter if it is used as a boundary, border line or a border – frontier (Rykiel, 2006)) is to specify the border region and the role of a border in the mentioned regions’ cooperation. Especially that because of limiting the state’s sovereignty and postmodern changes the role of a border as a special border is being weakened (Crook *et al.* 1992) and often depends on frontier penetrability and realisation of a benefits (Chojnicki, 1999).

If we consider a border as a barrier, no matter if in the physiographical, formal (legal), organisational, infrastructural, economic or psychological aspect (Komornicki, 1999), for CSOs they are breakable, easy to pass, to bypass. Cooperation between them, in the case of cross-border functioning as well, is based on communication, very often via the Internet or telephone, which make those activities easily accessible. Talking about practice, CSOs collaborating across the Polish eastern frontier are doing well in the case of breaking both national and European Union borders.

Martinez (1994) shows the typology of border regions which consider a border as a barrier. The main aspect in this typology is an interaction between neighbouring regions and distinguishes isolated regions, coexisting, cooperating and integrated regions. According to research made by Brzosko-Sermak (2007) Polish eastern border regions belong to group of the cooperating ones.

On the other hand Ratti (1996) shows functions of a border and their effects on regions. His dual conception is based on two functions of borders: the separation factor and contact factor. According to those factors a border can be a barrier (when the separation and closing factor dominates), a filter (relatively open) and a contacts initiator (contact factor domination).

The last aspect touched in this paper and being part of civil society phenomena research is the Civil Society organisations and the role of a border in their cooperation, is the creation of NGOs' collaboration network with a border as an affecting factor.

Network analyses are more a way, a method of research than a classical theory. They are based on a specific study approach concentrated on relations between chosen persons, organisations, governments and so on. However, there is a large spectrum of research taking into consideration the networking paradigm. Studies made by Castells (1996) and Wellman (1999) have shown change of modern society forms of organisation and relations in it. The changes from group structure (based on community) to net structure (based on loose and widespread net contacts) pursuing to create a network society or networked society.

Investigating the network of NGOs collaborating across the border we can learn, apart from its components and activities, the real features of a net. They range the power of particular elements, strength of their connections, weak and strong ties, relations between them, openness of a net. In this paper network analysis is just the announcement of the future research (Dąbrowski, 2008).

The long and successful development of border regions is not possible without frontier transparency with economic and social integration (Kuciński, 1995). NGOs are important as a part of social integration.

CSO cross – border cooperation seems to be useful as a tool to integration, for internal and external European Union Borders. Therefore it is important to know those organisations, their features, problems and networks better. The mapping of NGOs made and presented in this paper is addressed to those above mentioned research fields.

INVESTIGATION METHOD

The organisations investigated in this research were chosen from the Polish-Russian (Kaliningrad Oblast) and Polish-Ukrainian border regions from both sides of the border, at the level of voivodeships and oblasts. It includes respectively Pomorskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeships with Kaliningrad Oblasts and Lubelskie, Podkarpackie Voivodeships with Volynska, Lvovska, Zakarpatska Oblasts.

The investigation was focused on the local and regional level. In a few cases NGOs with their main localisation in other than research areas were included, but only those which have either a branch or direct activities in the border area.

The questionnaire includes five questions, about thematic scope, years of activity, budget sources, spatial range and about partners in cooperation.

The investigation was made in two rounds. The first was done in two months: December 2006 and January 2007 and included 67 organisations (37 in the Polish – Ukrainian border area and 30 in the Polish – Russian border area) which were asked to answer questions via e-mail. The mailing list was based on the list of Civil Society Organisations cooperating with the Centre for Youth Cooperation and Mobility (active NGO from Gdynia, Poland), with the Regional Government (Marshal's Office in Gdansk, Pomorskie, Poland) and organisations found via the Polish NGOs' Internet page (www.ngo.pl).

After the first round only 8 questionnaires came back with responses, 11 with information that this email address is no longer available, 5 that this is already only a private address and the rest (43) left without response.

The second round was made in February and March 2007. The list of surveyed organisations this time came from a “snow ball” effect from the first round as well as from a deeper Internet search and from other publications about CSO cooperation across the border (from 2003). It included 87 units (40 in the Polish – Russian border area, 47 in the Polish – Ukrainian border area). Most of the interviews were made via phone and the rest via e-mail. The response rate was similar to in the first round and contacts were not up-to-date or the organisation did not exist anymore.

To check the reason for the low response rate and whether the result was low only in the case of NGOs collaborating across the border or in all NGOs in the research area, there 24 questionnaires were also sent to non-CBC organisations on both sides of the border. The result was identical – only about 10% response and mainly e-mails came back with an annotation saying that this addressee was no longer available or the person was no longer an organisation representative.

It shows that non-stability is not only a feature of cross – border cooperating NGOs but for the main group of NGOs.

The total number of filled in questionnaires was 55 (20 in the Polish – Russian and 35 in the Polish – Ukrainian area).

In addition – from all recognised organisations those which had not given answers have been included in thematic area research (the number of all included in this part of research is 126 (58 in the Polish – Russian and 68 in the Polish – Ukrainian area)).

FIRST CONCLUSIONS

The first conclusion came even before the questionnaire processes. A large number of CSOs, not only NGOs, at Polish-Russian border area cooperates with Ukrainian organisations. It is explained by the large Ukrainian minority in Warminsko – Mazurskie Voivodeship and their activity in the fields of culture and tradition. The Ukrainian minority had migrated there compulsorily just after World War II from South – Eastern parts of Poland.

Non-stability is not only a feature of cross – border cooperating NGOs (regardless of border side) but of the main group of NGOs too. According to the Klon/Jawor Organisation research (Gliński, 2006) only 2/3 of all Polish registered NGOs work in an active way.

Most NGOs collaborating across the border in Poland are located in Warsaw and other big towns. Others, located in the Cross Border Area, are weak and less focused on cooperation with neighbours. The most important actors are located in Warsaw and mainly are financed by the USA, German or Polish government. The same situation occurs on Russian and Ukrainian side.

THE INVESTIGATION RESULTS

Investigation was focused only on a few features of NGOs collaborating across the border, including thematic field, sources of budget, spatial scope and years of activity. Besides recognized types, reasons and structures of NGOs cooperation networks were investigated. The gathered information shows not only how organisations operate but also indirectly indicates the nature of local border society.

The Polish and eastern NGOs' contacts began to develop after 1989, when significant cooperation was established between organisations with oppositionist provenance (Ukrainian case). During 1995–1998 many organisations with national experiences started to deal with international projects. Since 1999 all of the important CSOs in Poland have developed contacts and cooperation with relevant organisations over the eastern border, especially over the Ukrainian one. Up to now Polish – Ukrainian NGOs' cooperation seems to be better developed than the Polish – Russian one.

At the present time we can distinguish three main groups of Civil Society Organisations operating across the Polish eastern border.

The first one is Non-Governmental Organisations including large, international ones (they organise meetings, are cooperation and activity initiators; announce contests for grants and donations; they win governmental grants), national (often

being thematic NGOs' association group; they coordinate and help smaller ones) and local (small; seeking funds from the previous group; often very flexible and variable; often operate only for one project; here a sub-group: regional organisations looking to be a regional representative of an NGOs' circles and collaborating with local and regional self-governments).

The second group are research centres, active, collaborating with NGOs, governments of all levels, often being beneficiaries of governmental and large international funds, being initiators of meetings and dialogue in government-NGO contacts.

The third group contains other CSOs, quasi-NGOs that are strongly connected with governments at all levels, and depend on founders or main sponsors, with stable fund sources, very formalised and closer to governmental structure than to an NGO.

At the Polish side of the border the most active are large international, national organisations and research centres. The third distinguished group is noticed as the most stable.

At the Russian (Kaliningrad Oblast) side of the border the most active and the larger group is quasi-NGO. These are mainly organisations being part of local or regional level government. Other groups do not have good conditions to operate in an active way and especially with foreign organisations. Stable and prepared to cooperate are research centres. Local NGOs are at a low organisation level, passive and are called "baroque" or "tourist". There are also so-called "copy-paste" and "suitcase" organisations. The first one is based on "copied" ideas, structures or projects from other NGOs which are implemented as own initiatives but in another local area. The other one operates in one place and after the project or other activity ends packs and moves to another place.

In the Ukrainian part national and rarely local organisations cooperate with Polish ones (but the most important are triple cooperation, together with German and USA units). The initiator is often on the Polish side. Quasi-NGOs operate under almost all regional and local governments.

HOW DO THEY GET MONEY?

Based on investigation the budget of NGOs is not stable (excluding organisations supported by governments), with a tendency to change every year and with often not longer than a year's prospects.

Typical for an experienced NGO is a very diversified budget. Young organisations are more dependence on funds they would get from a project contests.

Grants, donations, funds from foundations and funds from realised projects are the crucial base creating the budget. Polish organisations are more enterprising and more often the largest share have incomes from realised projects and economical incomes from so called statute activities – NGOs organise to be paid trainings, sells books, newspaper, handmade products. Nearly half of eastern, Russian and Ukrainian, organisations are financed from members’ contributions, sometimes unofficially. For the Polish case the share of membership fee in organisations budget occurs around 25% (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).

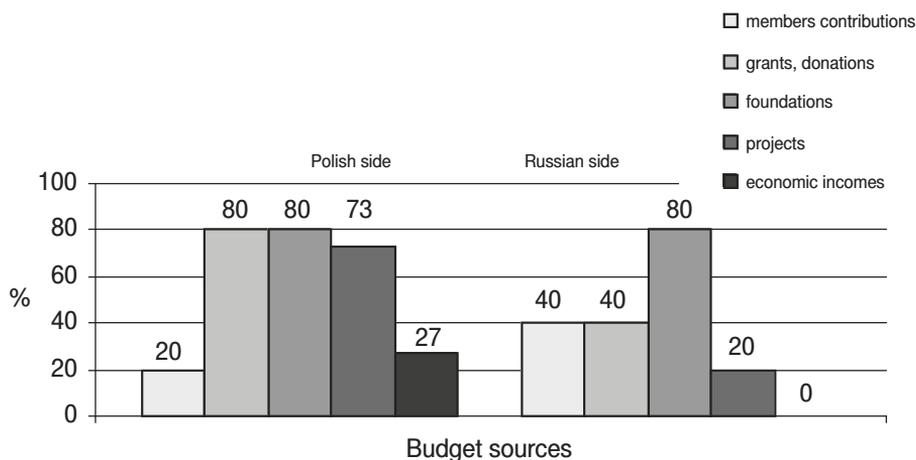


Fig. 1. Budget sources of NGOs in Polish – Russian border region in 2007/2008

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

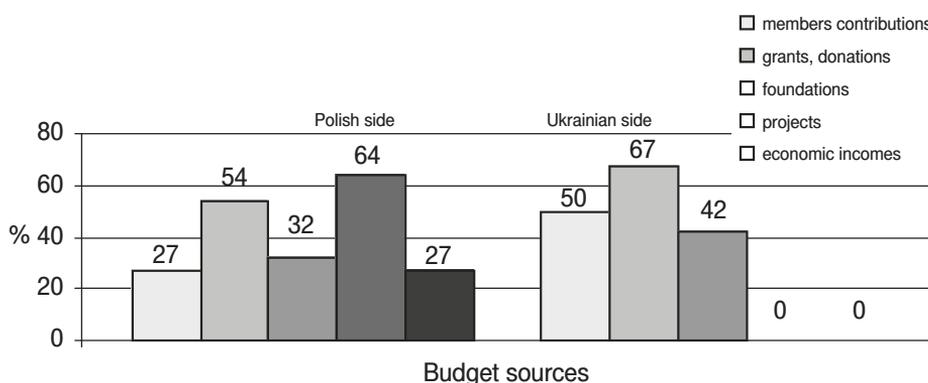


Fig. 2. Budget sources of NGOs in Polish – Ukrainian border region in 2007/2008

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Summarizing, Polish NGOs are more active and flexible in creating the budget, with year after year safer and long-term financial planning. Eastern partners do not use projects and economic incomes to support their own budget and are based on non – assuming a reporting obligation donations and grants.

An interesting point is that representatives of few organisations have already (in the meaning of young free market and open competition) complained about large competition and problems with it connected in the grants for project contests.

HOW LARGE IS THEIR ACTIVITIES SPATIAL RANGE?

There are big differences between the Polish side and the Eastern side of studying Cross-Border areas in the aspect of scale of activity. Polish organisations define their own scale at a nearly uniform rate as local/regional, national/binational and international. In the case of the Russian area 4/5 declares a local/regional scale of activity and in the Ukrainian area all of those interviewed declare local/regional scale (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4).

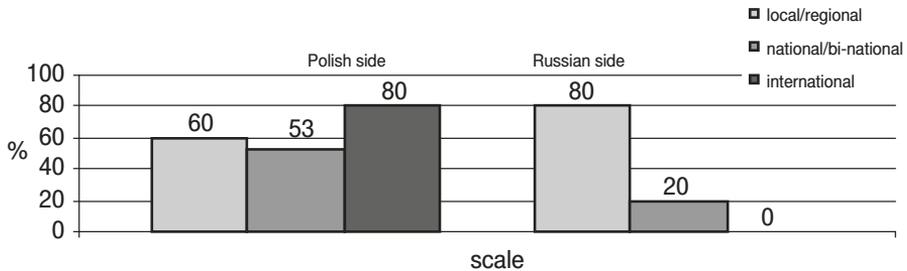


Fig. 3. Scale of cooperation of NGOs in Polish–Russian border region in 2007/2008

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

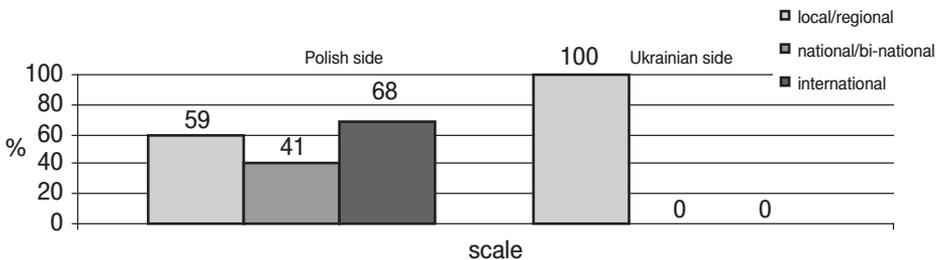


Fig. 4. Scale of cooperation of NGOs in Polish–Ukrainian border region in 2007/2008.

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

This can be explained by the level of the organisation's evolution. Polish ones, more experienced, have developed and formed a network at local, regional and even national level and now are looking wider, searching for foreign opportunities. Eastern organisations are still involved in locally and regionally focused activities and engaged in national or international cooperation but more often as a passive partner, not as an initiator. Probably that is why they have not mentioned their international scale of collaboration.

WHAT IS THEIR THEMATIC SCOPE?

The largest number of NGOs is focused on socio – cultural aspects, which include a whole spectrum of subjects. The second mentioned thematic area was political; however, Russian organisations are less involved in political areas than Polish and Ukrainian ones.

In the case of the Russian and Ukrainian side, bigger share (1/3) than in Polish has an environmental – ecological scope. On the other hand Polish ones are more interested in the economic area.

In more detail, in the Kaliningrad part of CBC dominate: ecological aspects, youth exchange and education fields of cooperation. Other spheres are, because of large government influence, rather impossible to implement.

At the Ukrainian side democratisation and youth activities are most often in cooperation with Poland (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6).

The most recognisable and visible (literally) in local and regional circles are NGOs involved in European Voluntary Service, being a part of European Union Youth and Youth in action programmes. There are always three units involved in it: the sending organisation (often a local NGO), the hosting one (often a quasi-NGO or local NGO), a coordinating unit (local or national NGO) and a volunteer implementing its own project.

According to reports from NGOs' activity across the Polish – Ukrainian border (*Polska – Ukraina...*, 2003) the main fields of cooperation are: democratisation processes (experiences sharing, transformation processes, self-government role), civil society, education (youth activities, youth and students exchanges), social problems (unemployment, poverty, disables people, addictions, exclusions, homelessness), culture and science, national minority.

The same sources about cooperation of Polish – Russian (Kaliningrad Oblast) CSOs (*Atlas organizacji...*, 2003) specify: youth, students and children's activities, culture, emigrants and compulsory migrants, social problems (disables people, addictions, HIV/AIDS, ecology, women's rights, youth) and environmental issues as main fields across that border.

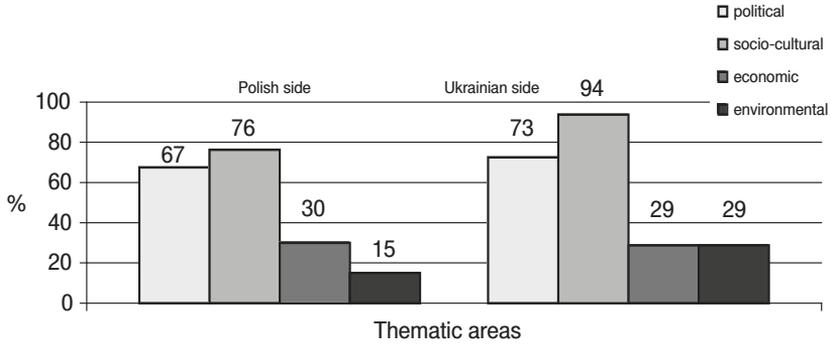


Fig. 5. Thematic areas of cooperation of NGOs in Polish – Ukrainian border region in 2007/2008

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

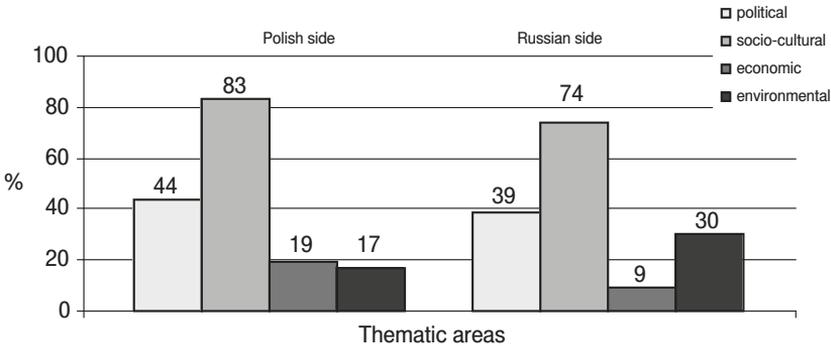


Fig. 6. Thematic areas of cooperation of NGOs in Polish – Russian border region in 2007/2008

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

HOW OLD ARE THEY?

Years of organisations’ activity cooperating across the Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Russian border are similar and are estimate at around 10 years. At the end of the 90’s Polish organisations have been already well developed and started to create contacts with eastern partners, especially with Ukrainian ones. Considering the age of democracy in Poland and Ukraine they are old and important at the NGOs market. It is a small group of mapped units but with the highest index of questionnaire responses.

Younger NGOs are still at the first level of evolution and create first local contacts. Nevertheless there are small organisations, especially in Ukraine, being during the transition from local and insecure to regional or national and cooperating with foreign units.

According to the Polish non- governmental association Klon/Jawor research (Gliński, 2006) in 2004 91% of all Polish NGOs were established after 1989. About 70% of them closed down after 3 years of activity.

WHO DO THEY COOPERATE WITH? – THE NETWORK / COOPERATION / PARTNERS

In the investigated areas we can distinguish two kinds of NGOs' cooperation: first, with governmental organisations (Ministries, regional and local government) and large international or national foundations and second, with real NGOs at regional and local level.

The first kind of cooperation is devoted to receiving funds for activities, taking part in their programmes, grants and donations. It is a very formal collaboration with the main relation: founder – receiver, giver – taker.

The second kind of relations, with local and regional CSOs, is focused on real common activities, common projects, and realisation of common aims. The attitude is partner – partner. Very often the main purpose to start cooperation is the possibility of getting external funds. After receiving funds and realisations of a mutual project, relations between them are suspended – temporarily disappear until the next project.

Relations at local level between NGOs across the border are rare. They are more common between quasi-NGOs, like schools and Community Culture Centres, regional and local self-governments.

It is very interesting that during the research there was no organisation which had indicated the Euroregion as a partner. It looks like NGOs do not cooperate with the Euroregions structures anymore, despite the fact that they were the most active organisations cooperating across the border after the system transformation.

They more often cooperate with large international organisations, from mature-democratic countries, the USA, Germany, the Netherlands, than with local initiatives. The reason is the aim of cooperation. The purpose to cooperate was to receive funds and to realise a project (often both). With large international and governmental organisations NGOs cooperate principally to get funds for their activities. With other small, local and regional organisations and even with quasi-NGOs for a real cooperation and implementation of common projects.

Small, local organisations have developed a relatively small network with an important role of the local self-government, quasi-NGOs, founders and a few

verified NGOs from the country and from the neighbour's state. Large NGOs/ organisations, being founders, cooperate as a partner with national governments, NGOs associations, research units. A large number of small organisations collaborate in relations: founder – beneficent.

It is interesting that a few of the responses refused to answer the question about their partners or units they cooperate with.

Analysing the location of organisations collaborating across the border, we can see, as confirmed also by reports from NGOs activity across the Polish – Russian border (2003) and Polish – Ukrainian border (2003), the most important actors in this cooperation are located in Warsaw. They are organisations with long experience (in relation to the NGO feature and the age of democracy in Poland), strong financial support (USA, German or Polish government) and large spectrum of activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Non-Governmental Organisations cooperating across the eastern Polish border are in a phase of rapid development. A few years of operating on the market makes them better prepared with long budget prospects, makes them stronger with a more diversified and bigger budget, makes them more specialised, open to new activities and new partners. On the other hand they are closer now to economic companies, to a small government if we look at the organisational structure. They have a hierarchy of a few – levels inside. They are part of large, international, globalised NGOs. From the author's observation it arises that some of the organisations remain small, with maximum ten hired people but with stable finances and well prepared projects and others entered bravely into the new "third sector" market looking for a quicker, more often only, financial development.

These observations are common for all three sides of the investigated border. But they occur in a different phase. In Poland, some NGOs are starting to be active on the market. In Ukraine, NGOs are learning fast and in the Kaliningrad Oblast they still depend on the government.

In this case it is important for better cross-border cooperation to create a good net, with partners for money and partners to work, with partners to teach and to learn. In the investigated case, in the author's opinion, the most important information was received from the last question, a question about collaborating partners. The results show who is a significant element in cooperation, and why, either because of money or preformed activities, show the role of governmental structures in it (question about the Euroregion's role in the creation of civil society) and can be a tool showing how to influence them. It shows that it is an important subject to investigate further.

NOTES

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