

TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ITS PLANNING AS A BASIS FOR PROMOTING THE PARTNERSHIP RELATIONS BETWEEN REGIONS

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze an individual case in the context of building an interregional partnership in the international dimension. The stages of cooperation, its course and potential, as well as the weaknesses of individual elements and their application are analyzed.

Key words

transnational cooperation, planning, management of transnational projects

Introduction

Transnational cooperation is an important element in building a competitive advantage. Entities involved in supra-regional or transnational cooperation exchange information in a way that stimulates the development of individuals. Cooperation can take place at the cultural, economic and political levels alike [1]. Regions that are at the center of their activity build multilateral partnerships that result in their intensive development and the diagnosis and implementation of good practices. They are referred to as "networking regions" [1] because, from their partnership with other entities, they often engage in multilateral cooperation. Relations between actors included in the network imitate a system of contacts in an international organization with a loose cooperation system [2]. Since building multilateral relationships is a tedious and time-consuming process, there is often one partner in the beginning, which is extended to another partner region or city. Due to the need to deepen these relationships, intense cooperation in the initial stage and its design in the context of further socio-political activity are most frequently used [3].

The subject of this article is an in-depth analysis of the process of undertaking and building international cooperation between a sub-region and a foreign partner, based on the example of the Sierpc district and the town of Zlaté Moravce. Cooperation was undertaken within the framework of the project "Local Partnership for Economic Development of the Sierpc Sub-region," co-financed by the European Union under the European Social Fund. An agent involved in the construction and implementation of the Strategy for Forecasting and Managing the Economic Change for the Sierpc Sub-region was involved in the Research and Innovation Centre Pro-Akademia, which was kind enough to provide the author with some material for analyses. The study used the method of document analysis [4-6] and individual case studies [7-10]. Due to editorial restrictions, a detailed description of research methodology has been omitted to describe the process of initiating, developing and deepening cooperation.

The characteristics of the analyzed entities

Sierpc Sub-region is in central Poland and is part of the Mazovian Province. Its surface area is 852.89 km². According to data collected by GUS [Main Statistical Office] in 2011, the sub-region had 53,864 people and a population density of 62.53 inhabitants per km². More than 65% of the population lives in rural areas. The commune structure consists of the municipal commune Sierpc and six rural communes: Sierpc, Rościszewo, Zawidz, Gozdowo, Szczutowo and Mochowo. The area of the district intersects communication routes, both road and rail, making the city of Sierpc a natural communication hub that is crucial for regional and national development.

Zlaté Moravce is a town in the Slovakian county of Nitra. It is located on the river Žitava, 28 km from Nitra. The first mention dates to the 12th century. It is inhabited by 15,618 people and covers an area of 45.36 km². The city is a center of mechanical industry and agriculture and has high tourism potential.

Transnational cooperation in the context of projects implemented by the European Union is crucial. It allows for the exchange of good practices and for their adaptation and implementation in cooperation partners. Similarity and regional cooperation are essential to the development of the Union [11]. The Sierpc Sub-region and Zlaté Moravce have similar problems and potential in the agri-food industry and tourism, but also have high unemployment and the need to intensify communication with inhabitants in common. The level of development of

individual entities is analyzed regarding building the profile and direction of transferring good practices. In this way, dominants are identified in the areas of activity. A dominant is a competitive advantage that can be transferred to the practice of another region. The idea of allotting dominants is determined by the need for development and its acceleration [12]. The issues that differentiate these regions are, first and foremost, the level of development: tourism (dominant of Zlaté Moravce), communication with the inhabitants (dominant of Zlaté Moravce), large-scale and multi-sectoral agriculture (dominant of Zlaté Moravce), transportation management policy (dominant of Sierpc Sub-region), or the development of vocational education (dominant of Sierpc Sub-region). It should be noted that the area of significant advantage of Zlaté Moravce is the experience of introducing the Euro as the national currency.

Due to the similarities and differences between the regions, it was decided to establish a cooperation based on the diagnosis of good practices in the areas, to try to adapt them and implement them at the project leader (Sierpc Sub-region) and the project partner (Zlaté Moravce).

Stages of transnational cooperation

Stage 1. Conference inaugurating a project involving a transnational partner (2.07.2012)

The first stage was the project's inaugural conference. Although the operators themselves conducted intensive e-mail communication before the conference itself, the official initiation of cooperation is linked to selecting a significant point in the timeline that facilitates subsequent organization [13]. The conference was aimed at presenting the model of cooperation and defining its scope. Because of the talks, the main scope of current contacts will be implemented using electronic media for financial optimization, while in the second part of the project direct contacts will be intensified to develop the best possible results of the final cooperation.

Stage 2. Study visit to the Sierpc Sub-region (1-4.07.2012)

The next stage in activity are study visits that are intended to strengthen relationships with a partner. Most often, the first visit is a "surveying" trip, and its purposes are to diagnose good practices and to optimize cooperation [14]. The visit in July 2012 was intended to bring together the representatives of the town of Zlaté Moravce with the specificity of the district, since only an in-depth knowledge of the leadership situation could give the project a good chance of development and the implementation of good practices. Visitors from Slovakia went to the district, especially the Skansen, including the Museum of the Mazovian Village, Kasztelan brewery, agritourism farms, Urszulewskie lakes and the Skrwa river valley. A meeting was held with farmers who presented the specifics of farm work in the sub-region concerning how they relate to soil conditions and how to use one's acreage. Guests also had the opportunity to contact the heads of upper secondary schools in Sierpc and learn about the specificities of youth work in Poland. The visit was an inspiration for a deeper focus on the development of cooperation in the fields of tourism, social and educational policy, and the agri-food industry. Visits of this type often inspire others to initiate international projects [13].

Stage 3. Workshop as a tool to strengthen the potential of cooperation

"Best practices - import-export-adaptation" at the Partner (28-30.11.2012)

During the workshops, the socio-economic situation in Zlaté Moravce was analyzed. The purpose of the workshop was to determine the partner's points of advantage. A resource map was developed, which identifies the area of basic skills, competencies and promotional and information activities, as well as tourism management in the partner's city. In addition, the scope of potential cooperation in the field of culture was highlighted, marking the Music School in Sierpc and the Arts and Culture Center in Sierps as the dominant entities. Cultural cooperation was identified as essential in youth exchange and youth work experience.

It was agreed during the workshop that a further personal meeting should take place later in the project, when the basic findings of the study are known. The Strategy for Forecasting and Managing Economic Change will be developed since strategic directions for the development of the leader should be given priority also in the field of international cooperation.

"Best practices - import-export-adaptation" at the Partner (12-13.07.2013)

The workshop was designed to diagnose the fields of competencies of the partner in areas recognized as a priority for the development of the Sierpc Sub-region. Based on the adopted program of diagnosis, the field of leadership competency was also subjected to the presentation of good practices to the partner. The workshop began to diagnose deficits and problem areas. In the second part, attempts were made to solve problems using

methods and techniques used in Zlaté Moravce and Sierpc. During the workshops, the following areas were considered as priorities:

- a) Transnational cooperation;
- b) Social policy;
- c) Education and development;
- d) Ecology, agriculture and tourism;
- e) Transport.

The workshop was completed by a summary and a table of good practices. After the workshops, another workshop was set up to deepen the cooperation.

"Best practices - import-export-adaptation" at the Partner (26-27.09.2013)

The workshops were designed to refine the data and to diagnose the application and adaptability potential of the good practices described. The workshop focused on issues related to education, development, and tourism.

The primary diagnostic area during the first day of the workshop was the potential of applying vocational education for young people in terms of labor market needs. Employees of the Labor Office and secondary and primary schools in Zlaté Moravce paid close attention to the remarks concerning the Polish vocational education system, further highlighting the differences between the systems. In the following, they presented methods and techniques of dealing with Zlaté Moravce with frictional unemployment and with difficult cooperation between territorial self-government units, as well as between schools and employers. The Education and Employment Council was proposed, whose competence is to adapt the educational offer to the needs of the labor market. In addition, because the Council exists in the Sierpc Sub-region, the partner raised the possibility of animating the system of extracurricular internships carried out in companies, as well as introducing a system of scholarships for the best-paid youths financed by employers operating in the sub-region. In Zlaté Moravce, youth meetings with vocational counselors are held each year to identify and utilize potential. Such a solution was suggested for implementation in the Sierpc Sub-region. There could be junior high school students, and later an upper secondary school for students. Representatives of the Sierpc Sub-region suggested that the city of Zlaté Moravce should organize conferences to be held in schools where employers would be invited and that are open to the participation of schoolchildren and parents. The purpose is not only to recruit staff candidates early, but also to present the potential of deficit professions to adapt skills earlier.

The second day of the workshop was devoted to issues of tourism and adaptation of the solutions used by the Project Partner to the needs of the Project Leader. The method of functioning of the tourism system in Zlaté Moravce was analyzed. In the following, we focused on the possibilities and potential of the partner to create and stimulate demand for tourism services. The town of Zlaté Moravce concentrated tasks related to trade, tourism and promotion in one department, allowing for better management and task delegation. As part of the workshop, it was also found that an important element in enabling demand stimulation is not only efficient information, mass media and whisper marketing, but also a calendar of tourist events making it possible to plan one's stay in the city in advance. The first calendar was developed as part of a project implemented in the city of Zlaté Moravce from the European Union, and its high effectiveness has made it a worthy tool. In the remainder of the workshop, participants from the town of Zlaté Moravce presented the methodology for the development and implementation of the calendar. After the workshop, it was agreed that the next meeting would focus on adapting good tourism practices and experiences related to the introduction of Euro currency in Slovakia.

"Best practices - import-export-adaptation" at the Partner (26-27.10.2013)

Workshops in Poland aimed to deepen and better organize information on good practices and their application potential for the Sierpc Sub-region. During the first part of the meeting, the focus was on the problem of creating and using a calendar of tourist events and the process of creating a tourist product. Based on the proposed draft, the workshop participants worked to develop an optimal form of the calendar of tourist events for the Sierpc Sub-region. The focus was on the use of the calendar of ordinary holidays and its adaptation to the needs and capacities of the county. The next part deals with the potential of tourist events and their use in the promotion of the overall tourist product. Part of the meeting was devoted to the adaptation of marketing methods and techniques used by the city of Zlaté Moravce to the possibilities and needs of the Sierpc Sub-region.

The second part of the meeting was devoted to the possibilities of solving social problems. Reference was made to the possibilities and scope of cooperation with employers, the steps to build relationships with schools, and

the potential for addressing the problem of unemployment through preventive and intervention measures implemented by public actors. It was proposed to develop a relational matrix that could inspire the deepening of partnerships between units representing district and commune authorities, schools, labor offices, and employers.

The third part of the meeting, carried out on the next day of the workshop, was about the impact of introducing the Euro currency into the local economy. The subject of the meeting was a critical analysis of the process of informing the population about planned changes, the process of implementing changes, and the adaptation of people to the new economic reality. A SWOT analysis of this process was performed. After summarizing the workshops, a plan of study visits and a conference summarizing the cooperation was presented. The workshops, especially the first and second, were an inspiration to present the solutions realized at the Project Leader, which could be an inspiration for the representatives of the city of Zlaté Moravce. Based on the map of problems created during the first meeting, the Museum of the Mazovian Village and the District Office in Sierpc and the City Hall in Sierpc were presented as the most valuable elements, mainly from the perspective of the architecture of the organization and management style. Other facilities scheduled to visit were:

- a) Arts and Culture Center - in the context of centralization not only of tourism management but also of concentration of services, contributing to the economic optimization of implemented activities;
- b) Regional Waste Management Facility - regarding solutions for eco-development and optimum waste management;
- c) Primary School - style of teaching and approximation of the philosophy of functioning of the system of education of the child in preschool and school age;
- d) Sports Hall - regarding the use of existing facilities and optimization of their use throughout the year.

Stage 4. Study visits as a tool for initiating cooperation areas

Study visit to the Leader (28-29.10.2013)

The study visit was realized as the first stage of the presentation of good practices at the project leader. Several locations were visited. During this visit, the focus was on issues related to good practices in managing and financing investments in various organizational units.

The first object visited by guests from Slovakia was the District Office on the first day of the visit. During the visit, the architecture of the organization was presented, referring to the electoral system and its impact on the functioning of the district. The philosophy of the district functioning regarding cooperation possibilities with external entities, both domestic and foreign, was also presented. During the visit, the tourist potential of the district was presented, with an emphasis on rural communes. The visit was made in the morning hours (9-12).

Another point of the study visit was the presentation of Sierpc City Hall. The tour was inaugurated by the Mayor of the City, who presented guests with its history and plans for the near future. The tour referred to diagnosing and using local potential. In the remainder of the visit, guests were given the opportunity to talk to the heads of the departments who presented their responsibilities and ways in which they manage the department. During the visit, the city's tourism potential was presented. The visit was made in the afternoon hours (13-16). Visits in the offices were the starting point for visiting the county and the presentation of local resources, which was held in the late afternoon (16:30 - 18:30).

On the second day of the visit, the Arts and Culture Center was presented. The purpose of the visit was to present the local resources, the course of the investment and its importance for the further development of the sub-region. The visit was enriched by the presentation of the Center's call for proposals and methods of volunteering. It was also referred to the issue of time management at the Center and the functioning of the Art Gallery. Guests were given the opportunity to see the performance of the Kashtelanka Folk Art Ensemble and, as a result, learn about one of the key elements of sub-regional identity building. The visit was enriched with the presentation of the offer of the Children's University and the University of the Third Age, in the context of Life-Long-Learning and the potential of its implementation in other EU countries.

The site in Rachocin was presented to guests due to its innovativeness. The entire segregation process was presented, which included the waste segregation system, the waste reception and collecting port, and the sorting mechanisms. Then, the mechanisms of waste management were presented, which help to reduce the cost of

introducing the waste act and contribute to revenue growth, which in turn allows for further investment. Visitors from Slovakia were given the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the possibilities of financing investments, which were largely achieved thanks to support from the European Union and the Voivodship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management.

Study visit to the Leader (12-13.11.2013)

The program of the visit included important places in the context of the tourist and sport-cultural offer of the district. The Mazovian Village Museum is one of the key elements of building identification and the identity of the sub-region. Visitors from Slovakia had the opportunity to see the changes taking place in the Open-Air Museum, especially in the context of building regional identities and integrating existing facilities into a modern marketing communication system. An additional aspect of the visit was the presentation of the possibility of raising funds from the European Union to revitalize existing monuments and buildings.

City Hall was analyzed from the perspective of experience in stimulating and creating the interest of tourists, especially from abroad. During the visit, mechanisms of promoting tourist events and investor acquisition activities were presented. Reference was also made to the methods of stimulating micro-enterprises in the field of tourism. One of the important elements of the study visit was the observation of the management structure's influence on the possibility of revitalizing and reconstructing existing facilities, especially those with tourist potential.

The study visit at Primary School No. 2 was aimed at presenting the potential of the education system in stimulating children's creativity and openness to co-organizing tourist events. Visitors from Slovakia could observe the methods and techniques used to stimulate the activity of children and the effects of the work of teachers and children whose products were presented. Teachers were eager to expose the educational, artistic and athletic effects of children and presented methods of working with a child of outstanding talent in the context of providing highly qualified human capital for the regional labor market.

The study visit was aimed at presenting the methods used by the sports facility to stimulate tourism. Reference was made to the possibilities of facility management, but also to the possibility of optimizing its management. An important element of the study visit was the presentation of sports hall facilities in the context of sports and leisure potential.

Study visit to the Partner (24-25.11.2013)

The study visit, just after the summation conference, was aimed at capturing the change process and adaptability of good practices seen at the Project Leader.

Migaziovcov Castle

During the visit, guests from Poland were presented a method of managing Migaziovcov Castle. Focus was particularly placed on the managerial mechanisms used to "rejuvenate" the history and potential of the work of guides. The Slovak partner conducted a meeting with guides, during which the methods of Polish guides at the Museum of the Mazovian Village were presented. A comparative analysis of the applied measures was made.

Park surrounding Migaziovcov Castle

At the park, the methods of managing a large-area facility were presented. Reference was made to the potential of the Mazovian village, defined as a brand compared to the brand of the arboretum in Zlaté Moravce. The park, founded in the 19th century, can be an inspiration, but also an experience of managing high natural potential.

Janko Kral's House

The study visit at Janko Kral's house was accompanied by a presentation of educational potential, centered around the idea of romantic and patriotic poetry. Some good practices were transferred from Sierpc, such as the idea of organizing multifunctional competitions conducted at the Primary School, visited by guests from Slovakia during an earlier study visit. The main feature of competitions is the realization of educational goals (e.g. patriotic education) using the dominant character, thematically integrated and the scope of competence in one of the school subjects, such as Nicolaus Copernicus (geography), Maria Skłodowska-Curie (chemistry), Adam Mickiewicz (Polish) or, as in the case of Slovakia, Janko Kral, a national hero and poet.

FC ViOn Zlate Moravce - team in the premier league

The study visit was aimed at presenting the use of sports facilities for tourist and leisure purposes. Guests from Poland could observe the training of the football team playing in the Slovak premier league, with emphasis on individual or quasi-individual training. The focus was on working with the local community in a similar, albeit slightly smaller, way in the Sierpc district.

Global progress

The main purpose of the study visit was to present the methods of working with the regional product on the example of mushroom processing. It referred not only to the production process but also to the modern machine park used for this purpose. It should be noted that the focus was shifted from regional production to mass production. That is why it was particularly interesting to exchange experiences and plans in the field of specialization with expanding competencies.

Stage 5. Conference summarizing cooperation (12.11.2013)

The aim of the summing-up conference is to present the course and the potential for further cooperation of a broader group of people. First, the conference was aimed at presenting the results of the work of the Polish team and planned changes, with emphasis on the prepared Strategy for Forecasting and Managing the Economic Change. Representatives from Poland and Slovakia took part in the conference. The prepared calendar of tourist events and a table of good practices, which may inspire further changes, were presented. Additionally, reference was made to the possibility of adapting some of the good practices developed during the workshops cumulated in time. It should be noted that the temporal focus of the process of observation, adaptation and implementation of good practices was an added value that enabled the integration of the Polish and Slovakian teams, and facilitated the transfer and penetration of national and organizational cultures. The conference was conducted according to a program that considered the needs of individual team members, but also referred to the product. It should be noted that there is considerable potential for further transnational cooperation with the project partner, particularly for culture, education, sport, and tourism. It also noted the possibility of cooperation in the context of further exchange of experience in the management and optimization of the functioning of manufacturing and processing plants in the agri-food industry.

Summary and conclusions

The international cooperation realized was the inspiration for further joint projects between the partners. A total of 27 good practices were diagnosed in 12 problem areas. Some of them have been implemented, such as the calendar of tourist events at the project leader, and some are inspiration for cooperation between the schools from Sierpc district and the schools from Zlate Moravce.

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