THE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP RELATIONS
OF POLISH MUNICIPALITIES – THE EXAMPLE
OF LOWER SILESIA

The establishment of individual international contacts by local authorities in the
framework of so-called partnership relations (twin, sister relations) is one of the facets of
the ongoing globalisation, as well as European integration. In the case of the former
Eastern block, these contacts have supported the transformation processes, which seek to
build a market and decentralised economy. According to Gruchman (1999), bilateral co-
operation with towns in highly developed countries allows to make up for the delays in
managing urban fabric, which arose in the period of centrally controlled economy, by the
transfer of experience and innovation in the field of self-governing and managing
municipal economy, as well as to face the competition which grows due to the
elimination of national barriers and the ongoing globalisation. These benefits can be
achieved particularly through direct contacts of local authority members and officials
involving co-operation in the field of city planning, environmental protection,
implementation of new technologies, promotion of business, industrial and agricultural
activity, etc. Exchange of experience in social problems solving, such as drug addiction,
unemployment, children care service development, integration of the disabled and
immigrants into the society, is also of major importance. However, to facilitate social
acceptance of globalisation, including European integration, it is of particular
significance to develop the traditional areas of co-operation such as education, culture
and sports (Lücke and Bellocci, 1997).

Contemporary forms of contacts between towns and municipalities have started to
develop after 1945. Just after the Second World War had finished, inhabitants of
Montbéliard, France and Ludwigsburg, Germany established the first formal partnership.
In 1951, the Council of Municipalities of Europe was set up to support the idea of
twinning relationships. A strong development of this form of co-operation in Western
Europe has been noted since the 1950s. In 1995, the European Union had more than 14
thousand bilateral relations involving almost 10 thousand municipalities, mainly French
(2837) and German (2485). Relatively most active were municipalities in Scandinavia –
partnership relations were established by 93% of municipalities in Sweden, 84% in
Denmark and 81% in Finland (Lücke and Bellocci, 1997). These ideas are also
reflected in Poland, although all the contacts were under control and restricted for
ideological reasons for many years. In practice, it is the political transformation between the 1980s and 1990s that has facilitated the spontaneous and voluntary development of co-operation between local authorities.

In Poland, partnership relations are not officially registered. In 1996, the Voivodship Statistics Office (WUS) in Jelenia Góra conducted an inquiry in the former border voivodships about partnership relationships (Gminy przygraniczne, 1997). Some data appeared also in few regional reports (e.g. Kozierski, 1996). In January 1998, the Association of Polish Cities conducted a research of the status of development of international co-operation of towns and municipalities across Poland, the findings however were not processed in respect of their geographical distribution (Kręć, 1998).

The objective of this paper is to present the historical development and current status of individual international co-operation of municipalities in Lower Silesia versus the country in respect of their geographical links and features. To this end, between January to February 2000, the author conducted telephone interviews regarding the current status of individual co-operation of all the 169 separate local self-government units in Lower Silesia (165 municipalities and 4 towns with a district /powiat/ status). Included in the interview were questions about their partners (administrative units or unions of municipalities), the year of establishing of informal relationship and signing a partnership agreement if any, the way of finding a partner, the scope of co-operation and the use (if any) of funding from programmes designed to support this type of international co-operation. In processing data concerning the number and nature of partnerships, those were omitted where contacts have expired at least 1 year ago, even if a formal agreement was formerly signed. The answers regarding the year of the establishing of co-operation were frequently approximate, therefore we need to take a cautious approach considering them (there is often lack of formal agreements or these were executed after several years of informal co-operation). To make comparisons, the data on partnership relations of towns and municipalities in Poland as per the status in January 1998, published by the Association of Polish Cities were used (Miasta partnerskie ..., 1998). These data, due to the dynamic growth in the number of partnerships, can be obsolete, these however represent the only data that are available in respect of the entire territory of Poland.

1. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CO-OPERATION IN THE FRAMEWORK OF PARTNERSHIP RELATIONS (1945–2000)

Since the mid-1950s, the largest Polish towns have started to establish first contacts with towns in the 'people's democracy' countries: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, GDR or the USSR. These contacts were restricted to the communist states political block (with a number of exemptions at the end of the 1960s), co-operation focused mainly on ideological goals, with contacts being appointed top-down and controlled by state authorities through Voivodship Offices (Koświn, 1993; Kaczmarek, 2000). In Lower Silesia, mainly Wroclaw initially developed co-operation links. Its partners under ‘friendship arrangements’ were the town of Gorki in the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic in the former USSR (1958) and Dresden in GDR (1958). They also established a co-operation relationship with Zaporozhye in the Ukrainian SSR and temporarily with
Hradec Kralove in Czechoslovakia (Kaczmarek, 1999). In many cases these contacts involved only meetings of officials and communist parties’ activists (Koćwin, 1993; Markowiak, 1997).

In the 1970s, the policy of openness provided opportunities for a limited networking with towns in the democratic (‘capitalist’) countries of Western Europe, mainly in Finland, Great Britain and Western Germany (data from the Association of Polish Cities). In that period, Wrocław liaised with Lyon in France (1973), Jelenia Góra with Valkeakoski in Finland (1979). In general such contacts were still under control and there were also cases of lack of co-operation of ‘appointed’ regions and towns (Koćwin, 1993). The closure of borders due to the political crisis early in the 1980s, including the introduction of martial law, caused all the contacts to vanish. A number of new appointments for cross-border co-operation with GDR were made in the mid-1980s: Jelenia Góra – Dresden, Kowary – Schöna-Bezdorf, Nowogrodziec – Pirm and Zittau, Bogatynia – Zittau, Gryfów Śląski – Bischofswerda, Lubań Śląski – Niesky, Zgorzelec – Görlitz, Wleń – Hoyerswerda. It is characteristic that even medium-sized urban centres could officially establish contacts. The official organisations (e.g. skouts) were able to establish contacts with partners from socialist countries, too. Apart from this, the town of Wałbrzych was developing co-operation with Tula (Russian SSR, USSR). Some local communities were establishing informal contacts with local authorities of Western Europe: the Municipality of Klodzko – Georg-Marien-Hütte, Klodzko (town) – Carvin in France.

As a result of political transformations in the years 1989–1990, municipalities have become more self-determining. May 1990 saw the first democratic local authority elections. Since that time, international contacts could develop in a formal way, without restrictions, with the wide participation of common citizens. Some of them were new relations, in some cases the previous contacts were renewed, however new principles were applied in signing agreements (Markowiak, 1997, Kaczmarek, 1999). Within the area of Lower Silesia of today, in the former Voivodship of Jelenia Góra, they carried out a co-operation programme with Denmark in 1990 which focused on the transfer of knowledge regarding the functioning of local authorities in the democratic countries in Western Europe. That programme involved a 2-week study tour to Denmark by a delegation composed of 120 councillors, mayors and chief executives from newly established local authorities in the former Jelenia Góra Voivodship. After a weekly training, a number of 2-person teams were delegated to different municipalities to see how Danish local authorities work (Pawłowski – verbal information). Following that programme many municipalities have established co-operation links with Danish partners: Bolesławiec – Hobro, Kamienna Góra (both commune and municipality) – Ikast, Lubań – Skjern, Wojcieszw – Trudholm, Myślakowice – Lenvig, Janowice Wielkie – Rosenholm, Szklarska Poręba – Aulum Haaderup, Jelenia Góra – Randers. In the other cases, most contacts were established freely following initiatives of Polish or foreign local authorities who were looking for partners through embassies and other organisations or through private relationships. There were cases where local authorities have established contacts through liaison with organisations of the former German inhabitants of the current Polish towns, who have frequently attended joint municipal holidays and official celebrations (e.g. Łądek Zdrój – Bad Schanndau, Radków –
Anröchte, Strzelin – Herne, Bolesławiec – Sigburg). Polish communities settled in other countries following the First and Second World Wars emigration facilitated the establishment of co-operation in less number of cases (Duszniki – Audun Le-Tiche, France, Kłodzko (town) – Flerom, Belgium). The possibility of raising funds from the Polish-German Co-operation Foundation was of major importance in encouraging municipalities to look for partners (at least 21 municipalities used that opportunity). Less local authorities (at least 6) take advantage of the European Union programmes such as Ecos-Ouverture, Phare-Partnership, Town-Twinning. The end of the 1990s in Lower Silesia saw a spontaneous growth in the number of contacts, mainly of a cross-border nature. This arises from the financial support for cross-border co-operation through such facilities as the Phare-Crossborder Small Grant Scheme use of which was declared by 19 municipalities and Phare CREDO (2 municipalities), as well as the offerings and organisational support through the existing Euroregions ‘Nysa’ and ‘Glacensis’ which have encouraged municipalities to seek partners.

As per the data provided by the Association of Polish Cities in January 1998, at least 576 municipalities (i.e. 23% of 2456 at that time) across Poland established partnership schemes which involved more than 1300 bilateral relationships. A schematic of bilateral co-operation development in the framework of partnership relations shows table 1.

Nowadays the co-operation usually develops in education, culture, sport events (mainly young people exchange programmes) and exchange of know-how about municipal economy management. A lot of attention is given to economic and tourist promotion, too (Kręc, 1998; Trzcielińska-Polus, 1999).

2. THE CURRENT STATUS AND STRUCTURE OF BILATERAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN LOWER SILESIA

In January 2000, 92 municipalities (54%) out of 169 in Lower Silesia stated that they were involved in bilateral or multilateral co-operation with local authority units abroad. Most of them had 1 partner (35 municipalities) or two partners (23 municipalities). The regional capital city, Wrocław, had the highest number of formal partners – 9 bilateral relations (Kaczmarek, 1999) and Jelenia Góra (7 partnerships). In all, 218 international partnerships were declared across Lower Silesia with local authorities abroad, of which several collaborated with more than 1 municipality in Lower Silesia. Geographically, German municipalities are most frequent partners (81 relations, i.e. 37.2%) and Czech ones (63 relations, i.e. 28.9%). As compared to the national data we can see a strong domination of contacts with Germany and the Czech Republic (more than 66% of relations altogether) which relates to the development of cross-border co-operation. The domination of typically cross-border contacts is particularly strong in the case of Czech partners. This is reflected by the distance between local authority partners, which does not exceed 25 km in 38% and 50 km in 54% of cases. With few exceptions, there is lack of partners from the south or east of the Czech Republic. Cross-border co-operation is of less significance in the case of contacts with Germany where the distance between only 12% of partners is up to 50 km.
Table 1. Schematic of development of bilateral international contacts of Poland’s towns and municipalities in the years 1955–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Spatial schematic*</th>
<th>Basic co-operation features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955–1971</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Schematic 1955-1971" /></td>
<td>Limited co-operation is conducted by the largest urban centres only. In practice, partners are appointed and restricted to involve towns in the communist block (‘socialist’) countries. Contacts are under central governments’ control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972–1980, 1983–1989</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Schematic 1972-1989" /></td>
<td>The largest urban centres may establish contacts with cities in the “capitalist” countries. Co-operation is also developed by medium-sized towns. Co-operation is under the control of regional (voivodship) authorities, in some cases partners are appointed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 1990</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Schematic From 1990" /></td>
<td>The remaining small towns (urban-rural municipalities) and fewer communes (rural municipalities) develops contacts. However, large urban centres still lead the way of co-operation. The number of contacts between local authorities in democratic countries, mainly in Western Europe, grows spontaneously and rapidly. Areas of contacts are stimulated by foreign co-operation support programmes (international and from a given country).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not real connections, schematic only.

Of typical international nature are partnership relations with municipalities in Denmark (16 relations, i.e. 7.3%), France (15 relations, 6.9%) and Holland (10 relations, 4.6%). It is characteristic that if Czech municipalities are excluded, the said countries will be ranked similarly high as in the rest of Poland, although in the exactly reversed
order. A relatively higher share of Denmark is caused by the abovementioned experience exchange programme that was carried out by municipalities from the Jelenia Góra region and Denmark.

As compared to entire Poland, co-operation between Lower Silesia and countries of the former eastern block is weaker (excluding in both cases the relations with Czech local governments), including the states that have emerged after the disintegration of the USSR (5% of relations with majority of Lithuanian local authorities, while 16.1% in Poland with majority of Slovak municipalities). Considering partners on other continents, most local authorities across Poland as well as in Lower Silesia co-operate with local governments in the U.S.A. It should be added that 11 local authorities in Lower Silesia stated that they co-operate with other towns and municipalities in the country (not included in table 2).

| Table 2. Origin of foreign partners of towns and municipalities in Lower Silesia and Poland |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| **A. Lower Silesia** (January 2000)           |             |               |
| Country of origin of partners                 | %           | Number        |
| 1. Germany                                    | 37.2        | 81            |
| 2. Czech Republic                             | 28.9        | 63            |
| 3. Denmark                                    | 7.3         | 16            |
| 4. France                                     | 6.9         | 15            |
| 5. Holland                                    | 4.6         | 10            |
| 6. Great Britain                              | 2.8         | 6             |
| 7. Italy                                      | 2.3         | 5             |
| 8. Lithuania                                  | 1.8         | 4             |
| Other in the former Eastern block             | 3.2         | 7             |
| Other                                         | 5.0         | 11            |
| **B. Poland** (January 1998)                 |             |               |
| Country of origin of partners                 | %           | Number        |
| 1. Germany                                    | 29.4        | 387           |
| 2. Holland                                    | 10.5        | 138           |
| 3. France                                     | 9.4         | 124           |
| 4. Denmark                                    | 8.0         | 106           |
| 5. Sweden                                     | 4.9         | 65            |
| 6. Czech Republic                             | 4.6         | 61            |
| 7. Slovakia                                   | 4.5         | 59            |
| 8. Great Britain                              | 3.9         | 52            |
| Other in the former Eastern block             | 11.6        | 153           |
| Other                                         | 13.1        | 172           |

Source: A. Own research. B. Own calculations based on data of the Association of Polish Cities (Miasta partnerskie..., 1998).

As well as the bilateral contacts, there are 4 multilateral partnership relations in Lower Silesia (as per 2000):

1. Association of Towns and Municipalities of Friedland. The Association was established in 1996 following the initiative of the Mayor of Friedland, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania (Germany) and brings together towns that currently have or had in the past the name of Friedland. Eight towns from 4 countries are members of the Association: Mieroszów in Lower Silesia and Korfantów in Upper Silesia (Poland), the said Friedland in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Friedland in Lower Saxony and Friedland in Brandenburg (Germany), Frydlant n. Liberec and Frydlant on Ostrava (Czech Republic), and Prawdinsk n. Kaliningrad (Russia). Member towns work together to organise, first of all, joint cultural and sports events (Związek Miast i Gmin..., 2000).

2. Union of Golden Cities. Its members are Zlaté Hory and Nový Knin (Czech
Republic), Goldkronach (Germany), Homatonbetsu (Japan), Złoty Stok and Złotoria (Poland, Lower Silesia). The Union brings together towns, which used to be gold extracting centres in the past. The Union was established in 1995. Its major objective is to promote each other and support tourist initiatives, but it has not been very active so far.

3. Association of Six Cities. This refers to a historical association that was established on 21 August, 1346, originally to protect merchants’ caravans against knights-robbers. It operated up to 1815. The Association members are: Bautzen, Zittau, Kamenz, Löbau, Górlitz (Germany) and Zgorzelec (formerly one town) and Lubań (formerly Lauban) in Poland. The Association was reactivated in 1991. Today their main area of co-operation is culture, arts, sports and tourism. The Association undertakes joint tourist promotion by publishing folders (Skowroński, 1994; Lehman, 1998).

4. Agreement of Cities. This Association was established in 1991, its main goal was to start up so called Izerska Railway that had been closed for economic reasons. In 1997, they expanded the scope of co-operation by adding sports, tourist, cultural and business activities. Currently its members are the following towns: Jablonec n. Nisou, Desná v Jizerských horách, Kořenov, Smržovka, Tanvald (Czech Republic) and Karpacz, Piechowice, Szklarska Poreba, Świeradów Zdrój and Jelenia Góra in Poland (Jakubič and Grzybowski, 1998; Grzybowski, 1999).

Association No. 1 and 2 are examples of typical multilateral co-operation of a ‘town town’ nature, where a prosaic common feature (e.g. name, similar history, similar element of the coat of arms) can often be a pretext to set up regular contacts. The two last associations are more of cross-border nature, particularly the Agreement of Cities.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The development of individual co-operation in the framework of partnership relations (twin, sister relations) in Lower Silesia ran similarly like in Poland. Large cities (in Lower Silesia – its capital, Wrocław) are unquestioned leaders of co-operation schemes, these are followed by medium and small towns. Sometimes smaller communities, which have proactive local governments, are able to develop their co-operation links more dynamically than large cities. However we need to remember that this may be misleading. Governments in smaller towns and municipalities consider co-operation schemes of local schools and organisations as their own. Local authorities in large cities may have their own international co-operation policies, therefore they often do not record international co-operation activities of educational or cultural institutions. Therefore the domination of large centres in the field of individual international co-operation is much stronger than it could be judged from the number of formal partnerships.

Most towns in Lower Silesia (75%) have already established bilateral international contacts, majority of the remaining are looking for partners. The level of co-operation is considerably lower in rural communities (30%) which are involved in individual international co-operation to a lower degree. This can be the grounds for a conclusion that a network of urban centres stimulates this type of co-operation – there are 89 towns in Lower Silesia inhabited by 71.6% of the population (31.12.1998). This is mainly due to the fact that urban local governments have bigger human resources and capacities to fund joint events, urban communities are considered to be more open to innovations and
interpersonal contacts. It is clear from the 1996 research conducted by the Jelenia Góra Regional Statistics Office in border regions (voivodships) across Poland that the former voivodships of Jelenia Góra and Walbrzych, which had many towns and now are part of Lower Silesia, represented the highest number of partnership contacts as compared to other border areas in Poland (Gminy przygraniczne, 1997).

In terms of geographical distribution of co-operation schemes, the municipalities in Lower Silesia are mainly affected by the border position of the region (German and Czech borders) and the availability of cross-border area support programmes. As the distance to the border grows, the number of municipalities involved in co-operation drops (Fig. 1).

![Map of Lower Silesia showing partnership with Czech self-government units, German self-government units, and units from other countries.]

**Fig. 1. Individual international partnership relations of towns and municipalities in Lower Silesia (January 2000)**
This is due to worse access to funds designed to support co-operation schemes as these municipalities can access only generally accessible programmes where competition is considerably stronger.

Local nature of co-operation is particularly visible in the case of contacts with Czech local authorities. Relations with German local governments have a more international nature and predominate in Lower Silesia. The reasons of this situation are:

- the possibility to receive grants for events and infrastructure projects from the Polish-German Co-operation Foundation, subject to having a partner in Germany;
- a high number of contacts with Germans arising from their high tourist mobility, Polish citizens undertaking jobs in Germany and business links between both countries;
- a high number of potential partners – there are more than 14 thousand municipalities in Germany, of which only 17% established contacts in 1995 (Lücke and Belloccchi, 1997);
- the historical background – German local authorities are keen to establish contacts with towns in the areas that belonged to Germany before the Second World War.

The partnership relations confirm the growing importance of links with Western Europe – the European Union countries represent 64% of international relations in Lower Silesia (74% in Poland in 1998). The U.S.A. dominate in respect of contacts with other continents. These links are reflected also in the origin of foreign investment, as well as general tendencies of Poland’s foreign policy.

As yet, multilateral partnership relations are developing slower, they can be, however, a good starting point in respect of participating in European programmes which currently are not generally known but require at least three partners. In Lower Silesia, such relationships have a cross-border nature – similarly as in bilateral relations they involve mainly Czech and German local authorities. Laurent (1991) indicated that the weaker participation of Polish municipalities in multilateral partnership relations with Western Europe might arise from the necessity to pay fees, which the Polish local authorities might consider too high.

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