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COOPERATION IN THE FRAMEWORK OF TRANSBORDER AND REGIONAL STATISTICS

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Statistics of cross-border areas plays an increasingly important role. It contributes to regional development and international cooperation. Official statistics satisfies the growing demand for information about cross-border areas. One of the key elements of the research work in border regions is to create a unified information infrastructure.

The specificity of shaping cross-border statistics lies in the fact that the object of research is the areas of two or more states, each of which is subject to national tax, financial and other legislation, as well as is covered by national statistical system.

Data of cross-border statistics are necessary for:

- the regional authorities to provide management in border and cross-border regions, namely for analyses which are carried out by municipalities, counties and provinces on both sides of the border,
- establishing regional development in all fields,
- the needs of regional science,
- the needs of entrepreneurship,
- the needs of society of cross-border regions.

The main emphasis is put on basic statistical information of cross-border cooperation, which is the statistics of regional border areas.

Cross-border cooperation poses some challenges for regional statistics, chiefly the methodological ones.

The experience of regional statistics of the Polish-Ukrainian border area shows that the stage of quite spontaneous cooperation, which consists primarily in the preparation of joint publications, should be developed into a great systematic work to establish a system of cross-border statistics.

The cooperation of the Ukrainian and Polish statisticians in the border area has reached such a level, that what should follow in order to bring a new quality to this cooperation is the establishment of cross-border data bank.

A characteristic feature of the modern-day Europe is the rapid development of international cooperation of regions. Cooperation between regions in Europe contributes significantly to the strengthening of democratic and political stability, in their economic, environmental, cultural and social development.

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Cross-border cooperation has become a factor in promoting social dialogue and social equality, a tool for development of all sectors of the cross-border cooperation. Its place in the regional politics of cross-border regions is determined by the ability to activate and efficiently use the existing capacity of cooperating regions, joining the potential for solving social problems and challenges of territorial development in the transboundary region.

So, what does the cross-border cooperation mean?

Following the Madrid convention, transboundary cooperation is defined as "...a common action aimed at strengthening and intensification of good-neighbourly relations between territorial communities or authorities which are under the jurisdiction of two or more contracting parties".

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The basis for cross-border cooperation is the process of the creation of connections and contractual relations in border regions in order to find solutions to common and sometimes even identical problems.

Cross-border cooperation is aimed at eliminating the negative aspects of the existence of borders, and the consequences that have arisen in border regions due to their location on the national outskirts of states and aims to improve people's lives.

The main objectives of such cooperation are:

- the elimination of existing stereotypes and beliefs on both sides of the border;
- the elimination of political and administrative barriers between the neighbouring nations;
- establishment of economic social and cultural infrastructure.

At present, information, the lion's share of which makes up the statistical information, is one of the key assets of cross-border cooperation.

Statistics of cross-border regions is playing an increasingly important role. It contributes to regional development and cooperation between the countries. Official statistics meets the growing demand for information about cross-border regions. One of the most important elements of the research work in border regions is the creation of a unified information infrastructure.

The specifics of the formation of cross-border statistics lays in the fact that the object of research is the adjoining territories of two or more countries, each of which is a subject of national legislation, taxation, financial and other systems, and is provided by the national statistical information.

Cross-border statistics data are needed:

- for regional authorities for the management of border and cross-border regions, namely, for the analysis, which is carried out by municipalities, districts and regions on both sides of the border;
- for adjusting and planning of regional development in all spheres;
- to ensure the development of regional science;
- for the needs of business;
- to provide information to the population of border regions.

The main accent is given to the regional statistics of cross-border territories, which is the basis of the statistical information related to the cross-border cooperation.

Regional statistics in general, is a part of the official statistics of a particular state. It provides a quantitative description of the socio-economic phenomena within the administrative boundaries of a region.

As practice shows, the regional statistics does three main functions:

- informative function - provides collection, processing, updating of databases, both at local and state level, a hand-over data to users (authorities, government, science, etc.). The source of these data are primarily statistical surveys and censuses, registers, sample surveys, etc.
- analytic function - the conversion of primary information and the following creation of the system of analytical indicators to analyze the effectiveness of socio-economic development.
- the function of providing information and statistical services – both informational services and analytic services, resulting in the assessment of the effectiveness of implemented regional programs.

One can assert that the most important aspect of regional statistics is its informative function. Its effectiveness enables the eventual request for an analytic function, as well as for other information services.

For cross-border regions, especially for those which are at the outer borders of the European Union and those are the regions of Poland, Ukraine and Belarus, there exists an urgent problem of comparability of statistics, especially at the lower level of aggregation than a region / province.

The cooperation of Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian statisticians began in the 90's of last century as a consequence of the formation of Euroregions and consisted mostly in the preparation of general statistical publications in this framework.

To mention, on the Polish-Ukrainian-Belarusian borderland we have:

- Euroregion "Karpaty" (1993), which includes five counties of Hungary, Podkarpackie Voivodship of Poland, the two krajs (Košice and Prešov) of Slovakia and 4 regions of Ukraine (L'viv, Zakarpatska, Ivano-Frankivs'k and Chernivtsi);

- Euroregion "Bug" (1995), which includes on the Polish side - Lublin province, on the Ukrainian side - Volhyn region and the two districts of L'viv region, on the Belarus side - Brest region.

Also, in the recent years, the bilateral Ukrainian-Polish statistical publications dealing with the assessment of socio-economic development of the border regions has come out.

It should be noted that this cooperation takes place exclusively at the initiative of the statistical offices of the border regions.

Since the beginning of such collaboration, which originated in 1995, more than 30 statistical publications have been published.

Summing up the publication activity of the border departments of Statistics of Ukraine and Poland, we can conclude:

1. Most often the subject of statistical publications is demography, and also data concerning the description of territory, employment, infrastructure and tourism.

2. Virtually all publications are for informational purposes only.

3. There is a lack of publications that would describe the effectiveness of realization of development projects for cross-border regions.

Exchange and analytic processing of statistical data of cross-border regions from different sides of the border has revealed a number of methodological problems:

1. The methodological comparability, comparability of classifications and terminologies.

2. The quality of data, their relevance, completeness and representativeness due to the different types of statistical observations.

3. Access to data, the possibility of disaggregation at the lowest level of administrative and territorial hierarchy. Data confidentiality policy.

The key problem is the first one. It requires a thorough examination and concordance of used concepts and classifications. Here the following three cases can be distinguished:

- full methodological consistency;
- incomplete methodological consistency, but with the possibility of data comparability;
- the impossibility of data harmonization and comparability.

There are significant methodological divergences in environmental statistics, social infrastructure, which are associated primarily with the peculiarities of national classifications.

An important aspect is also comparability, availability and representativeness of data for the administrative-territorial level below NUTS2, that is very important for cross-border statistics.

Addressing these issues requires a meticulous study and analysis of regional statistics of borderland territories and has to become an additional impetus for the development of regional and cross-border statistics.

The cooperation of the Ukrainian and Polish statisticians at the borderland has reached a stage, where the setting up of the cross-border databank furnishing such cooperation a new quality has become apparent.

The accomplishment of the objectives of creation the databank would permit:

- to create an international public Internet databank that meets a common methodology of Eurostat;
- create a coordinated and open to general public metadata database;
- to achieve the harmonization of statistical data;
- to eliminate language barriers when using the databank, since it can be made multi-lingual (at least trilingual).

Such a databank could form a basis for a unified informative infrastructure of the Polish-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation with the possibility of further territorial expansion.

Such work on the databank creation would be useful not only for statisticians of the border regions, but also for Statistical Offices of Ukraine and Poland at large.

Personnel for the job is available on both sides of the Polish-Ukrainian border. However, it is necessary to solve some organizational and financial issues. Here we greatly hope for the support of the main Statistical Offices of Ukraine and Poland.

Conclusions

Borderlands in the integrating Europe is increasingly becoming a subject of interest of regional statistics.

Exchange of information at the transboundary promotes good neighbourly relations on both sides of the border. Regional statistics at borderland is also an informational basis for the preparation and implementation of various types of cross-border cooperation. It is used for the preparation and implementation of various projects, as well as in the process of the working out a strategy of cross-border region development.

Cross-border cooperation, in turn, poses certain challenges for regional statistics, primarily of methodological character.

The experience of regional statistics on the Polish-Ukrainian borderland shows that from a rather spontaneous cooperation, which consisted mainly in the preparation of joint publications, one has to move towards a more systematic work on the developing of cross-border statistics.

For this purpose, it would be desirable to establish a joint centre of transboundary statistics having the objectives:

1. Harmonization of statistical methodology of the regional statistics of cross-border areas.
2. Creation and maintenance of Web-based cross-border databank with an interface to other regional and local databanks, first of all with the regional Eurostat databank, and aimed at a wider range of users (not only of cross-border areas).
3. Coordination of statistical observations of cross-border areas.