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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES OF MAZOWIECKIE VOIVODESHIP. THE EXAMPLE OF THE URBAN MUNICIPALITY OF WĘGRÓW

WSPÓŁPRACA MIĘDZYNARODOWA GMIN MAZOWIECKICH. PRZYKŁAD GMINY MIEJSKIEJ WĘGRÓW

Mazowsze is the largest Polish voivodeship in terms of both the area and the population. It occupies the area of 35.6 thousand square kilometres, inhabited by 5.2 million people¹. All types of Polish local governmental units can be found within its territory. In total, there are 314 municipalities – including 229 rural municipalities, 50 urban-rural municipalities and 35 urban municipalities. There are 42 poviats – including 37 rural poviats, and 5 cities with poviat rights. The entire territory of the voivodeship belongs to the third Polish local government unit – a self-governing voivodeship, known as Mazowieckie Voivodeship².

International cooperation of local governmental units in Mazowieckie Voivodeship is common. Rural municipalities, rural-urban and urban municipalities, rural poviats, cities with poviat rights, as well as the self-governing voivodeship have their foreign partners. A detailed discussion of international cooperation of all local governmental units of Mazowieckie Voivodeship goes beyond the scope of this article. Its purpose is to present this cooperation on the basis of a specific example, and Węgrów was chosen as one of the urban municipalities of Mazowieckie Voivodeship.

In its category, Węgrów is an average municipality of Mazowieckie Voivodeship in terms of its area and population. The city occupies the territory of 35 square kilometres, inhabited by about 13 thousand people³. The urban nature and self-government traditions of the municipality reach far back in history – Węgrów was given urban rights in 1441 – and the municipality has a great history

¹ Online: www.mazovia.pl/wojewodztwo/krotko-o-mazowszu [16.07.2017].

² S. Faliński, *Mazowieckie samorzady terytorialne jako beneficjenci funduszy Unii Europejskiej w latach 2007–2013*. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach 2013, No. 98, Series: Administracja i Zarządzanie, No. 25.

³ Online: www.wegrow.com.pl [16.07.2017].

of international, intercultural and interreligious cooperation. For hundreds of years, the population of Węgrów has been as diversified as that of the entire Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the 16th century, the city was a significant centre of Polish reformation. It had a strong Calvinist community and it was considered to be the birthplace of the Polish Brethren or the Arians. The Jewish community in Węgrów had also existed since the 16th century⁴. As it was to turn out later, these traditions of multiculturalism exerted limited influence on modern international cooperation of Węgrów as an administrative unit and a social community.

The objective of this article, which has been only mentioned briefly, can be considered at three different levels. First of all, the purpose is to present a more or less complete shape of this cooperation, taking into account its various forms and aspects, in various periods, as well as its evolution and transformation. Secondly, it is to explain why international cooperation of Węgrów has been specific and unique while indicating the similarities and analogies between international cooperation of Węgrów and the same type of cooperation of other Polish local government units. Thirdly, it is to present the factors, which have been decisive for the form of international cooperation of Węgrów and other local government units.

In order to achieve this objective, appropriate sources have been selected – and partially created – for the purpose of this article. The first group of these consists of existing documents and materials produced by the local government unit of Węgrów – mainly the contracts between Węgrów and its foreign partners. The second consists of evoked sources, developed particularly for the purpose of the research process discussed, which are interviews with representatives of the local government units of Węgrów: councillors and public institution officers. Interpretation of these sources in association with analysis of selected studies on international cooperation of local government units allowed for an attempt to achieve the research objective defined.

Institutionalized international cooperation, which is based on a partnership agreement signed by the municipal authorities, was commenced by Węgrów as late as in 2005, when Polish local government units had well developed international contacts. In year 2003, there were 2131 such agreements concluded by all of our local government units – municipalities, poviats and voivodeships, of which 1728 were signed only by cities and municipalities.⁵ It seems that institutionalized international cooperation of Węgrów commenced only as a result of rapid

⁴ Literature on history of Węgrów is quite rich. Particularly worth recommendation – when it comes to medieval and contemporary age – is the collective work published at the very beginning of the era of free Poland, which begun in 1989, entitled *Węgrów dzieje miasta i okolic w latach 1441–1944*. Eds. A. Kołodziejczyk, T. Swat. Węgrów 1991.

⁵ *Współpraca międzynarodowa samorządów. Praktyczny przewodnik*. Eds. K. Paczyńska, A. Stachowiak, A. Porawski, H. Leki. Poznań 2009, p. 21.

development of international relations of the Polish local communities, which resulted from Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004⁶.

Before the accession, the inhabitants of Węgrów engaged in international cooperation not through their municipal authorities, but individually or in civic communities smaller than the municipality. A significant reason for this activity was willingness to provide assistance to their compatriots living in territories which once belonged to Poland and now located abroad. This concerned the Poles living in Ukraine, in Lviv Oblast, and in Lithuania – Švenčionys District Municipality. Activity of this kind in the late 20th and early 21st century was typical and quite popular among the inhabitants of many local communities in Mazowieckie Voivodeship – not only in Węgrów – which maintained relations with their compatriots from the former Eastern Borderlands of the Republic of Poland or those deported deep into Russia or the Soviet Union. A particularly significant role in establishing international relations of Węgrów was played by scouts. As early as in the 1990s, when the commander of the scout troop of Węgrów of the Polish Scouting Association was a history teacher, Wanda Kosińska⁷, it was her initiative to organize in 1994 the first camp in Ukraine, and in 1995, the scouts of Węgrów visited Lithuania. It seems that the decision to organize these trips was influenced by the following fact: in 1993, during a camp in Dołha, there was a meeting with several Polish children from Ukraine. In the following year, the camp in Ukraine was organized. The participants visited Lviv, Kamianets-Podilskyi and Khotyn, searching for Polish traces in these territories, but they also met their peers from Ukraine and became friends with them. Friendly relations with Ukrainians were also established by teachers and students of Jan Dobrogost Krasiński grammar school of Węgrów, who first engaged in cooperation with their peers of the 54th General Education Secondary School in Lviv, and then with young Ukrainians from Zhovkva and Skole. By developing these relations, the young inhabitants of Węgrów, using the funds from the governmental program “Polish-Ukrainian Youth Exchange”, visited Ukraine many times and welcomed their Ukrainian friends in Poland. These visits served not only the purpose of strengthening friendships, but also allowed the citizens of Ukraine to get to know Węgrów, as well as other Polish cities and towns. As a result of these visits and scout camps, organized in Ukraine, partnership agreements were later signed by Węgrów with Zhovkva and Skole⁸.

⁶ I have discussed this process broadly in: S. Faliński, *Współpraca międzynarodowa samorządów terytorialnych*, [In:] *Wymiana i konkurencja. Środowisko i formy promocji Polski w świecie*. Studia i Analizy Dyplomacji Kulturalnej i Publicznej (Warszawa) 2011, No. 2.

⁷ Interview of the author with Wanda Kosińska, 28.07.2017.

⁸ *Współpraca partnerska Węgrowa z miastami na Ukrainie*. Wystąpienie burmistrza 15.01.2008 (Internet archive of the Municipal Office in Węgrów).

The first official international agreement was signed by the urban municipality of Węgrów on November 29th, 2005 with the Ukrainian Zhovkva⁹ – a city, like Węgrów, having about 13 thousand inhabitants, located in Lviv Oblast, twenty-something kilometres from the Polish-Ukrainian border, established by one of the most renowned military leaders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Grand Hetman of the Crown and the Great Chancellor of the Crown, Stanisław Żółkiewski. On behalf of Węgrów, the agreement was signed by the mayor, Jan Górski, and on behalf of Zhovkva – by mayor Pyotr Vykhoperi. A substantially identical agreement was signed one day later with Alexandr Marushkevich, mayor of another Ukrainian city, Skole¹⁰, also located in Lviv Oblast – along its southern, Carpathian edge – and twice smaller than Węgrów.

These documents have been signed for an indefinite period of time, which is not always a standard in such cases. Some are signed for definite periods of time and require extensions. The unlimited term agreements discussed specify precisely the areas of operation of local governments in which cooperation is to be implemented. These are dominated by social issues: education, culture, sports and recreation, tourism and museums. Non-governmental organizations, which are a key element of any civic society, have also been mentioned. There has also been space for economy and organization of work of the municipal authorities and an issue which has been referred to rather unfortunately as “community management”, which is probably supposed to mean organization of community activity of the inhabitants. The list ends with an item which is connected directly to the European Union, in which we read: “planning and implementation of investment projects, partnership and assistance within the framework of the European Union”¹¹.

As we can see, apart from benefits of partnership as such, the signatories of these documents also plan to make joint use of the possibilities created by Poland’s accession to the European Union. However, these have not been defined as clearly as the forms of cooperation in other areas, listed above. Exchange of children and youth has been planned, as well as experience in education and upbringing; performances of folk and music groups, artists and creators; meetings of sports players and their groups, organization of sports competitions and matches, for instance, during municipal festivities. These are to be accompanied by exchange of experience with regard to organization of tourism, museums and exhibitions, as well as popularization of knowledge concerning monuments and facilities which are of value for tourism in the cooperating cities. Economic development of the local communities discussed is to be developed thanks to business meetings, conferences and trade fairs, as well as substantive advice on use of the available EU funds, as well as mutual promotion of goods and services offered by the

⁹ Online: [www.wegrow.com.pl/uploads/pub/pages/page_37/text_images/4481\[23.07.2017\]](http://www.wegrow.com.pl/uploads/pub/pages/page_37/text_images/4481[23.07.2017].).

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem.

business communities of Węgrów, Zhovkva and Skole. Improvement of the level of public services is to be made possible thanks to exchange of experience with regard to management of the city infrastructure: waste and sewage discharge, supply of potable water and communal heating or management of the urban housing resources. Through meetings and cooperation of various social groups and NGOs operating in the area of Węgrów and its Ukrainian partners, the basis for civic cooperation is to be established, closer to individual inhabitants than cooperation at the level of municipal authorities and thus promoting creation of individual relationships between the inhabitants of the friendly communities.

According to the documents discussed, the partnership is aimed at achievement of the established goals. There are seven of these. The first one consists in broadening the school curricula by adding lessons on tradition, history and culture of the partner cities. The second – improvement of the level of teaching of foreign languages functioning in the European Union, including Polish among the children of Polish origin, learning at schools of the Ukrainian partners. The third – promotion of local customs and cultural traditions among the local communities. The fourth – establishment of business cooperation between Polish and Ukrainian entrepreneurs and NGOs. The fifth – joint promotion and presentation of the socioeconomic potential of the partner cities in Ukraine, Poland and in other EU member states. The sixth – increasing the probability of implementation of joint projects, co-financed from EU funds, in particular, in the field of culture. The seventh – exchange of good practice in terms of quality of public management and civic activity in the partner cities.

Another international agreement was concluded by Węgrów on September 29th, 2006 with Valozhyn – a Belarusian city of about 10 thousand inhabitants, in Minsk Oblast, at the northern edge of Naliboki Forest¹². Unlike the former documents, this one was not signed in Węgrów, but in Belarus – in Valozhyn. The agreement was signed in association with the ceremony of bringing back the bell of the Roman Catholic church in the town of Ivyanest in Valozhyn Region. The bell, manufactured by the founder's workshop in Węgrów, was buried during the Second World War and thus saved by the local parishioners against smelting by the German occupants for military purposes. Apart from representatives of Węgrów, the city in which the saved bell had been manufactured, the ceremony was attended by representatives of Belarusian authorities and Polish diplomats¹³. The agreement, concluded during the ceremony, differs from those signed earlier with the Ukrainian cities. It is not a partnership agreement for an indefinite period of time, but a document which has been referred to as a letter of intent, which obviously

¹² Online:

www.wegrow.com.pl/uploads/pub/pages/page_37/text_images/UMOWA%20Nr%203.pdf [25.07.2017].

¹³ Interview of the author with Ewa Basztak (director of the Węgrów Cultural Centre in years 1996–2008), 29.07.2017.

indicates its preliminary nature, not binding on the parties, although it contains some very specific commitments and dates. Such components are not typical of letters of intent. It thus seems that the intent of the parties was to engage in a long-term cooperation, which, nevertheless, never was commenced. The ceremony was accompanied by a performance of the folk group of Węgrów, called “Węgrowianie”; later on, a modern dance ensemble “Avocado 2000” visited Belarus. On the part of the Belarusians, the cooperation was, in fact, limited to participation of representatives of Iyvanest – where a Polish House was located – in the grand event, attended by the Polish Television – an open-air picnic known as “The Wedding Customs Festival”, edition of 2007. The festival started in the 1990s, and its indirect participants, thanks to TV broadcasts, were inhabitants of the entire Poland. The cyclical event had been organized until 2014, and in the period of its peak popularity, it was co-financed not only by Węgrów, but also by the self-governing Mazowieckie Voivodeship and the Polish Television.

The next international agreement of Węgrów is also known as a letter of intent, and it was concluded for an indefinite period of time on 14th of December, 2007, with the Ukrainian town of Rokytne, Rivne Oblast, inhabited by about 8 thousand people. On behalf of Ukraine, the agreement was signed by mayor Andrey Kovalenko, and on behalf of Poland – by mayor Jarosław Grenda. The main purpose of the agreement is a declaration of intent to engage in business, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation. Thus, significant differences can be noted between this agreement and those formerly concluded with other Ukrainian cities. In partnership agreements with Zhovkva and Skole, emphasis was put on social cooperation – education, culture, sport and recreation – while in this agreement, economic issues were at the forefront. This is not the only difference. In the letter of intent discussed above, reference is made to international Polish-Ukrainian agreement of 1992 on good neighborliness and friendly cooperation and to the principles defined in European Charter of Local Self-Government (using the same wording as in the document discussed); no such reference was made in the previous documents. Similarities to the previous documents include indication of other spheres of cooperation, analogous to those included in the previous agreements, including cooperation of municipal institutions and improvement of quality of work of the local authorities, social organizations or direct relations between citizens. Nevertheless, in the agreement under concern, emphasis was put on economic issues, understood not only as mutual support for Polish and Ukrainian enterprises, but also activity on behalf of their direct cooperation, which may mean joint production of goods and rendering of services. The provisions of this letter of intent are to be clarified further in the planned “agreement on cooperation and partnership”¹⁴.

¹⁴ Online: www.wegrow.com.pl/uploads/pub/pages/page_37/text_images/4483 [26.07.2017].

Węgrów has yet another partner city in a different part of Europe, far from our eastern neighbours – Ukraine and Belarus: Valsolda. It is a small Italian town of about 2 thousand inhabitants, located in the northern part of the country – in Lombardy, the province of Como. Valsolda was the birthplace of the 18th century constructors of Węgrów's church and monastery complex of Franciscans-Reformers – brothers Carlo and Francesco Cerani. A renowned expert in Polish baroque, professor Mariusz Karpowicz, who has researched their constructions, came up with the initiative of initiation of partnership-based cooperation between Węgrów and Valsolda¹⁵. The agreement was signed on 13.06.2008. Poland was represented by mayor Jarosław Gręda, and Italy – by Alberto de Maria. The “agreement of friendship” refers directly to shared history of the two cities, located more than 1000 kilometres apart. Commitment was made to maintain and develop the existing relations and to exchange experiences with regard to local authorities and local development, and – which is particularly valuable – to support direct relations between the inhabitants of the two cities. Priorities of this cooperation were listed in the order of significance as the spheres of activity of the local authorities which have to be dealt with. The top of the list was occupied by those areas of community life, which define the identity of each of the communities, and their elements indicate the cultural and civilisational affinity between the two. Therefore, cooperation was declared in the field of culture, education and sports – to be developed through cooperation of various educational and cultural institutions, organizations and informal groups of citizens. In the next place, the document indicated the necessity of mutual support of tourism in both cities and their geographical surroundings. The priorities discussed do not mean that economic issues were disregarded. On the contrary – they are referred to directly in the further part of the document, declaring support for local enterprises and firms and exchange of experience in the field of economy and local development. A document of this kind could not lack a reference to membership of Italy and Poland in the European Union. Both parties declared their intent to engage in joint projects, supported by EU funds¹⁶. As we will learn in the further part of the article, these declarations were not merely paying lip service.

After initiation of cooperation of Valsolda of western Europe, the authorities of Węgrów decided to sign yet another agreement with a city in our part of the continent. This time, the chosen partner was located in the Lithuanian Švenčionys District Municipality, with which – as we can recall – the inhabitants of Węgrów had maintained informal relations since the 1990s. The origins of these must be

¹⁵ Interview of the author with the head of the Department of Social Affairs of the Municipal Office in Węgrów, Hubert Kowalewski, 17.07.2017. To find out more about the activity of Cerani brothers: M. Karpowicz, *Carlo i Francesco Ceroni – budowniczości kościołów w Węgrowie*. Węgrów 2008.

¹⁶ Online: www.wegrow.com.pl/uploads/pub/pages/page_37/text_images/4484 [26.07.2017].

looked for in the meeting of Wanda Kosińska with a Pole from Lithuania, a Polish activist and poet, Apolonia Skakowska. Thanks to her, Ms. Kosińska engaged in cooperation with a Polish school in the small city of Pabrade in Vilnius Region, Švenčionys District Municipality. After the commander of the scout troop, other inhabitants of Węgrów also reached Pabrade – a special role was played by Marek Królak, who organized assistance for the local orphanage, which was renovated thanks to the efforts of many people of Węgrów, including the then-councillor and the present mayor, Krzysztof Wyszogrodzki¹⁷.

As a result of this cooperation, on 19.09.2010, an official international agreement was signed between Węgrów and Švenčionys District Municipality. In its content, it is similar to the earlier agreements signed with the Ukrainian partners. In the document signed, culture, education, sports and recreation were also treated as priorities. Development in these fields is to be achieved thanks to various cultural, artistic, sporting and recreational undertakings, as well as through conferences, seminars, meetings and exchanges of Polish and Lithuanian groups of experts, students and youth for the purpose of exchange of experience with regard to education, culture and arts. While treating the social awareness sphere as a priority, the partners have not forgotten about the economic issues. This sphere of social life has also been mentioned, and the document declares willingness to support Polish-Lithuanian trade. The authorities of Węgrów and Švenčionys District Municipality also commit themselves to mutually promote the cultural heritage and touristic and recreational values of their region.

The agreements presented have been implemented with different intensity in three directions: Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Italian. Cooperation with the Belarusian partner was short-term, progressing as presented earlier, and it practically ended in year 2007. The reasons for this fact should be primarily seen as associated with the political situation in Belarus, where the authorities are not eager to engage in intensive cooperation with local authorities from Poland.

Cooperation with Ukrainian partners of Węgrów has continued with various intensity until today. Local authorities and representatives of local communities maintain relations, municipal institutions and artistic groups engage in cooperation, as well as groups of citizens and individual inhabitants. A particularly significant role in Polish-Ukrainian cooperation was played by implementation of the project known as “Mr. Twardowski on a rooster – immaterial cultural heritage of the Slavs in education of children and youth”. It was implemented from October 2007 until May 2008 thanks to financial support of the European Union. The objective was to strengthen the local cultural traditions and the historical identity of the inhabitants of Węgrów and its surroundings, as well as to solidify the ties between members of the local community of Węgrów, particularly children and young people. Another aim was to make the city and its surroundings more attractive to tourists by

¹⁷ Interview of the author with councilors of Węgrów – Tadeusz Ryczkowski and Barbara Szymańska, 27.07.2017.

popularizing knowledge on culture and history of this part of Poland and the land of Slavs. Young inhabitants of Węgrów got to know their local historical tradition and transmitted it to their Ukrainian partners, who also depicted and popularized their past and their own, local historical traditions. The objective was to get to know, discuss and interpret legends, fairy and folk tales to broaden the knowledge about the befriended Polish and Ukrainian cities and regions, thus developing the local awareness and identity constituting a part of the national identity, historically shaped, also on the basis of cultural kinship of the entire land of Slavs and the modern Slavic nations, including Poles and Ukrainians. This activity was supposed to bring, and probably brought, not only enrichment of own local and national identity of the Poles and Ukrainians, but also strengthening of the ties and building of friendship between them. The project was implemented not only by the partner cities – Węgrów, Zhovkva, Skole and Rokytno and their educational facilities, but also by one of the schools in Lviv. Seminars, conferences, lectures, exhibitions, workshops, festivals and open-air events were organized for the inhabitants of Węgrów and their partners from Ukraine¹⁸. The project “Mr. Twardowski...” was not the end of cooperation between Węgrów and the partner Ukrainian cities. Relations have been maintained through mutual visits and exchanges, mainly during city festivals organized in Poland and Ukraine, although these are not as intensive as the ones which took place within the framework of the project.

Cooperation of Węgrów with the Lithuanian partner – Švenčionys District Municipality – has been continuous. In the year following signing of the agreement, 2011, a delegation from Węgrów went to Lithuania to participate in the 525th anniversary of establishment of the city of Švenčionys. In the following year, the region was visited by a Polish delegation with the then-President of the City Council, who is the present mayor of Węgrów, Krzysztof Wyszogrodzki, and Marek Królak, who had helped the orphanage in Pabrade. The Poles participated in the ceremony of the repeated funeral of general Daniel Konarzewski, buried in Švenčionys District Municipality. The local authorities of Węgrów financed a commemorative plaque for the general, which was mounted on his burial chapel. In year 2013, a large delegation of inhabitants of Węgrów went to Švenčionys District Municipality. Its members included the local authority officials and members of the City Council, the deputy mayor, as well as Węgrowianie Folk Group of more than ten members, which performed during the Days of Švenčionys together with folk artists from Mexico, Georgia, Russia, Belarus, Moldova and Lithuania, as well as other Polish folk groups. Worth mentioning is also the visit of the group and of authorities of Węgrów, including mayor Wyszogrodzki, to the International Festival of Folk Music and Dance in year 2015. In the same year, a delegation from

¹⁸ Online:

www.wegrow.com.pl/strona-322-pan_twardowski_na_kogucie_niematerialne.html;
www.wegrow.com.pl/strona-318-zakonczenie_projektu_pan_twardowski_na.html
[31.07.2017].

Švenčionys, led by the mayor of the district Rimantas Kripėius, visited Węgrów during the days of the city. One year later, representatives of Węgrów, including the mayor, went to Švenčionys to celebrate the 530th anniversary of establishment of the city.

Two years earlier, in year 2014, an event took place in which the partners of Węgrów cooperated together in the city and through its agency. In August, during the celebrations of the Days of Węgrów, there was a meeting of representatives of the Polish Węgrów, the Lithuanian Švenčionys District Municipality and the Italian city of Valsolda, and their artists participated in the festival organized for the occasion. This was a part of a joint, trilateral project “Węgrów – Švenčionys – Valsolda – three cities, the same Europe”, co-financed by the European Union within the framework of the European program “Europe for its citizens”. The guests of Węgrów participated in lectures, discussions and debates concerning the issues related to the project name, and during a special session of the City Council, the tradition and effects of work of the three cooperating local governments was presented. The entire Polish-Lithuanian-Italian meeting ended with a concert of bands, during which the hymn of the European Union was played¹⁹. Implementation of this project shows how bilateral cooperation may lead to transmission of relations and creation of a specific network of cooperation between partner cities²⁰. Unfortunately, in the recent years relations with Valsolda have been practically suspended. For the last time, representatives of the town in Lombardy contacted our representative of Mazowieckie Voivodeship in year 2015, during the funeral of Professor Mariusz Karpowicz, highly distinguished among the two local communities. According to the inhabitants of Węgrów, this suspension has been due to the fact that the mayor of Valsolda has changed. The former mayor de Maria was very much involved in the cooperation; however, the same cannot be said about his successor...²¹

In cooperation of Węgrów with Švenčionys District Municipality, apart from the presented theme of international cooperation and establishment of a network of cooperation and partnership of local governments of different countries, a very important issue is the sense of nationality, stemming from the sense of solidarity of inhabitants of Węgrów with their compatriots living abroad. It seems that in general, willingness to cooperate with Švenčionys District Municipality was motivated by the need to help the Poles living in Lithuania. It is the reason for continuous and intensive cooperation between the Community Centre of Węgrów with the city of Pobrade, lying in Švenčionys District Municipality and inhabited

¹⁹ Online: www.wegrow.pl/strona-400-wegrow_swiecziany_valsolda_trzy_miasta.html [31.07.2017].

²⁰ To find out more about such networks, S. Faliński, *Współpraca międzynarodowa samorządów...*

²¹ Interview of the author with councilors of Węgrów – Tadeusz Ryczkowski and Barbara Szymańska, 27.07.2017.

mostly by Poles – the city is visited by the inhabitants of Węgrów individually and in groups; the local orphanage has been renovated by them, artistic groups and Poles living in Pobrade visit Węgrów, and folk groups and delegations from Węgrów are frequent guests in Švenčionys District Municipality²².

Węgrów should soon sign yet another partnership agreement. This time, it will be with a local government of the Slovak city of Hurbanovo. The Special Educational Centre in Węgrów has cooperated with a special school in this city since 2012. The city representatives are to be present during the Days of Węgrów in 2017, and, according to the statement of the mayor of Węgrów, Krzysztof Wyszogrodzki, the decision on signing of the agreement has already been made²³.

Discussion of international cooperation of Węgrów leads to a number of conclusions.

– As we may remember, the origins of international cooperation of the local government should be perceived as associated with activity of the Polish Scouting Association – to be more precise, of the local commander, Ms. Wanda Kosińska, and not the activity of the local authorities. Civic activity of a specific group of members of the local community initiated this cooperation, making it popular among other representatives of the municipal community. Therefore, the human factor (Ms. Wanda Kosińska) was of great importance and could influence the development of this organization, as we are dealing with a specific person, running a specific organization. In general, thus, it can be stated that active citizens – members of the municipal community – launched a process which involved other members of the local community, and finally the municipal authorities joined them. This type and direction of evolution of activity – from citizens to authorities – is not a common phenomenon. Usually – although, as it has been proven by the example of Węgrów, not always – the direction among the municipalities of Poland and Mazowieckie Voivodeship is reversed: from authorities to citizens; usually, public and institutional cooperation is initiated, which then develops into local and civic activity. This direction of development was reversed in the case of Węgrów.²⁴

– It seems that the most important motive for the scouts of Węgrów to engage in international cooperation – which shaped the direction of this cooperation – can be regarded as a “sentimental and patriotic” motive, resulting from the sense of

²² Interview of the author with the director of the Community Centre of Węgrów, Katarzyna Zabadała, 26.07.2017.

²³ Interview of the author with the mayor of Węgrów Krzysztof Wyszogrodzki, 27.07.2017.

²⁴ S. Faliński, *Aktywność międzynarodowa* Warszawy. Zeszyty Naukowe Uczelni Vistula 2015, No. 3(45); Idem, *Współpraca międzynarodowa gminy miejsko-wiejskiej. Przypadek Olecka*. Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne 2016, Vol. 49; Idem, *Dobre praktyki gminy wiejskiej w dziedzinie współpracy międzynarodowej*. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach 2017, No. 113, Series: Administracja i Zarządzanie, No. 40; Idem, *Droga gminy Gizalki do Flagi Europy*. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach 2017, No. 113, Series: Administracja i Zarządzanie, No. 40.

solidarity with compatriots living abroad and sentiment to areas which are rich in Polish historical mementos. This motive has been present ever since in relations of Węgrów with the partners from Ukraine and Lithuania and was present during the earlier – now suspended – contacts with Belarus.

– The reasons for engaging in cooperation of Węgrów with Valsolda of Lombardy were quite different. In this case, the motives for initiation of cooperation should also be sought in the past – however, not history of the nation, like in the case of the former Eastern Borderlands of Poland, but local, rich history of Węgrów and works of creators of its outstanding – in terms of architecture – sacred buildings. It should be kept in mind, however, that the initiative to engage in this cooperation came not from members of the local community of Węgrów, but its friend, professor Karpowicz.

– A very important role in initiation of cooperation of Węgrów urban municipality was played by an external factor. This consisted of the special programs of the European Union and the associated funds for their implementation. Eagerness to get access to these was surely an important, although not the only reason for engaging in cooperation at the level of the municipal authorities²⁵.

– The areas of social life in which Węgrów has engaged in international cooperation are typical of the entire Mazowieckie Voivodeship and Poland. These are dominated by culture and historical heritage, education, tourism, sports and recreation, and the main participants of this cooperation – apart from representatives of the authorities and municipal institutions – are children and young people. It is very important and needed, as relatively strong links must be built among people who get to know each other in their youth in order to cooperate and maintain friendships at mature age. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility of cooperation on the part of mature members of the communities.

– The forms of cooperation are also typical. Its most visible part consists of occasional municipal festivities, festivals and events, attended by artists, singers, dancers and music bands representing their local communities. International cooperation is also implemented in a less spectacular, but continuous manner by various institutions active in the cooperating local communities: schools, community and sports centres, educational institutions. Joint projects are implemented, which are based on exchange of experience and sharing of knowledge – there are mutual visits of children, young people and experts, who exchange information not only on their own and shared culture or history, but also the components of organizational, managerial and educational culture.

International cooperation of Węgrów is specific and unique, like that of any other community of Mazowieckie Voivodeship; however, it plays a similar role to that of other local governments in the voivodeship. This role can be summarized as follows:

²⁵ Interview of the author with councilors of Węgrów – Tadeusz Ryczkowski and Barbara Szymańska, 27.07.2017.

- It constitutes yet another area of community activity, thus strengthening the links between members of the territorial community.
- It serves as one of the points of reference for shaping and development of the sense of own local identity, separate from all others.
- It serves as a carrier for popularization of individual nature of the community.
- It is a carrier of information on specific traits of the befriended territorial communities.
- It allows the community members to grasp their similarity to members of other befriended communities.
- It teaches respect for other cultures.
- It shapes tolerance among members of the community in relation to its equivalents, which differ from it in terms of civilisational origins and culture.
- It stimulates interest in the surrounding world among the community members.
- It provides the community members with knowledge of the world.
- It contributes to the strengthening of the belief that pluralism and differences may enrich the community.
- It weakens and eliminates negative stereotypes and cultural and civilisational prejudices.
- It exerts a positive impact on economic development through stimulation of business cooperation.
- It provides opportunities of access to special external funds (EU programs).
- It enables the community members to notice the common, universal values, which are typical of all people despite the cultural diversity.

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SUMMARY

The article discusses international cooperation of the urban municipality of Węgrów and presents a case study of international cooperation of one of 314 municipalities of Mazowieckie Voivodeship. It describes the characteristics of international activity of a specific urban local community which has its foreign partners in Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus and Italy. International cooperation of Węgrów has been discussed, indicating its similarities to international initiatives of other municipalities of Mazowieckie Voivodeship and the entire Poland. The summary contains a proposed definition of the role played by international cooperation of municipalities.

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł jest poświęcony współpracy międzynarodowej gminy miejskiej Węgrów i studium przypadku opisującym współpracę międzynarodową jednej z 314 gmin województwa mazowieckiego. Zawiera on charakterystykę aktywności międzynarodowej konkretnej miejskiej wspólnoty lokalnej, która ma swoich partnerów zagranicznych na Ukrainie, Litwie, Białorusi i we Włoszech. Omówiono w nim przede wszystkim współpracę międzynarodową Węgrowa, ale także wskazano na podobieństwa tej współpracy do współpracy międzynarodowej innych mazowieckich i polskich gmin. W podsumowaniu artykułu umieszczono propozycję określenia roli, jaką pełni współpraca międzynarodowa gmin.

Key words: local government, international cooperation, Węgrów, Mazowieckie Voivodeship

Słowa kluczowe: samorząd terytorialny, współpraca międzynarodowa, Węgrów, Mazowsze

