

Development of Tourism in a Cross-Border Area on the Example of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

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Abstract

Cross-border areas can be places of economic, social, cultural and tourism activity. Tourism development in such areas depends not only on the level of attractiveness of tourism assets and tourist infrastructure but, primarily, on the cooperation of many regional and local entities, expressed e.g. in the effective promotion of cross-border tourism products. The objective of the article is to identify determinants of tourism development and specify barriers to its development in the cross-border area of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The desk research method was used for the purposes of this paper. An audit of the current tourist development of the researched area (based on data provided by the Polish and German Statistical Offices) was used to determine the area's tourism potential. The significance of cooperation for the creation of cross-border tourist products was illustrated by case studies of selected projects. The Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and the German Federal State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern make up a cross-border area well placed for tourism development, on the account of numerous tourism assets, good tourism development and the activity and involvement of tourism entities in the implementation of common tourist initiatives. The obstacles in turn are mainly of an administrative and financial nature. The analyzed projects, realized in the researched area by Polish and German entities, indicate the key importance of cooperation in cross-border areas.

Keywords: tourism, cross-border area, cross-border cooperation

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Introduction

Cross-border areas often have similar natural conditions, but differ in terms of socio-economic conditions. If they have the right potential for tourism development, undertaking joint activities aimed at improving tourism attractiveness of a cross-border area can contribute to stimulating economic development. Tourism development of a given region contributes mainly to the reduction of unemployment, increase in investments, including direct foreign investments, mobilization of small enterprises and improvement in infrastructure through development of tourism and para-tourism infrastructure. For cross-border areas, tourism development can mean a chance to manage intensifying competition between tourist towns and regions that cross national borders. The Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and bordering to the west, the German Federal State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, make up a cross-border area that is well placed for tourism development and cooperation in this respect. Tourism development in this region is determined by numerous tourism assets, good tourism infrastructure as well as the activity and involvement of tourism entities in joint tourism initiatives.

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The objective of the article is to identify determinants of tourism development and specify barriers to its development in the cross-border area of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The article has been divided into four parts. The first concerns theoretical aspects of the delimitation of border territories. The second part presents determinants of tourism development in the analyzed region, whereas the third part is an attempt to identify barriers hindering cooperation in tourism in a cross-border area. The last part characterizes selected tourism initiatives supporting tourism development.

1 Delimitation of border territories

For a long time regions situated near national borders have been the subject of research of many scientific disciplines such as: geography, history, law, ethnography, spatial planning, regional policy or sociology. Territories located near national borders can be divided into border areas,¹ borderlands and cross-border areas. Border areas are situated near the border of only one country and are characterized by ethnical and cultural diversity (Malendowski and Ratajczak 2000, 39). Borderlands are areas located on both sides of the border on the periphery of both countries they are situated in (Fic 1996a). Therefore, a borderland is a territory located on both sides of the border, whereas a border area is located only on one side of a national border.

Near a national border, there are also cross-border areas. In literature on the subject, the notions of a cross-border area and region are similar in terms of meaning. A cross-border area includes urban units located on both sides of the border which are characterized by administrative and socio-economic relationships (Tomaszewski 2007, 103). On the other hand, a cross-border region can be considered as a uniform complex of areas having common features, but divided by a national border. Population of such a territory has common cultural traditions and willingness to cooperate for cultural, social and economic stimulation (Palmowski 2000, 24). A similar view on defining a cross-border region is reflected in documents formulated by the European Union institutions and bodies. According to the Community Charter for Regionalization of the European Union,² a cross-border region is “a territory which constitutes, from a geographical point of view, a clear-cut entity or a similar grouping of territories where there is continuity and whose population possesses certain shared features and wishes to safeguard the resulting specific identity and to develop it with the object of stimulating cultural, social and economic progress” (Fic 1996b, 23–25). Therefore, a cross-border area is a territory that belongs to at least two countries and which includes administrative units of given countries (communes, urban communes, counties, voivodships, districts, lands) and local communities represented by local governments of various levels. This area also includes a wide range of diverse forms of economic activity aimed at satisfying needs of cross-border residents. Then, when a cross-border area is relatively homogenous and has common features distinguishing it from adjacent territories, it is called a cross-border region (Gardzińska 2015, 11–12).

Cross-border areas are characterized by a diverse level of socio-economic development and their functions. Nevertheless, due to their peripheral locations, they are usually considered as underdeveloped and backward areas that need to be mobilized. In the conditions of current economic integration, they are transformed into zones of direct contacts on several grounds: economic, social, cultural, political as well as tourism. Cross-border areas are places which, thanks to benefits resulting from an adjacent location as well as cooperation and numerous relationships, aspire to become more and more integrated.

1. In the European Union, a border area has been marked off on the basis of the definition included in the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006. The document specifies a border area as an area of a district that extends no more than 30 km from the border. If part of any district lies between 30 and 50 kilometers from the border line, it shall nevertheless be considered as part of the border area, Regulation (EC) No 1931/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 laying down rules on local border traffic at the external land borders of the Member States and amending the provisions of the Schengen Convention. OJ L 405, 30.12.2006, as amended.

2. In 1988, the member states of the European Community passed the Community Charter for Regionalization as an annexe to the Resolution on Community regional policy and the role of the regions.

2 Determinants of tourism development in the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

In the west, the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship borders the German Federal State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (fig. 1). Natural and socio-economic potential of these regions indicates that they can see their chances of development in tourism, however, it is necessary that they cooperate and create common tourism products. It is confirmed by the fact that in the structure of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern the service sector is of the greatest significance as in 2014 it generated 70% of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship GDP³ and over 74% of Mecklenburg GDP⁴. A considerable part of these services is connected with transport and travels, including tourism. Furthermore, the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and the Land of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern are characterized by similar conditions for tourism resulting mainly from their location by the Baltic Sea and their landform features being the effect of glaciations in this part of Europe.

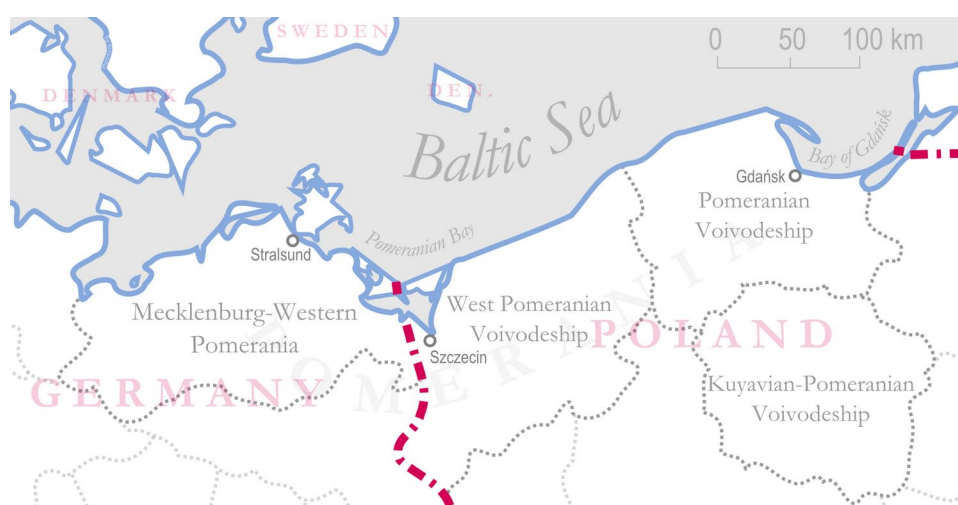


Fig. 1. Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

Source: Map by Krzysztoflew, published at <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pommern>

In the cross-border area of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, there are numerous tourism assets:

- recreational assets (water resources, especially the shared Baltic Basin, a high forestation rate, good climate conditions)
- sightseeing assets (among them natural assets, mainly many forms of environmental protection⁵ and anthropogenic assets which consist of museums, historical monuments, annual local events)
- specialized assets (the Szczecin Lagoon, the Oder, many lakes, mineral waters, deposits of chalk, peat and mud)

Natural sightseeing assets enable natural tourism connected with communing with nature, visiting places untouched by industry or visiting various places of environmental protection (learning about new species of plants and animals, interesting geological features). On the other hand, anthropogenic values determine sightseeing tourism which is mainly based on visiting museums, historical sites and natural places as well as walking tours undertaken along tourist routes. The last group of tourism assets are specialized values determining specific forms of qualified (active) and health resort tourism.

Using the tourism assets of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is possible thanks to tourism facilities. Both regions are characterized by a well-developed accom-

3. Data published at <http://szczecin.stat.gov.pl/>, as on 25 October 2016.

4. Data published at <http://www.statistik-mv.de/>, as on 25 October 2016.

5. In total, there are 5 national parks, 400 nature reserves and 170 nature parks.

modation base and a high number of tourists using lodging in collective tourist accommodations. In 2014, the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship was placed fourth in Poland (after the Pomorskie and Małopolskie voivodships) in terms of a number of accommodation facilities (1 322 facilities),⁶ whereas Mecklenburg-Vorpommern took seventh place among 16 German federal states with 2 906 accommodation facilities.⁷ The number of accommodation places in comparison with permanent residents of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (for every 1 000 residents) is over two times higher than in the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship (in 2014 there were 175 places per 1 000 residents).

In 2014, 543 009 foreign tourists used the accommodation base of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship, which constitutes 24% of all users. In Mecklenburg, the situation is completely different. It is a federal state visited mainly by domestic tourists living in other German federal states. Foreign tourists (369 853 people) constitute only 5,1% of all users of the accommodation base. Poles are not a large group of visitors of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In 2014, there were 16 231 people, which constituted around 5% of all foreign tourists.⁸ Poles' visits to Mecklenburg last one day in the majority of cases. On the other hand, the largest group of tourists in the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship are Germans who are over 80% of foreign tourists.

The area of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship is also characterized by good transport accessibility. Land transport is of key importance in terms of internal connections between the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Tourists cover this distance mainly using road and rail transport (connection between Świnoujście and a German part of Usedom). On the other hand, from the point of view of external accessibility, a crucial role is played by air transport, ferry transport as well as expressways and motorways. Moreover, main railway connections leading to the Voivodship and Mecklenburg are also very significant. Furthermore, institutional factors are also essential for the development of tourism in the cross-border area of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Numerous tourism entities operate in the analyzed region, thus quality and scope of their cooperation determine tourism development. One of such entities is Euroregion Pomerania which represents the cross-border interests of Poland, Germany and Sweden.⁹ The range of the Euroregion activities also includes tourism. The example of that is involving tourism in the “Cross-Border Cooperation Programme of Development and Activities of Euroregion Pomerania for 2014–2020.”¹⁰ Moreover, the activities of the Euroregion Pomerania involves, among other aspects, the use of EU financial instruments. The Association of Polish Local Authorities of the Euroregion Pomerania is a representative of the Polish members of the SGPEP in the EU Initiative Interreg VA Monitoring Committee of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship/Mecklenburg-Vorpommern/Brandenburg,

6. Data published by Central Statistical Office of Poland at Local Data Bank (see: <https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/>), as on 25 October 2016.

[In the journal European practice of number notation is followed—for example, 36 333,33 (European style) = 36 333.33 (Canadian style) = 36,333.33 (US and British style).—Ed.]

7. Data published at <https://www-genesis.destatis.de/>, as on 25 October 2016.

8. Data published at <http://www.statistik-mv.de/cms2/>, as on 25 October 2016.

9. The German side in the Euroregion is represented by Kommunalgemeinschaft Pomerania e.V. (the Association of Local Authorities Euroregion Pomerania) with the head office in Löcknitz that consociates two districts of the Federal State of Brandenburg (Barnim, Uckermark) and three districts of the Federal State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Vorpommern-Greifswald, Vorpommern-Rügen and Mecklenburgische Seenplatte). The Polish side is represented by the Association of Polish Local Authorities of the Euroregion Pomerania (SGPEP, from the Polish name Stowarzyszenie Gmin Polskich Euroregionu Pomerania) that consociates almost all communes of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship including the City of Szczecin.

10. The priority II refers to “Improvement of Accessibility of Regional Economic and Tourism Centres” and its objective is to develop and integrate the tourism product of the Euroregion Pomerania through: development of transport roads necessary for tourism development in the Euroregion (waterways and marinas, service centres and cycling routes, rail connections excluded from regular operation), integration of tourism products and external promotion (creating a calendar and promoting local tourism products of the Euroregion, developing online information platforms for tourism products), creating tourism products out of local tourist festivities, cultural meetings, sports competitions (developing a system of service of tourists coming for local tourist events, bilingual service of local tourist events, promoting “cross-border” volunteering for service of local tourist events), as cited in: Association of Polish Local Authorities of the Euroregion Pomerania, “Cross-Border Cooperation Programme of Development and Activities of Euroregion Pomerania for 2014–2020”, (see: <http://www.pomerania.org.pl/>).

which decides what proposals are retained for possible funding, including the proposals related to developing tourism in the cross-border area.

In addition, cooperation of local authorities also has a great influence on tourism development. Due to the different political systems of Poland and Germany, the structure of these entities is not identical. The German federal system determines a more complex structure of public administration organization than that of a unitary state such as Poland. The regional authorities of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship are represented by the Marshal of the Voivodship, while this function is held by the Prime Minister and the Parliament (Landtag) in the Federal State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The representatives of the Department of Tourism and Economy in the Marshal's Office of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and the Ministry for Economic Affairs, Construction and Tourism of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern cooperate on tourism development.

A similar situation can be observed in the case of regional tourism organizations. There is one regional tourism organization in the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship, namely the Regional Tourism Organization of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship (ZROT, from the Polish name Zachodniopomorska Regionalna Organizacja Turystyczna). Whereas in Mecklenburg, there are 9 regional tourism organizations in the form of tourism associations which scope of activities include areas of particular tourism regions of Mecklenburg.

At the local level, tourism development is significantly influenced by cooperation between communes, cities and counties situated on both sides of the border and between local tourism organizations which in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern take a different form than in the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship. In Germany, local tourism organizations (LOT) are entities that deal with local marketing or provide tourist information services for local authorities of a given area. From a legal perspective, LOTs in Germany are based on two main solutions. The first one means that LOTs operate as parts of organizational structures of local authority bodies (e.g., offices, departments) whose tasks involve tourism promotion of a given area. The activities of such entities are funded entirely from local authority budgets. The second solution concerns establishing separate entities (most often commercial companies and partnerships), with or without local authorities' participation, which are commissioned to perform specific tasks of promoting a given area for the benefit of cities/communes.

3 Barriers to tourism development in the cross-border area

There are not only factors stimulating tourism development in the cross-border area of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, but also some inhibitors of this process. Apart from the language barrier, one of the factors hindering the tourism activity is the superficial nature of the agreement between the authorities of Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Mecklenburg's government mainly focuses on activities and support for tourism initiatives regarding the Rügen island, or strives to deepen the cooperation with Hamburg and Lübeck and therefore, depreciates the significance of the German border area and the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship. Furthermore, the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship is often perceived as competition which makes it more difficult to convince German partners to undertake some joint initiatives. This attitude is only visible at the regional government level as, locally, tourism entities recognize a greater need to cooperate or see mutual benefits for all parties.

There is also an issue of financing joint tourism initiatives that creates a barrier to developing tourism in the analyzed cross-border area. It is mainly caused by the poor financial condition of some communes and counties located on both sides of the border. Smaller territorial units are not able to develop ideas for tourism initiatives together with a foreign partner. It seems that Interreg VA, an European territorial initiative, is a good solution, however, territorial units often do not have enough funds to bring their own contribution to the project. It should be also stressed that costs in EU projects must be covered from own resources, which are then reimbursed after the project is finished. The financing issue pertains mostly to all areas located in the central or border parts of the analyzed regions. The seaside communes are in a better situation as they generate more revenue from tourism due to a large interest of tourists.

One of the factors inhibiting tourism development is also the low tourism infrastructure standard in Poland. In terms of accommodation infrastructure, there is the well-developed Baltic Coast (in qualitative and quantitative aspects), whereas the central part of the voivodship is not sufficiently developed with respect to the number and quality of accommodation facilities. Furthermore, there are better measures applied for the categorization of accommodation facilities in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The quality of the accommodation base in the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship differs even within one category. Moreover, it is also necessary to improve the quality of the active tourism infrastructure (e.g., construction of bridges, marinas, bike/kayak rental points, trail marking).

Among barriers hindering tourism development, the issue of no common tourism strategy for border areas is of a key importance. If such a document was created, it would enable selection of priority areas, analysis of financing sources of joint initiatives and identification of potential partners. The entity responsible for implementing such a strategic document could be the Euroregion Pomerania or regional authorities of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Another barrier is insufficient communication between tourism-oriented organizations and institutions as well as lack of skills necessary to develop a high-class tourism offer. This is mostly connected with poor market knowledge, adequate target market identification and identification of needs and expectations of Polish and German tourists. It is clear that cooperation with the tourism industry is insufficient in terms of tourism activities conducted together. No precise division of responsibilities is defined which results in a situation where some activities are duplicated and conducted separately by a few entities rather than in cooperation.

4 Examples of tourism initiatives in the cross-border area of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

Even though there are a lot of barriers for tourism development in the cross-border area, tourism entities recognize a need to work together and undertake pro-tourism initiatives. These activities are chiefly conducted by local tourism entities. The cooperation of communes that undertake joint ventures with partner entities from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has a very diverse character as there are small initiatives (promoting tourism attractiveness of partner communes) as well as large projects regarding tourism infrastructure. In that respect, one of the most active local authorities is the Police commune which focuses on expanding the active tourism offer (in particular, based on water activities, cycling and walking) in cooperation with the German Pasewalk commune. This has a significant impact on the development of cycling and walking tourism as they implement projects connected with combining the cycling route networks into a common cross-border route. Additionally, the commune has been cooperating across borders to develop nature tourism with other entities from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. An example of it could be the Cross-Border Environmental Education Centre in Zalesie¹¹ which has been created as a result of a joint project with the Ueckermünde Zoo and the City of Eggesin. Together with the Boat Sailing Centre in Eggesin and the Ueckermünde Zoo, this facility forms a Polish and German network of education centers. This center organizes joint cultural, tourism and ecological initiatives as well as educational classes for different age groups.

In the city of Świnoujście, you can find another example of local authorities active in terms of tourism development in the cross-border area. The cooperation with the Vorpommern-Greifswald commune and the seaside town of Heringsdorf is very dynamic which is visible through the number of projects implemented mainly aimed at connecting the border areas. As part of that cooperation,

11. The Cross-Border Environmental Education Centre in Zalesie was opened on 12 September 2013. The interiors of the building (an old stable) were completely transformed and its rooms were equipped with modern multimedia equipment that makes it possible to learn about the diversity of the natural world interactively. There were such workshops created as: "little inventor," microscope workshop, art workshop, library and atmospheric condition room. This facility is adapted to the needs of the disabled, and the equipment is available both for visually-impaired as well as hearing-impaired people.

there was a cross-border promenade built and a project named UsedomRad was implemented on the Usedom island (also in Świnoujście), just to name a few.¹²

Activities of the grassroots initiative (social initiative) Tourism Organization of Stepnica “Nie tylko dla orłów” also have an impact on tourism development in the cross-border area. Being one of the members, the Tourism Organization of Stepnica cooperates very closely with the HOP Cross-Border Network of the Oder Delta association from Wolgast (HOP Transnationales Netzwerk Odermündung).¹³ The main objective of this cooperation is tourism development around the Szczecin Lagoon. Collaboration with the German partner takes the form of meetings during which each partner’s ideas together with their implementation methods are discussed and their experience is exchanged. The work done by the Tourism Organization of Stepnica with HOP Transnationales Netzwerk Odermündung is an example of good cooperation. It chiefly results from the fact that the local community established an organization which they treat as an opportunity to develop the commune. The members of the organization are tourism enthusiasts who promote tourism in that region of their own volition. There are many analogies on the German side. Founders and members of the HOP Cross-Border Network of the Oder Delta association from Wolgast want to develop the tourism product, using the potential of the Szczecin Lagoon, not just on the German side, but also on the Polish side.

It should be stressed that the Tourism Organization of Stepnica also works with the German environmental protection organization Deutsche Umwelthilfe from Berlin and the Michael Succow Foundation¹⁴ from Greifswald. The German partners registered the area on the German side of the Szczecin Lagoon and the Stepnica commune as one ecosystem in the international programme Rewilding Europe¹⁵. The project coordinator on the Polish side is the Tourism Organization of Stepnica. Undoubtedly, being part of the Rewilding Europe programme is an opportunity to promote and develop the commune by obtaining funds for ecotourism development (Meyer 2016). In this programme, the local community is the project’s beneficiary which means that each interested resident can actively take part in it and earn money on that form of tourism.

In 2015, the Rewilding Europe Foundation decided to make the Polish-German area encompassing the Szczecin Lagoon with its wide surroundings of the Wolin and Usedom islands and Ueckermünde Heath (around 200 thousand ha in total) its eighth priority area in Europe, where together with local partners it will attempt to “increase the role of natural resources and wildlife in landscapes and at the same time enable the community to recreate their connection with wildlife to the benefit of everyone.”¹⁶ The other priority areas in Europe are Western Iberia, the Eastern Carpathians, the Southern Carpathians, the Danube Delta, Velebit, the Central Apennines and the Rhodope Mountains.

Conclusion

Numerous tourism assets and a good level of tourism development in the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, as well as good transport accessibility, allow us to

12. The objective of the project was to combine the bicycle rental offer with public transport (rent a bike in point A, return it in point B and go back by bus or train). This system is an alternative to cars which is very important during the summer season. There were several dozens of automated bicycle stations installed across the whole Usedom island and in the towns of Wolgast and Anklam.

13. The acronym HOP comes from the first letters of: Haff (Lagoon), Oder (the Oder river), Peene (the Peene river). The HOP Transnationales Netzwerk Odermündung association brings together a network of people from the vicinity of the Szczecin Lagoon that are involved in water and nature tourism. The members of the association are both entities from Germany and Poland, mostly small harbors and marinas, water equipment rentals, sailing schools, active holiday schools, small hotels, camping sites, agro-tourism farms, restaurants and inns.

14. Professor Michael Succow is a German biologist and ecologist who works in the University of Greifswald. He devised a typology of moorlands, initiated the creation of nature reserves and is a scientific counsellor to a number of environmental organizations and institutions.

15. Rewilding Europe is an initiative of WWF-Netherlands, ARK Nature, Wild Wonders of Europe and Conservation Capital. The aim of Rewilding Europe is to involve 1 million hectares of land by 2020 in its project and create there 10 world-class wildlife and wilderness areas in Europe.

16. See webpage of Naturalists’ Club at <http://www.kp.org.pl/index.php?lang=english>.

conclude that the analyzed cross-border area possesses characteristics that contribute to tourism development. The importance of carrying out tourism initiatives in the cross-border area is recognized by both the Polish and the German sides. In order to intensify the benefits of tourism development for both sides, many barriers in such areas as economic, legal and social issues that hinder partnership activities should be effectively removed. Tourism development of a cross-border area requires a close involvement of not only local and regional authorities, but also of the tourism industry and non-governmental tourism organizations. The grounds for these entities' activities must be a clearly defined action plan and effectively operating system of management, coordination and cooperation for the benefit of tourism development. The presented examples of cooperation at the local level show the benefits arising from joint activities undertaken by partners from a cross-border area.

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