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Doctoral dissertation

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Summary of the doctoral dissertation

Supporting cross-border initiatives of local communities in the South Baltic area from EU funds in 2007-2013 by the South Baltic cross-border cooperation program

The development of Poland after joining the European Union gained a fast pace and Poland became the main beneficiary of the EU Cohesion Policy. Since 2007, Poland has recorded one of the fastest GDP increases among EU countries. However, the improvement in the level of wealth was not uniform across the country. One of the main challenges of European integration is poor identification of the inhabitants of EU countries with European identity. The EU is seen as a provider of development funding, but rarely do European citizens realize that the Union will do what they contribute to building it. In this context, and due to the growing disparity, programs and activities that connect the inhabitants of the EU across divisions, including across borders, are of great importance. Diversity, which was to be the key motive of territorial cohesion, began to be perceived by some economists as a development challenge in a situation of growing spatial disparities. Unfortunately, development policy, including the EU Cohesion Policy, did not keep up with this challenge. The application of the same requirements for thematic concentration of funds for regions differing in terms of economic potential is a systemic error. However, the structural problems of different territories are not always correctly identified, which in turn makes it difficult or impossible to properly define territorially oriented development paths and the corresponding structure of public intervention.

Local initiatives with a cross-border dimension are often referred to as people-to-people cooperation. People-to-people activities are closely related to small grant systems, enabling the implementation of projects with a limited range by local, often beginners, organizations, or local authorities. The aim of these activities is to increase trust in cross-border relations of local communities, as well as to create social capital resources. The lack of such cooperation

deepens the mental, linguistic and cultural barriers. According to experts, small projects characterized by the involvement of local communities and cooperation by various types of non-institutional circles turned out to be a success. In their opinion, projects of this type should be implemented, inter alia, by in the area of social innovation, e.g. building a civil society.

The main purpose of the dissertation is to identify the causes and nature of the South Baltic Program problems in supporting cross-border Local Community Initiatives and to propose ways of reducing them. The main hypothesis was also put forward in the dissertation, which assumes that the South Baltic Program requires systemic changes to support grass-roots social initiatives of significant importance for the development of cross-border cooperation in the South Baltic area.

Cross-border cooperation programs make it possible to strengthen ties between communities in the local - cross-border dimension. However, the integration processes are not as effective as originally assumed. The reasons lie in the legal and formal differences, largely economic, as well as mental and social, between the EU member states. In this context, it is extremely important how the networks of cross-border cooperation will be developed. Will they move towards identity networks or take the form of calculation-based networks? Therefore, developing cross-border cooperation in the local dimension, people-to-people, acquires a special significance, because it not only contributes to the creation of a network of connections in the institutional and social dimension, but also goes deeper, striving to build and strengthen a common identity.

Practical conclusions can also be drawn from the considerations carried out and treated as recommendations addressed to responsible entities and participating in regional development programming. In the Euroregion Baltic countries, the regional programming process should be based on detailed knowledge of the development potential, considering the existing regional differences, and the actions resulting from strategic provisions should be geographically oriented. This is in line with the approach to regional policy to take advantage of the differences that exist. Due to the similar processes taking place in the local government and the private sector, the areas requiring intervention should be selected within the framework of the interregional policy. On the other hand, public authorities in the regions decide about activities enhancing development within the voivodship in terms of intra-regional policy.

The considerations contained in the dissertation were based on the assessment of the condition and development of measure 2.4 for the Local Community Initiatives of the SBP. These analyzes should be continued to identify areas requiring intervention under the regional policy on an ongoing basis. In addition, it is also worth expanding the set of development measures, considering its various aspects. It will also allow to monitor changes occurring in terms of the strength, direction and nature of the impact of local initiatives on coastal regions as a whole but taking into account their individual areas.