

Local Border Traffic as a Platform for the Development of Border Cities

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Abstract. The paper aims at presenting to answer: Local Border Traffic is a platform for the Development of Border Cities? Cities located in the border zone were subjected to analysis, limiting the study area to the Polish Warmia-Masuria Province and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation. For the needs of the present task, survey studies were designed and carried out, targeting the inhabitants of 13 districts (*poviat*) of Warmia-Masuria Province (border cities) covered by the Agreement on LBT on the Polish side, as well as respondents residing in the Kaliningrad Oblast on the Russian side, in order to determine the costs and developmental benefits of the Agreement entering into force. Individual interviews represented the basic research method in data collection. The interview questionnaire was the research tool applied. As results from the carried out surveys, Local Border Traffic for border cities: 1) expand economic innovations, 2) the infiltration of social and cultural influences, 3) is a spatial factor of their regional and local development.

Keywords: local border traffic, small cities, border cities, development, the border.

Conference topic: sustainable urban development.

Introduction

Small border cities allow people to advance socially and economically. They allow the development of the various ideas, trade, culture and science. Many challenges and decisions will give you the chance to create jobs and increase prosperity while improving the efficiency of use of natural resources, reducing pollution and poverty. Border cities need an approach that will outline a clear vision of development and specific objectives.

However, national borders play an important role in the socio-economic small cities development of border regions. Depending on how open they are, location in the border zone can become a factor stimulating or posing an obstacle to development. This has a great impact on good social, cultural and economic relations. It has an especially pronounced influence on the development of border cities, especially in the context of political and economic changes in Europe in the 20th century, which, until the end of the 1980s, continued to be subordinated to the interests of the military or border guards. The opening of borders and socio-economic revival of the border zone, as well as the resultant introduction of a simplified mode of crossing the border, stimulated trade and border traffic. It opened or deepened the existing cross-border relations, while the introduced Agreement on local border traffic (LBT) significantly dynamised relations. In this case, the key factor influencing the direction of the development of cities is their location in the border zone.

Thus, small cities located in the border zone were subjected to analysis, limiting the study area to the Polish Warmia-Masuria Province and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation¹. Therefore, the main objective of the research is to identify the benefits and costs of the inhabitants of the small towns of Warmia and Mazury and the Kaliningrad District located in the area covered by LBT.

The subject of the analysis are the results of survey studies carried out by the authors within the framework of the “Local Border Traffic with Kaliningrad Oblast – Theories and Practice” project for the Association of Municipalities of Poland Baltic Euroregion commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Department of Public and Cultural Diplomacy (Zabielska, Zielińska-Szczepkowska 2013). For the needs of the present task, survey studies were designed and carried out, targeting about 250 the inhabitants: of 13 districts (*poviat*) of Warmia-Masuria Province covered by the Agreement on LBT on the Polish side (small cities), as well as respondents residing in the Kaliningrad

¹ Small border cities called have the following benchmarks:

- The size – under 20 thousand residents;
- Site – in the area of 13 districts (*poviat*) Warmia and Mazury Province covered by the agreement of the LBT.

Oblast on the Russian side, in order to determine the costs and developmental benefits of the Agreement entering into force². The paper aims to answer: Local Border Traffic is a platform for the Development of Border Cities?

The basic research method for collecting data were individual interviews. An in-depth interview directed at inhabitants of those cities where the principles of local border traffic apply was carried out using the research technique. The research tool devised for this purpose was an interview questionnaire.

When preparing solutions, materials from the Custom's Chamber, Border Guard and other sources of statistical information were used.

Significance of a small city³ in economic development, accounting for border cities

Cities, as places for meeting people, creativity, innovation and centres for providing services, are becoming the driving force of the economy. They also play a key role in local and regional development. This pertains especially to small cities⁴, the development of which is significantly connected with satisfying the needs of their inhabitants (as well as serving the role of centres for agricultural services). Small cities are, therefore, an essential element for preventing the depopulation of rural areas and the migration of populations to cities, and a component of sustainable regional development⁵. Moreover, giving regions their character, they determine their uniqueness. This uniqueness is especially important for small cities located in the neighbourhood of the national border; thus, the observed variation in terms of the terminology used to describe them. One can therefore distinguish categories in which the national border divides the city into two parts – often asymmetrical – with these being described as partitioned order cities, split towns, split-up towns, and cross-border cities/metropolises. Another model comprises cities located on both sides of the border which can be described as functionally dependant. Here, we distinguish twin cities, double cities (*doublons villes*), neighbouring cities and companion cities. In this context, adjacent cities and connected cities occurring in the coastal zone should also be highlighted. Moreover, some researchers emphasize the fact that border cities usually differ culturally and are referred to as multicultural cities (Kulczynska, Matykowski 2014).

As a result of the above, as cited in Lundén (2004), the present studies assume that cities located on one side of the border are referred to as small border towns.

Local border traffic on the Polish-Russian border – example of the relationship stimulating the development?

The border between Poland and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation (RF), which took its present form after 1945, has created a new political and social order in the area of what had formerly been East Prussia. In the years 1945–1990, it was among the areas which were particularly guarded and thus, unique to Europe at the time. This uniqueness was emphasized by its artificial, authoritarian and linear course, which did not account for local natural, social, administrative and economic circumstances.

The specifics of the border were largely influenced by the social, spatial and functional structure of the Kaliningrad Oblast RF, which became the place of settlement for a selected group of the population, economically or socially connected with the dominant military complex (Kostjaszow 2000).

While there were road border crossings on the border with Poland in Gronowo and Bezledy (authorized for simplified border traffic), train crossings in Braniewo, Bartoszyce and Skandawa (for cargo rail traffic) and sea crossings in Frombork, border traffic on them was marginal. It was basically limited to official delegations of national and local government authorities travelling to the Soviet Union on business, as well as people involved in the small, strictly regulated border exchange (Wojnowski 2006).

It was not until 1990 that the livid process of shaping Polish-Russian cross-border relations (economic transformation in Poland and the collapse of the Soviet Union), the intensity of which was determined mainly by the changing legal regulations, took place. The opening of the border and rather liberal regulations influenced the dynamically increasing number of customs clearances (up to 5 mln in 1997). However, the economic crisis in Russia in 1998 (resulting in an increase in the exchange rate of the dollar unfavourable to Polish exporters and Russians purchasing goods in Poland), or the increase of excise duty in Poland in 2001, as well as legal changes connected with the accession of Poland to the EU and the Schengen Zone, led to a decreasing tendency (especially until 2003). Following this period, border traffic quickly rose back to its previous state (to 4 million people annually). Signs of

²Research has been directed also to the local government units and enterprises from the LBT. More information in the report: Zabielska, Zielińska-Szczepkowska (2013).

³It should be pointed out that, along with the expansion of actual cities, the border between city and country is becoming more and more blurred, while urban and rural areas have merged together, creating new urban-rural conditions (Allingham, Raahauge 2008).

⁴Due to the fact that the administrative borders of small cities no longer reflect the physical, social, economic, cultural or environmental conditions for development, modern forms of their management are becoming necessary.

⁵Realizing the aims of sustainable development in small cities is a process of constantly improving the applied solutions for the activities assumed. This means mainly setting them out in such a way, that the aims, directions and coordination of tasks in the short-, medium- and long-term perspective enable the verification of the obtained results and assumed plans. The above takes place mainly by administrative decisions, infrastructural projects, local law, and increased public awareness.

recovery became most visible in 2010. A real chance for overcoming the stagnation did not come until the agreement on local border traffic (hereinafter: LBT) in December 2011 (over 6 million people annually until 2015). The rapid increase in border traffic during this period made it possible to have hope for a new stage in shaping interrelations⁶.

The above is true, especially considering that leading to the assurance that borders with neighbouring countries do not constitute a barrier to trade, social and cultural exchange, or regional cooperation, has become important aim for European Communities (*Regulation EC No 1931/2006*). For this purpose, they created an efficient system for the needs of LBT. It ought to be highlighted here that its principles are a derogation from the general provisions regulating border control of persons crossing the inner border of EU member states. They were specified in Regulation (EC) No. 562 in 2006, establishing the so-called Schengen Borders Code (*Regulation (EC) No 562/2006*), in which criteria and conditions which ought to be fulfilled when introducing facilitations for border zone residents (*Regulation EC No 1931/2006*). Therefore, in order to prevent abuse, the requirement of possessing permissions for crossing borders within the framework of LBT was introduced⁷.

Moreover, with permission of the European Commission, member states can sign bilateral agreements on LBT with neighbours who are not members of the EU. On the basis of such an agreement, border zone residents of the parties to the agreement (up to 30 km, and in special cases, up to 50 km into the territory of each country), can regularly cross the border to stay in the border zone of the other country for social, cultural or family-oriented reasons, as well as justified economic⁸ reasons, for a period not exceeding the set out time limits (*Regulation EC No 1931/2006*).

Within the analysed region, facilitated crossings of the Polish-Russian border by inhabitants of the border zone affect 7 coastal districts of Pomorskie Province⁹ as well as 13 districts of Warmia-Masuria Province¹⁰, and Kaliningrad Oblast RF¹¹ (Fig. 1).

The agreement on LBT, by facilitating direct social, cultural, tourist, family and economic contacts between the Kaliningrad Oblast RF and, among others, cities in northern Poland, was supposed to create the possibility of alleviating barriers created by the Schengen Zone¹². This is extremely important to Warmia-Masuria Province.



Fig. 1. Region covered by local border traffic
(Source: Straz Graniczna 2017)

⁶In connection with the NATO Summit and World Youth Day (WYD), Poland took the decision to suspend, as of 4 July 2016, the provisions of intergovernmental agreements on LBT in the part pertaining to the entrance and stay of residents from the border zone of Ukraine and the Russian Federation in the territory of the Republic of Poland. Local border traffic with Ukraine was resumed soon after the ending of WYD, while border traffic with the Kaliningrad Region was not resumed.

⁷ The EU also established specific criteria and conditions for issuing permissions to cross the border under LBT for border zone residents. These are in accordance with the conditions of entry that are binding for inhabitants of the border zone crossing the external land border.

⁸ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Local Border Traffic, 2017.

⁹ Districts: Pucki, city Gdynia, city Sopot, city Gdańsk, Gdański, Nowodworski, Malborski.

¹⁰ Districts: city Elbląg, Elbląski, Braniewski, Lidzbarski, Bartoszycki, city Olsztyn, Olsztyński, Kętrzyński, Mrągowski, Węgorzewski, Giżycki, Gołdapski, Olecki.

¹¹ Above-standard expansion of the border zone (30 km) accepted by the European Commission resulted from the location of Kaliningrad at a greater distance from the border, thus the possible exclusion of the city from LBT principles.

¹² Establishing the principles of local border traffic is a following, alongside the Agreement on free movement of people and Agreement on navigation in the Vistula Bay, important element of the legal infrastructure creating the facilitation scheme for the movement of people between the two countries.

When characterizing this region, attention should be given to the fact that (Zabielska 2010):

- According to EU criteria, it is among the least developed in the entire EU, especially in terms of the economic structure and its dynamics. The many-year system of a centrally-steered economy in times of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) caused a significant civilization backwardness, which is observable in the unfavourable economic condition of the infrastructure, especially the transportation infrastructure. The flawed and ill-considered allocation of investments in the years 1945–1990 also resulted in the helplessness of a large part of the population, including the inhabitants of regions of post state-run farms and small towns where economic monoculture aimed mainly at servicing agriculture formed;
- The province is a border region, though not a typical border between EU countries. It is the border between the EU and Russia and, at the same time, the only border between Poland and Russia in the new “post-transformation” geopolitical system of Europe. This situation has caused the region to be a territorial space for cooperation between Poland – as a member state of the EU – and Russia;
- The border between the region – and, at the same time, Poland and the EU – and Russia, has a sea-land character, which enriches, but at the same time complicates, mutual relations. The unfavourable state of relations between Poland and Russia, in consequence, creates a situation in which the natural areas for cooperation are not taken advantage of, the most distinct example of which became the underexploited maritime traffic on the Vistula Bay, being more a consequence of the political rather than economic conditions.

In turn, the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation is an important area for Warmia and Mazury voivodship from geopolitical and geo-economic perspective. Mutual collaboration is becoming important in both bilateral and multilateral dimension considering the European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

Although the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation had the status of a special military zone and the closed character of the border made wider and unrestricted collaboration difficult. All the contacts were limited and formalized, conditioned by ideological factors. Only the transformations at the turn of 1980s and 1990s caused elimination of the rigors of closed area and increased interest in the Oblast, which was expressed, among others, in establishment of contacts by a variety of regional and local entities.

Local border traffic as the platform for the development of border cities in the opinions of their inhabitants

As reported by the Customs Chamber in Olsztyn, Russians, under LBT, are doing increasingly more shopping in Poland, buying, above all, food, household appliances and electronics. The Polish, on the other hand, drive to Russia mainly to purchase petrol, which is twice cheaper there (Border traffic ... 2016).

Customs officials report that the number of TAX FREE documents has increased at a very high rate. Thanks to them, Russians purchasing goods in the EU and reporting this at the border in the form of a purchase invoice are refunded the VAT tax. In just the first half of 2013, over 16.5 thousand Russians entered nearly 55 thousand invoices valued at 62,800,000 zlotys into the TAX FREE system on the border with the Kaliningrad Oblast, reporting 40 thousand invoices for goods valued at 55 million zlotys during the entire last year. In order to facilitate the clearance of accounts, customs officials launched an electronic system “Tax Free for Travellers/Tourists” (Border traffic ... 2014).

According to the Customs Chamber in Olsztyn, the number of people crossing the Polish-Russian border upon introducing local border traffic increased nearly twofold. Since the time the new regulations entered into force, customs officials cleared approximately 6 million travellers. Besides the positive implications of introducing the Agreement, negative aspects in the form of increased illegal activity were also observed; during this time, customs officials seized twice more illegal cigarettes (Polskie Radio Olsztyn 2013).

Survey studies were designed and carried out and targeting the inhabitants of 13 districts (*poviat*) of Warmia-Masuria Province covered by the Agreement on LBT on the Polish side (small cities), as well as respondents residing in the Kaliningrad Oblast on the Russian side (Fig. 2). Within the framework of the “Local Border Traffic with Kaliningrad Oblast – Theories and Practice” project for the Association of Municipalities of Poland Baltic Euroregion commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Department of Public and Cultural Diplomacy within the framework of the “Local Border Traffic with Kaliningrad Oblast – Theories and Practice” project for the Association of Municipalities of Poland Baltic Euroregion commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Department of Public and Cultural Diplomacy.



Fig. 2. Cities covered by local border traffic
(Source: own elaboration based on Straz Graniczna 2017)

The study comprised about 250 the inhabitants of the small cities of Warmia and Mazury (22 the small cities) and the Kaliningrad District (14 the small cities) located in the area covered by LBT, 52% women and 48% men. The majority of those surveyed – over 50% – was between the ages of 20 and 40, while 41% were people aged between 40 and 60. Just under 4% were people over the age of 60. Nearly 50% of the respondents had completed secondary education (49%), and 37% – tertiary education, while only 14% were with primary and vocational training education.

The answers to the general question of whether the inhabitants took advantage of the so-called Local Border Traffic (hereinafter: LBT) were quite varied (Fig. 3) .

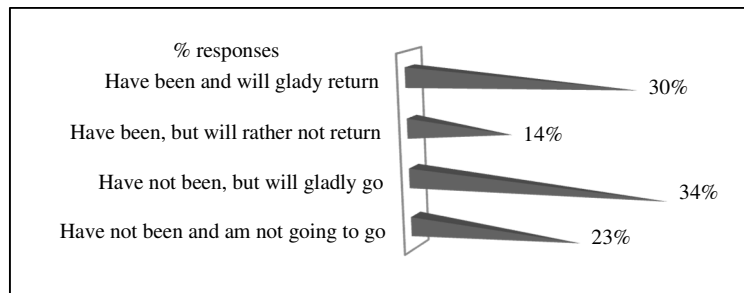


Fig. 3. Have you participated in LBT?
Source: own elaboration based on study results

A further question regarded people who were in the neighboring country under LBT (44% respondents). The people surveyed were next asked what source of transport they used. Over 60% chose travelling by car, while 25% travelled by coach. Very few chose to travel by train (7%) and bike (4%).

The respondents were also asked about future plans regarding the use of LBT. Short of 50% are not planning to travel to the neighboring country, while 36% would gladly cross the border of the neighboring country, and 15% area undecided as of yet. The surveyed people observe inhabitants from outside the Polish-Russian/ Russian-Polish border, treating this as a positive occurrence. Such visits drive the local economy (45% of indications).

According to the surveyed inhabitants, we should take care of our neighbours, while information boards should also be written in two languages (30% of responses). On the other hand, 48% believe that information boards written solely in mother tongue are perfectly sufficient, while 22% do not have a problem with it.

Inhabitants from the LBT area clearly see the benefits of introducing the agreement on LBT, which are visible, above all, in the development of entrepreneurship and local economic recovery (13% each) (Fig. 4). This also gives possibilities for reviving tourist traffic (12%), cultural exchange, and for inhabitants to earn money (7% each). Moreover, it is positively reflected in shaping better relations between the communities on both sides of the border (6%). Due to the introduction of the agreement on LBT, the modernization and increased efficiency of the infrastructure takes place, including the border infrastructure (6%). Common events, such as ones of a sports character, are also organized. There is also the exchange of youth, as well as pupils and students (approx. 5% each).

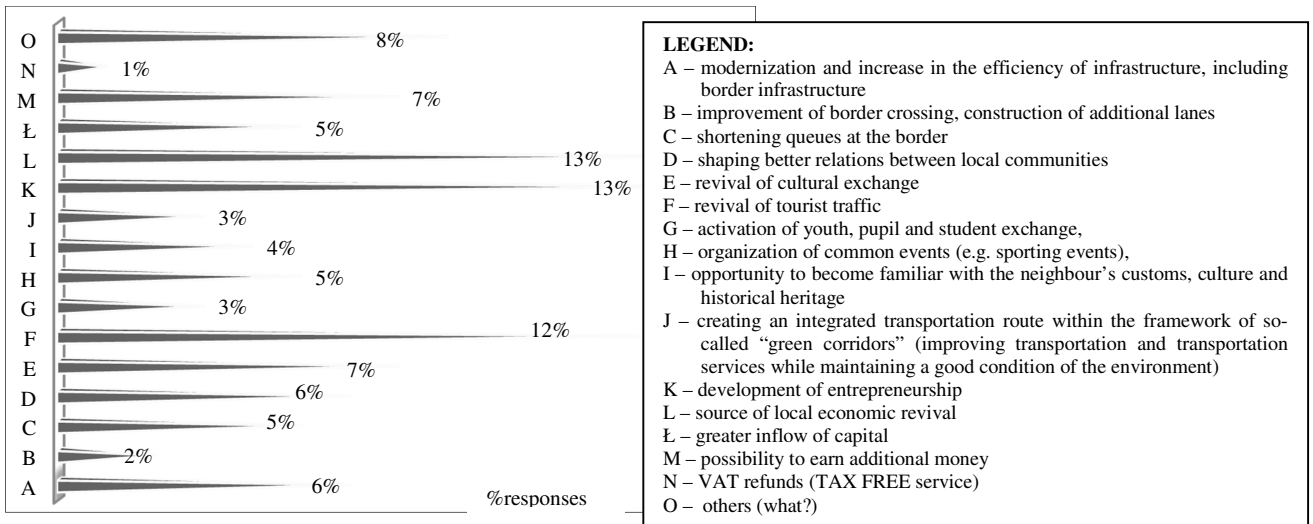


Fig. 4. What advantages does the introduction of the agreement on LBT bring you?
(Source: own elaboration based on the results of studies)

The introduction of the agreement on LBT, after a year of being in force, opened vast possibilities for contacts in terms of business, tourism, or every-day social interaction, especially for shop-owners (over 70% of responses), transport providers (over 40%), micro as well as small businesses, and hotel- and restaurant owners (approx. 25%), as well as sailors, ship owners and ferry operators (approx. 5% responses each).

However, the facilitated border crossing resulting from the introduction of the agreement on LBT, in addition to advantages, brought about a series of negative factors occurring on the Polish as well as Russian side of the border. Taking into consideration the rankings given to individual elements, it was observed the respondents were most bothered by the following:

- On the Polish side: social pathologies – e.g. illegal trade – (approx. 30% of all indications), border procedures and the limited possibility of crossing the border (12% each), introduction of low-quality goods (approx. 10%) (Fig. 5);

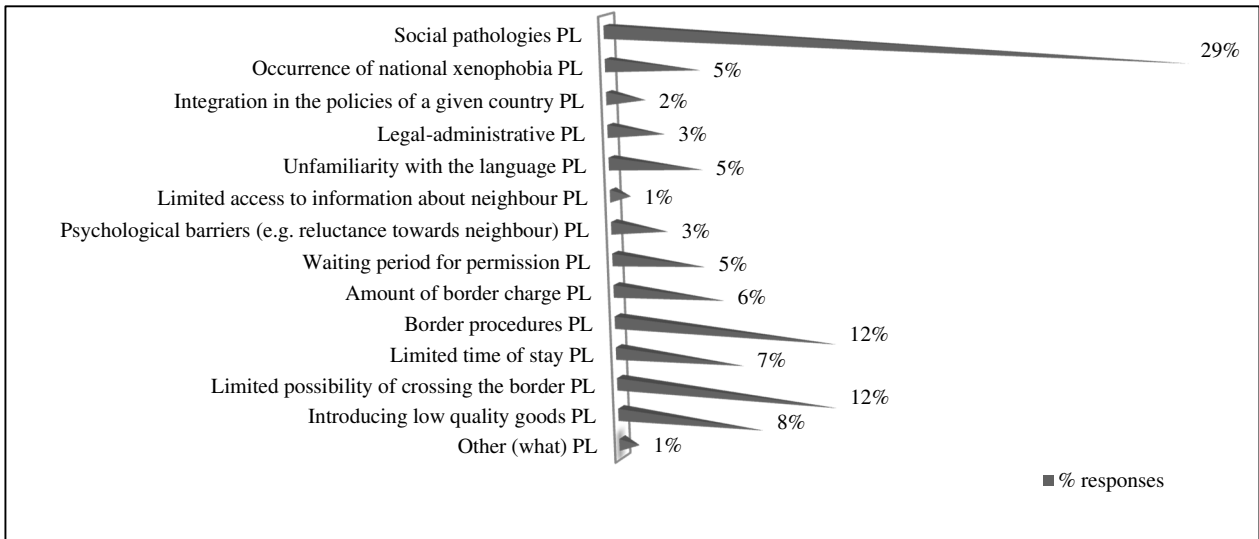


Fig. 5. What negative factors occur, on the Polish side, following the introduction of the agreement on LBT? (max. 2 answers)
(Source: own elaboration based on the results of studies)

- On the Russian side – social pathologies, e.g. illegal trade (15% of all indications), border procedures (10%), limited possibility of crossing the border, legal-administrative procedures and limited duration of stay (9% each), introduction of low-quality goods and unfamiliarity with the language (6–7%) (Fig. 6).

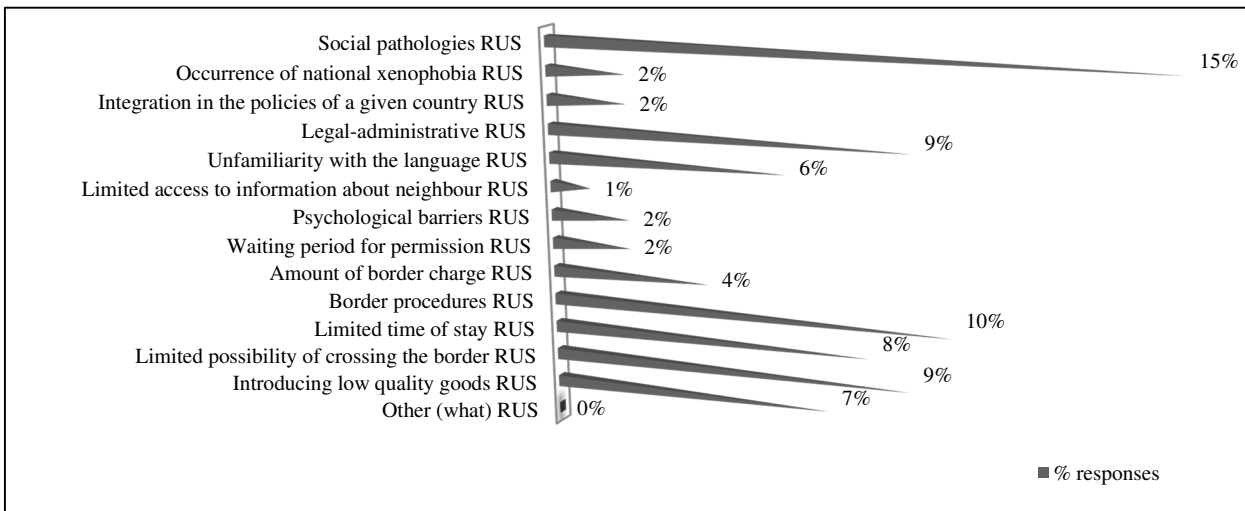


Fig. 6. What negative factors occur, on the Russian side, following the introduction of the agreement on LBT? (max. 2 answers)
(Source: own elaboration based on the results of studies)

Another aim of the study was to determine: whether neighbourly cooperation, thanks to the introduction of the agreement on LBT, is an opportunity for the faster development of a small city? As it turns out, 40% of the inhabitants have a hard time confirming this fact. On the other hand, 60% believe that cooperation with the neighbour, thanks to the introduced facilitations connected with the agreement on LBT RF, is in fact an opportunity for the development of their small city. However, 30% of these respondents claim that this is true only to a small extent.

The carried out studies have made it possible to determine the main factors which influence an increase in the visits of inhabitants from the zone covered by LBT following the introduction of the agreement on LBT. According to the respondents, the main motivation is the location near the border (25% of responses) as well as the convenient transportation network, e.g. important transportation routes (15%). Particularly important are also the legal and administrative improvements, among others in terms of customs and tax provisions (over 10%). Another important feature is also the level of local economic growth (10%). Not without significance is the progressing development of cross-border establishments and engagement of entrepreneurs in maintaining various contacts with partners from abroad. Other important features are, among others: knowledge of the situation on the other side of the border, an attractive and unspoiled natural environment, and organizational engagement of regional institutions in supporting Polish-Kaliningrad/Kaliningrad-Polish cross-border cooperation (Fig. 7).

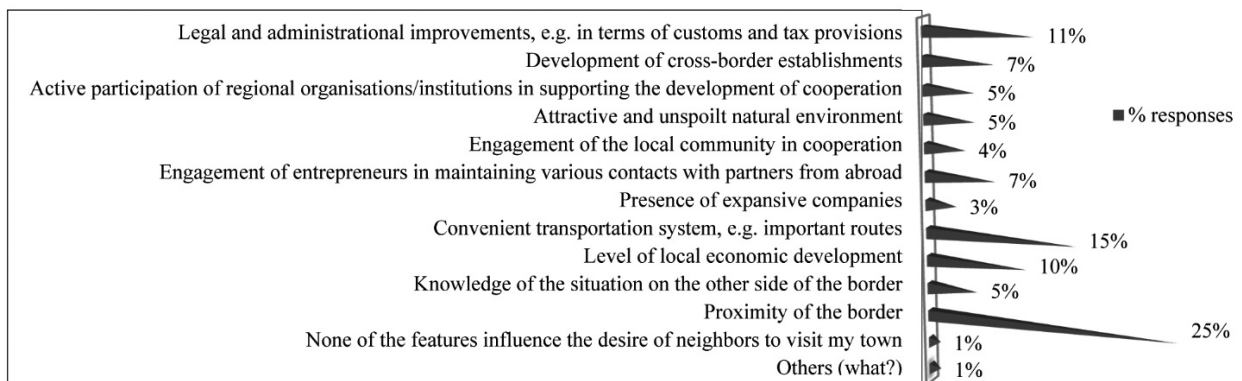


Fig. 7. Which of your city's features may influence increased visits inhabitants-neighbours following the introduction of the LBT agreement? (max. 3 answers)
(Source: own elaboration on the basis of research results)

As results from the carried out surveys, over 42% of the inhabitants treat the introduction of the agreement on LBT as a factor stimulating their city. On the other hand, 37% of the total respondents did not confirm the above. In 25% of the cases, the introduction of the LBT agreement did not become an inspiration for the socio-economic revival of the city.

Due to the numerous difficulties and existing barriers, the inhabitants were asked who should assume actions aimed at increasing the potential advantages arising from the introduction of the agreement on LBT.

The carried out analysis showed that mainly local self-government authorities (36% of indications) ought to initiate and create the right conditions to take advantage of the opportunities arising from the introduction of the agreement on LBT. The initiative of organizations and associations as well as local communities also turns out to be necessary (17% each), and additionally central authorities (16%). According to the inhabitants' opinions, the smallest role goes to business entities (mainly entrepreneurs) (10%) and non-governmental organizations and associations (4%).

Conclusions

Border regions (and on their areas of small cities) are characterized by peripherality of socio-economic development and are rather weakly transformed by human economic activity. They stand out mostly due to the presence of areas with valuable landscapes, with historic and cultural attractions. Moreover, being in the neighbourhood of political borders, they are predisposed to the development of a certain kind of land use. There are specific organisms urban. However, after the opening of the borders following the process of bonding (construction of roads, bridges, roads, ring roads, paths) with interesting urban systems. Border relations shaped within this area – and the stimulation of neighbourliness – expand economic innovations, the infiltration of social and cultural influences, and comprise a spatial factor of their regional and local development.

However, historical and political conditions may lead to these borders becoming more hermetic and characterized by low permeability. An example of such is the Polish-Russian border, where the possibility of direct cooperation between border cities was strictly limited and controlled. This was caused by the military-strategic role of the Kaliningrad Oblast RF. It was not until the late 80s/early 90s of the 20th century when the transformations during that time led the building of new relationships. A particular form of these were the facilitations introduced in 2012 within the framework of local border traffic, as confirmed by the present studies. This “opened-up” vast possibilities for contacts in terms of business, tourism or everyday intrapersonal relations for inhabitants of small towns and cities from the area encompassed by the agreement, especially for shop-owners, transport providers, micro and small businesses, and hotel and restaurant owners, as well as sailors, ship owners and ferry operators. The progressing development of cross-border establishments is not without meaning.

The arguments show that the small border traffic is a platform for social and economic development of small towns border. Indeed, which results in the economic integration, exchange of information, the flow of experience and facilitates development of tourism. It leads to cultural and educational development of the region and is a tool of promotion. The above-listed functions result also in its contribution to the economic development of the region.

In conclusion, small border cities – especially located at the Polish-Russian/Russian-Polish border in the area covered by the Agreement of the LBT – can become “(...) the European Cities of tomorrow as places of advanced social progress; they are platforms for democracy, cultural dialogue and diversity; they are places of green, ecological or environmental regeneration; and they are places of attraction and engines of economic growth (...)” (Cities of tomorrow... 2011).

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