Conditions and possibilities of using Baltic amber heritage in the development of territorial cooperation

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Abstract

Baltic amber, also referred to as the “gold of the Baltic Sea”, is one of the most valuable fossil resins in the world. Due to its valuable properties, it has been the subject of international cooperation and exchange since ancient times. Then numerous trade routes were laid, which gradually turned into tourist attractions. Nowadays, amber contributes to the development of cities and regions where it is mined and processed. This gives them a competitive advantage, creates a positive image and stimulates territorial cooperation. The essence of this cooperation lies in the use of the socio-economic capital of interested parties connected by common interests. Representatives of the world of science, business and non-governmental organizations participate in this cooperation.

An example of the effective use of amber and its heritage in activities that stimulate territorial development is Pomeranian Voivodeship with its capital in Gdańsk. The article analyses the activities in this area carried out since 1996 by two non-governmental organizations: the Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego Foundation (Agency for Regional Development) and the association Academia Europa Nostra. The study was conducted using of secondary sources, including the resources of both organizations and the knowledge of the author, the initiator and coordinator of numerous initiatives related to the heritage of amber.

Keywords list (en): Baltic, amber, territorial cooperation, promotion, Pomeranian Voivodeship, Poland

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Introduction. The heritage of amber has been reflected in the material and non-material culture of Baltic societies since the earliest times [13, p. 10]. This is evidenced by numerous archaeological discoveries [2, p. 28]. An amber, or more precisely a succinite, is associated with the Baltic Sea Region. It is a fossil resin of conifers, at least 40 million years old, with a succinic acid content of 3 to 8 percent. This distinguishes succinite from about a hundred other fossil resins identified in nature, which contain less than 3 percent of this acid [9, p. 9]. Baltic amber is famous for unique inclusions of small fragments of plant, tissues and animal organs, which are immersed in the aromatic resin abundantly secreted by amber-bearing trees [5, p. 165]. Everyday tools and ornaments made of amber have become museum exhibits and can be found in numerous exhibitions [22, p. 92]. Historical amber routes have transformed into linear tourist destinations. Tradition and the contemporary life are reflected in tourist products, the development of which was enabled by territorial cooperation [20, p. 65].

Study of the issue of territorial cooperation. Collaboration is an ambiguous term used in many areas of science [8, p. 70; 15]. Man as a social being [1, p. 5] enters into relationships with other people [7, p. 423]. Reality is actively transformed, which allows for the satisfaction of individual and collective human needs [3, p. 157]. This process leads to the formation of organizations. Their activities are influenced by the system of connections, relations and rules [12] the participants of these organizations are subject to [6, p. 42].

The territorial cooperation makes a special case of collaboration, also known as decentralized cooperation [27, p. 27]. It is the sub-state entities that make participants of this type of cooperation [4, p. 15]. The spatial scope of this cooperation is determined by the boundaries of both administrative and functional regions distinguished for a specific purpose. The subject scope covers practically all spheres of social and economic life. Territorial cooperation is implemented at the national as well as international level [25, p. 45].

Results of the research. Tourism as part of territorial cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. Political changes and the development of good neighbourly relations in late 20th century led to the opening of interstate borders. One of the directions for bringing the states closer together was the development of territorial cooperation. This included a wide range of foreign activities of local authorities and the NGOs. It contributed to overcoming stereotypes and existing prejudices and overcoming the state border as a social, economic, infrastructural and cultural barrier. Political transformations additionally created favourable conditions for a fuller utilization of the economic and intellectual potential of the Baltic Sea states [11].

Territorial cooperation in the field of tourism has developed particularly intensively in the Baltic Sea region [10; 16; 26]. It focused on the use of natural and anthropogenic resources for the development and promotion of unique tourism products [21]. It was supported by the European Union through pre-accession programmes followed by cohesion policy programmes and neighbourhood policy [17, p. 56].

One of the initiators and coordinators of the territorial cooperation was the Gdansk-based Secretariat of the “Visions and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea 2010” Programme. This Secretariat identified potential areas for cross-border cooperation. One of these cross-border areas was the Jantar Euroregion (Fig. 1), so named owing to the rich amber resources found in the area [18]. However, the suggested name did not gain the approval of all the founders and thus the Euroregion started in 1998 under the name “Baltic”.

Fig. 1. The planned „Jantar” Euroregion.

In 2010, another proposal to institutionalise cross-border cooperation using the amber heritage idea was put forward. The Pomeranian Regional Tourist Organisation in cooperation with the Ministry of Regional Development of Kaliningrad Oblast in Russia developed a joint project “Amber Heritage Network — a system of experience and information exchange in the field of preservation and promotion of amber heritage in the South-Eastern Baltic Region”. The project was
aimed at the transfer of knowledge, experience and good practice in preserving and using the amber heritage to create a competitive tourist offer [19]. One of the results of the project was the concept of the Polish-Russian transboundary area, the “Baltic Amber Region”, with the main emphasis put on creating various amber tourist products, building the image and recognizable destination brand (Fig. 2).

The development and promotion of the amber heritage idea by the “Regional Development Agency” foundation. The beginning of an institutionalized international cooperation related to the development and promotion of the amber heritage was the “Amber Road” project implemented in 1996–1997 by partners from Sweden, Greece, Latvia and Poland (Fig. 3).
Fig. 3. Amber routes as part of the Amber Road project.

The observer in this project was the Russian partner — the Kaliningrad city administration. The project was co-financed by the European PHARE fund. The initiative was coordinated by the international Baltic Tourism Commission, organizer of the annual “Baltic Tourism Conference”. That conference was accompanied by the Baltic Travel Mart Fair. The Polish partner (Regional Development Agency in Gdansk) initiated in 1997 a BTC conference to be held in Gdansk, as part of the city’s Millennium event. This made it possible to incorporate the opening
The ceremony of the Amber Trail into the said Millennium celebrations.

The inaugural study tour took place on the Gdańsk — Malbork — Kaliningrad — Klaipeda — Liepaja — Riga route. The Regional Development Agency decided to use the project to create additional products related to the Amber Trail. An original souvenir item was created which became a symbol of the amber heritage and after a dozen or so years a symbol of the Amber Trail. The souvenir was made of sterling silver and Baltic amber. It symbolized the cooperation based on the amber heritage.

Many entities were interested in using the motif of amber heritage. At that time, on the initiative of the city of Gdynia, a national association for the construction of the Amber Road motorway was established. The motorway became the axis of the VI North-South Transport Corridor, connecting the Balkans, Central Europe and Scandinavia. Amber symbolism was used to promote the motorway later named “Amber One”. The initiative was supported by the Polish Tourist Organization. In addition, the regional tourist organizations expressed their will for a coherent marking of Amber One route with promotional and information pylons.

An important role in initiating and coordinating initiatives related to the amber heritage was played by a representative of the Baltic Tourism Commission — “BTC Poland Office”, operating within the structure of the Regional Development Agency. The promotional activities included such actions as: 1) publication of the book “Amber — a mystical experience” and posters of amber routes (1997); 2) organization of a study tour for journalists from all over the world along the Amber Trail (1997); 3) development of the concept and co-organization of the unique tourist product “World Amber-Fishing Out Championships” (1998); 4) publication of periodical newsletter “Amber Heritage” (1997–1998); 5) creation and maintenance of the “Polish Amber Portal” website www.amber.net.pl (1998–2001).

Thanks to the cooperation of the amber heritage stakeholders with the Baltic Tourism Commission, numerous amber-related tourism products were created. In the late 20th century, coach tours became popular amber-related products. These tours were organized by Eastern European tour operators. Other Baltic organizations, including the Union of Baltic Cities and the Council of Baltic Sea States, joined in the promotion of the amber heritage. The Baltic Tourism Commission had included many articles on amber and amber heritage in its materials since the beginning of this project. The Regional Development Agency established cooperation with a team of coordinators of Polish tourism brand products. This cooperation resulted in the start of preparations for the development of the Amber Trail as a brand product.

The moment the aforementioned group of coordinators had been dissolved, many of the works related to the promotion of the Amber Trail in the region were continued by the Self-Government of Pomeranian Voivodeship [24, p. 18]. It should be noted that amber related products were included in the “Pomeranian Voivodeship Tourist Product Development Programme for the years 2008–2013” [14]. It was important that BTC Poland had the opportunity to promote the Amber Trail and the heritage at the same time as developing other important cultural tourism products, including Viking and Hanseatic heritage products. Representatives of the Baltic Tourism Commission visited the Council of Europe office and obtained a document naming Gdansk as the World Amber Capital. The Regional Development Agency was dissolved in 2003. Nevertheless, much of the amber-related work was coordinated by the Pomeranian Regional Tourist Organization.

Development and Promotion of the Amber Heritage within the operation of “Academia Europa Nostra” Association. The development and promotion of the amber heritage has played an important role since the beginning of the association's activities [23, p. 147]. Soon, Academia Europa Nostra became a member of the Pomeranian Regional Tourist Organization, which resulted in further joint initiatives related to amber and tourism.

One of the aims of the association is to activate and integrate the local and regional environment and to inspire cross-border cooperation between local governments and communities. The association pursues its aims by, among other things, conducting research and development, publishing, training and promotional activities, organizing conferences, and training courses at
The Association has set up a publishing house and produced a number of publications addressing issues related to the amber heritage. The international scientific conference “Forum Europa Nostra” has become a cyclical event organized by the association. The subject of amber has repeatedly appeared in the speeches of the authorities of the Association. Forum Europa Nostra, organized in 2014, was devoted to the heritage of amber. The participants of the conference visited the Amber Museum in Gdańsk, took part in a study visit to the regional section of the Amber Trail. In 2008, a letter of intent was signed to boost joint activities for the creation and development of the European Cultural Route, the “Amber Route”. In 2009, the authorities of the Association held a meeting with the authorities of the Yantarnyj Amber Combine in Russia, initiating cooperation in the joint promotion of the amber heritage.

The activities carried out by the Association were supported by the Polish consular authorities in Kaliningrad and the Russian consular authorities in Gdańsk. They led, among other things, to intensified cooperation between amber museums in Gdańsk and Kaliningrad (Fig. 4).

The year 2009 saw the publication of an article entitled “Forum Europa Nostra for the Baltic Sea Region” in the “Regional Review” — a European Parliament magazine. Implementation of activities in the field of amber promotion has always been based on cooperation with social and economic entities, local government units, government administration bodies and representatives of the consular corps. For his activities, the President of the Management Board received a diploma of the Honourable Ambassador of Polish Congresses, as well as an award of the Marshal of the Pomeranian Voivodeship “For activities to create amber as a brand product”.

Conclusions. Amber has become a very attractive and unique motif of national and international territorial cooperation. It integrates societies and nations and inspires them to creative activities. The European Union supports potential beneficiaries with external funds and thus mobilizes them to search for cooperation partners. Sometimes it becomes a problem to continue activities after the project financed from external funds has ended. Non-governmental institutions involved in initiating and coordinating cooperation sometimes cease their activities, but the effects of their work remain. Other stakeholders continue the initiated activities. If there is competition, it is creative and serves the idea well.

Activities to promote the amber heritage, initiated in the late twentieth century by the Regional Development Agency and continued by the association Academia Europa Nostra, have resulted in the creation of tourist products. Some of them, such as “International World Amber-
“Fishing Out Championships” and “International Amber Fair Amberif” are organized annually and effectively promote the region. It is no coincidence that the Pomeranian Exhibition and Convention Centre is called “Amber-Expo” and Gdańsk is positioned as the “world capital of amber”.

Remarks:

4. URL: www.academiaeuropanostra.eu (accessed: 20 October 2021).
5. URL: >>>>
6. URL: >>>>

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Conditions and possibilities of using Baltic amber heritage in the development of territorial cooperation

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Аннотация

Baltic amber, also referred to as the “gold of the Baltic Sea”, is one of the most valuable fossil resins in the world. Due to its valuable properties, it has been the subject of international cooperation and exchange since ancient times. Then numerous trade routes were laid, which gradually turned into tourist attractions. Nowadays, amber contributes to the development of cities and regions where it is mined and processed. This gives them a competitive advantage, creates a positive image and stimulates territorial cooperation. The essence of this cooperation lies in the use of the socio-economic capital of interested parties connected by common interests. Representatives of the world of science, business and non-governmental organizations participate in this cooperation.

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