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LITHUANIAN-POLISH TOURIST CROSS-BORDER FUNCTIONAL AREA – A NEW INSTRUMENT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CROSS-BORDER TOURIST DESTINATION

Litewsko-Polski Turystyczny Transgraniczny Obszar Funkcjonalny – nowe narzędzie rozwoju transgranicznej destynacji turystycznej

Abstract: The development of tourist function in cross-border areas requires appropriate instruments supporting cross-border cooperation. One such instrument is the Cross-Border Functional Area (CBFA). This paper presents pioneering works leading to the creation of the Tourist Cross-Border Functional Area (TCBFA) in the Lithuanian – Polish borderland. Its main aim is to answer the question whether the CBFA instrument is applicable in the development of cross-border tourist destinations, and if so, to what extent. An additional goal is to identify the attributes of a TCBFA on the example of the Lithuanian – Polish borderland. The study debates the relevance of the CBFA in the development of a cross-border tourist destination. It shows that establishing a flexible destination management structure enables the intensification of cooperation between key stakeholders across the border, the implementation of cross-border projects and the promotion of tourist products.

Key words: cross-border functional area, cross-border cooperation, destination, tourism, European Union, Lithuanian – Polish borderland

INTRODUCTION

For many years, tourism has been treated as a key factor in the socio-economic development of tourist reception areas (Lea 1988, Clarke, Godfrey 2000, de Bruyn, Meyer 2022). However, awareness of the threats it may pose to the natural and anthropogenic environment has increased recently. There was a need to implement the solution for tourism development consistent with the principles of sustainable development (de Araújo et al. 2022, Kizielewicz 2023). Planning and organizing the

Wpłynęło: 19.10.2022

Zaakceptowano: 21.06.2023

Zalecany sposób cytowania / Cite as: Studzieniecki T. i in., 2023, Polish-Lithuanian Tourist Cross-Border Functional Area – a new concept for the development of a cross-border tourist destination, *Prace i Studia Geograficzne*, 68.1, Wydział Geografii i Studiów Regionalnych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa, 65–82, DOI: 10.48128/pisg/2023-68.1-04.

development of tourism in cross-border areas, which are potential tourist destinations has become a particular challenge for theoreticians and practitioners (Gardzińska 2015, Studzieniecki 2021, Więckowski 2011). Past experience in the development of cross-border tourism included the use of territorial cooperation instruments such as Euroregions, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI). All these instruments have already played an important role in the integration of cross-border areas. However, they were not without flaws (Studzieniecki 2016), and therefore the search for more effective mechanisms of cooperation across national borders continued (Malatine, Kyjovský 2019, Jakubowski et al. 2022).

In the context of the development of the EU's cohesion policy and neighborhood policy, the Cross-Border Functional Area (CBFA) as a new instrument of cross-border cooperation was born. It was developed, among other things, for the purposes of allocating EU Structural and Investment Funds. However, there was a lack of theoretical solutions and practical experience in this area. In 2019, in the Lithuanian – Polish borderland, the first attempt was made to develop the CBFA, the leading function of which would be the tourism. Commissioned by DG REGIO of the European Commission, the implementation of the pioneering project “Identification of the key elements of the tourist cross-border functional area on the Lithuanian-Polish border” (Kurowska-Pysz et al. 2021) began. It was a pilot nature in the Central And Eastern Europe which assumed the identification and delimitation of the Tourist Cross-border Functional Area (TCBFA) in the Lithuanian – Polish borderland, as well as the identification of key factors conditioning the process of its development. A road map for creation and promotion of the TCBFA territorial brand under the working name ‘Jatvingia – the land of the Yotvingian tribe’ was also developed.

The objective of this paper is twofold. First, it is to answer whether the CBFA instrument is applicable in the development of cross-border tourist destinations, and if so, to what extent. Second, the paper aims at identifying the attributes of a TCBFA on the example of the Lithuanian – Polish borderland.

CONCEPTUALIZATION, CLASSIFICATION AND ORGANIZATION OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

The issue of tourist destinations is richly reflected in the scientific literature (Kotler, Bowen, Makens 2009, Lynch, Tinsley 2001, Cai 2002, Laws 1995). Numerous research studies attempt to interpret it in a multi-faceted manner (Metelka 1986, Pearce 2015, Stankova, Vasenka 2019). Destination typologies varied greatly (Bercia, Barrado-Timón 2005, Studzieniecki, Spirajevs 2019, Żemła 2019). The term *tourist destination* appeared in English-language literature in the 18th century in the context of a place visited by tourists (Page, Connel 2009). It gained significant popularity among theoreticians and practitioners of tourism at the end of the 20th century, permanently entering many European languages, including Polish (Borzyszkowski 2012). However, as a neologism, replacing native terms, it aroused controversy (Kruczek 2017) and was criticized by linguists (Dunaj, Mycawka 2017). A tourist destination is mainly understood as a geographical location to which a person is travelling (Metelka 1990, Manhas et al. 2016). Buhalis (2000) broadens this conceptualization by stating that the geographical location “is understood by its visitors as a unique entity, with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning”. Lynch and Tinsley (2001) state that several studies tend to look at the tourist destination as a “system containing a number of components such as attractions, accommodation, transport, and other services and infrastructure”.

When conceptualizing a tourist destination, a systemic approach (Leiper 1979) becomes useful (Hall 2008, Studzieniecki 2021, Naderpour et al. 2011). A tourist destination, also known as a tourist reception area (Dziedzic 1998, Niezgoda 2006, Marczak 2018), is located in a specific tourism space, i.e. in a part of the physical and socio-economic space where tourism phenomena occur (Warszyńska, Jackowski 1978). One such phenomenon is a travel (Włodarczyk 2009), which takes place in tourism space between two areas: the tourist destination area and the tourist emission area (Fig. 1).

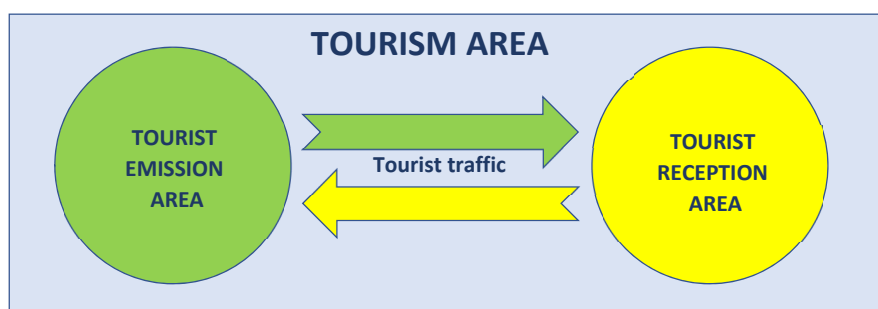


Fig. 1. The tourism system in spatial terms
Source: own study based on (Leiper 1979)

Więckowski (2014) points out that tourist traffic also takes place in transit space. The destination is part of the tourism space (Kowalczyk 2014), located in a real geographical space (Stachowski 1993). Włodarczyk (2014) proposes that depending on the degree of use of geographical space for tourism, real tourism space, potential tourism space and non-tourism space should be distinguished.

Tourist destinations cannot exist without tourist attractions (Kruczek 2011), which, as a result of marketing activities, become products attracting tourists (Studzieniecki 1994, Nowacki 2000, Kaczmarek et al. 2010, Gardzińska 2015). Meyer (2008) argues that tourist space, including destinations, can be identified using a functional criterion, which means that an area with important tourism functions becomes a tourism space.

From an economic point of view, the tourism market covers the entirety of relations (Panasiuk 2014) between the supply located in the tourist destination area and the demand located in the tourist emission area (Fig. 2). As soon as tourists arrive at the destination, tourist goods and services are consumed.

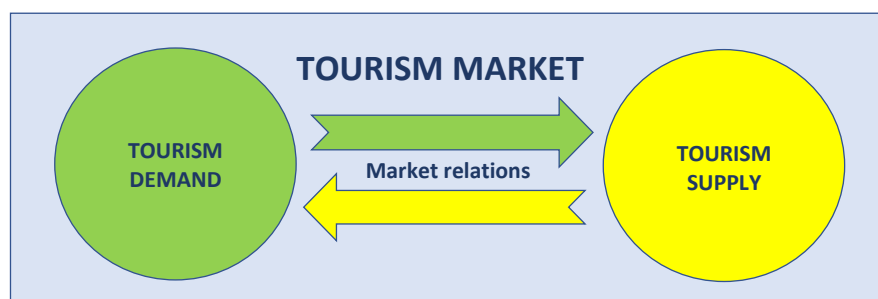


Fig. 2. The tourism system in terms of the market
Source: own study based on (Leiper 1979)

The choice of tourist destination by travelers is determined by a number of demand and supply factors (Marvel 2005). Tourists have to find the destination attractive (Fig. 3). The growth of inbound tourism is a crucial duty of organizations managing the destinations. It may be through the development of travel motivators and facilitators (Studzieniecki 2021).

A tourist destination is a multidimensional concept (Studzieniecki et al. 2020). It can be analyzed in several perspectives:

1. spatial – as an area (Pechlaner 1999), space (Bieger 2009), territory (Boniface, Cooper 2009), region (Goeldner, Ritchie 2011), a place (Leiper 2004) to which tourists travel,
2. institutional – as a set of entities (Panasiuk 2017), organizations (Buhalis 2000), or clusters of entities (Martyshenko 2010) creating conditions for tourism in the visited area,
3. marketing – as a collection of products consumed by visitors during their stay in the area (Bieger 1998, Gardzińska 2015),
4. psychological – as a collection of experiences (Gunn 1988) and feelings (Hu, Ritchie 1993) of travelers related to their stay in this area.

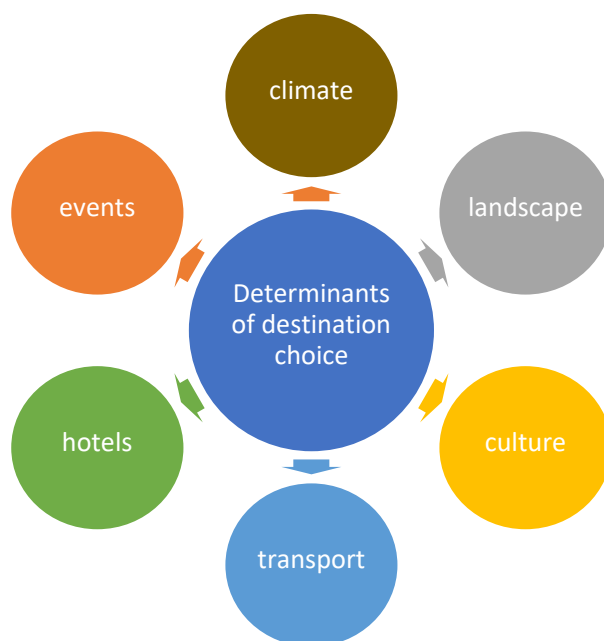


Fig. 3. Key determinants of destination selection
Source: Marvel, 2005

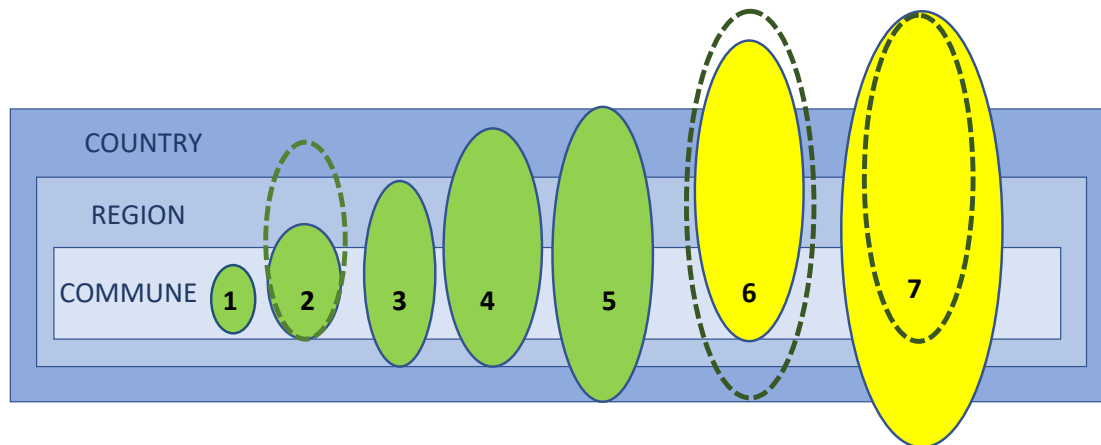
According to the World Tourism Organization (2007), destination is a physical space, where the tourist spends at least one night. This includes various services and attractions and is defined by physical or administrative borders, which are important in destination management. In accordance with the recommendations of the European Commission (The European Tourism Indicator System, 2016), a destination functioning in accordance with the principles of sustainable development fulfills the following requirements:

1. is attractive for tourists,
2. is spatially separated,
3. has tourist products,
4. is promoted as a destination,
5. is characterized by measurable demand and tourist supply,
6. is managed by a group of private and public entities and the local community.

The typology of destinations is diverse. In the context of the organization of tourism, domestic and foreign destinations are distinguished (Pearce 2015). Both domestic tourists (participants of domestic tourism) and foreign tourists (participants of inbound tourism) stay in a given destination.

An important criterion for classifying destinations is the level of activity. Lew (2021) distinguishes 4 basic levels of destinations, such as: local, regional, national and global. According to Panasiuk (2015), the basic criterion for the classification of tourist destinations should be the institutional level of implementation of activities, which determines the method of its management. The author indicates 6 levels: local, supra-local, regional, Euroregional, national, supranational (European). Studzieniecki (2008) proposes dividing destinations into those found in one country (attractions, districts, municipalities, counties, regions) and those located in at least two countries (cross-border areas, transnational areas, continents). In the context of the administrative division of the state covering counties and communes, it seems advisable to single out destinations related to administrative levels, i.e. local, regional and national destinations. DMOs (destination management organizations) are established at these levels. One should also assume the possibility of creating intermediate destinations, i.e. supra-local and supra-regional ones. On the other hand, destinations that cross national borders can be divided into cross-border and transnational (Fig. 4). Więckowski (2023) argues, that the role of tourism in border-

lands is becoming more and more important. Tourism development has been facilitated by process of debordering (Więckowski, Dallen 2021, Kurowska-Pysz 2016) and the changing character of borders (Kolosov, Więckowski 2018). Borders are no longer barriers to tourist traffic, they become an element that attracts tourists (Kozak, Buhalis 2019). An important stimulus for the development of tourism in cross-border and transnational areas has become the EU funds available under the cohesion policy and the neighbourhood policy (Studzeniecki, Meyer 2017).



Legend: 1 – local level, 2 – supra-local level, 3 – regional level, 4 – supra-regional level, 5 – national level, 6 – cross-border level, 7 – transnational level

Fig. 4. Tiers of tourist destinations

Source: own study

Local level attractions may become destinations (Weidenfeld et al. 2016). They can be, for example, museums (Skot-Hansen 2019), theme parks (Dridea Catrinel, Strutzen 2008), or pilgrimage centers (Dowson 2020). Regional destinations, like regions, are very diverse. It is worth referring to the typology of regions proposed by Liszewski (2003). The author distinguishes three classification criteria for tourist regions, such as location, shape and function (Fig. 5). By dividing the geographical space into central and peripheral areas, two main types of tourist regions can be identified: metropolitan regions and peripheral regions. Considering the shape, three types of these regions are distinguished: a nodal region, a band region and a large-area region. In turn, in the context of functions, regions can be divided into specialized (focused on a specific type of tourism, e.g. sports, spa) and multifunctional.

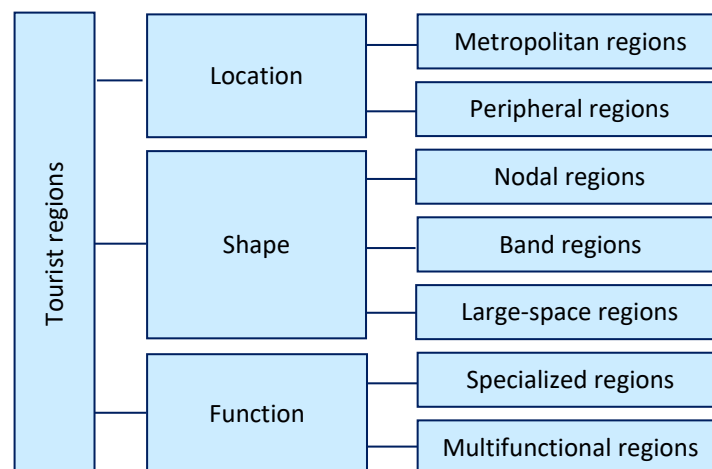


Fig. 5. Typology of tourist regions

Source: own study based on: Liszewski 2003

International destinations can be divided into cross-border and transnational. The former are most often associated with cross-border cooperation and correspond to the areas of this cooperation, e.g. with Euroregions or European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Transnational destinations may be both geographical regions (Kizielewicz, 2013) and political regions set up by international agreements (Studzieniecki, 2021), such as the Visegrad Group. Usually, transnational areas, unlike cross-border areas, cover entire countries. In some cases (such as the Baltic Sea Region), the destination may include not only countries but also selected administrative regions (the coastal federal states of Germany).

A cross-border destination usually consist of parts of countries. However, sometimes it happens that a whole small country (e.g. Andorra) is part of the cross-border area (Euroregio 2022). According to Studzieniecki (2021), cross-border tourist destinations can be divided into 3 categories:

1. point destinations (e.g. tripoints, cross-border mountain peaks),
2. linear destinations (e.g. national borders, routes along borders),
3. spatial destinations (e.g. lakes, seas).

Some facilities, such as hotels, restaurants, and museums, may have a cross-border character (Więckowski 2021). An interesting example of a cross-border linear destination is the Polish-German promenade located in the Polish city of Świnoujście and the German commune of Heringsdorf. (Więckowski 2020). On the other hand, spatial destinations may be Euroregions, EGTCs, cross-border national parks, cross-border biosphere reserves, cross-border sites entered on the UNESCO list (Jakubowski, Seidlová 2022), etc. A cross-border functional area may also become a cross-border destination. This requires the fulfillment of a number of conditions, including proper delimitation and institutionalization as well as operationalization of cooperation (Kurowska-Pysz, et al. 2021).

CROSS-BORDER FUNCTIONAL AREAS – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the body of scientific literature and spatial planning practice, functional areas are most often defined as areas concentrated around nodes (urban centers) and characterized by a high intensity of functional linkages, or as areas designated according to specific criteria that determine their internal consistency and shape the nature of internal and external interactions (CEMAT 2017). The most common way of defining functional areas is inherently linked to spatial mobility. Therefore they are understood as structures based on spatial interactions (e.g. social interactions and movements of people), internal autonomy and principles of external separation and internal cohesiveness (Aagesen et al. 2022). In planning practice and public policies implementation, the functional area is one of the manifestations of the transition from a sectoral approach to an integrated territorial approach to better use the endogenous potentials of functionally defined territories, the integration of public activities in the spatial dimension and a multi-level governance system.

The description of a functional area used in planning documents in Poland has developed from the category of ‘problem area’, understood as “an area where a particular spatial management phenomenon or spatial conflicts occur” (*National Spatial Development Concept 2030*, 2011, p. 176). In the context of this category, the functional area was defined as “a compact spatial system consisting of functionally linked territories, characterised by shared conditions and anticipated uniform development objectives” (*National Spatial Development Concept 2030*, 2011, p. 176). The purposes of Poland’s planning policy, a typology of functional areas was made (Table 1). The set of the types of functional areas was described as an open one, which means, that the number and geographic extent of such areas may depend on the purpose the delimitation is intended to serve.

Nowadays, “functional areas form places of many shapes and sizes” (Faludi 2016, p. 308), often cross-cutting the boundaries of administrative units, including state borders. As such, cross-border functional areas result from the cross-border functional integration, which is reflected in socioeconomic interaction in the form of flows or exchanges, essentially of people and goods (Turner et al. 2022), often driven by the existing cross-border differentials and asymmetries (Decoville et al. 2013).

Table 1. Typology of functional areas in Poland's planning policy

Type of the functional area	
Urban functional areas	Voivodeship centres, including metropolitan (metropolitan areas)
	Regional centres
	Sub-regional centres
	Local centres
Rural functional areas	Areas participating in development processes
	Areas requiring support of development processes
Functional areas of a special phenomenon on a macro-regional scale	Coastal zone
	Polish exclusive maritime economic zone
	Mountainous areas
	Żuławy
	Areas of soil protection for agricultural production
	Restricted areas
	Areas exposed to the threat of flooding on the scale of river basins
Areas whose development is subject to modelling	Environmentally valuable areas
	Areas of protected cultural landscapes
	Areas of protected and modelled water resources
	Areas of strategic deposits of minerals
Functional areas that require development of new functions with the use of regional policy instruments	Areas with the lowest degree of development and deteriorating development prospects
	Cities and other areas losing their current socioeconomic functions
	Areas with the lowest level of access to goods and services on which development possibilities depend
	Borderland
	Areas with the worst transport accessibility to voivodeship centres

Source: *National Spatial Development Concept 2030*, 2011, p. 179–184

In legal regulations and strategic documents at the EU, national or regional level, there are numerous references to EU regional policy, perceived as an important determinant of supporting the development of functional areas (Kociuba 2015, Rosenkiewicz 2012). Thus some conceptualizations of cross-border functional areas are made in the context of the EU regional policy (Fig. 6) and refer, in a nutshell, to the category of intra-national functional areas and to the category of cross-border areas (Ładysz 2021). Similar approach was presented, i.e., in the *Territorial Agenda 2030 (A Future for All Places)* (2020) which is a key document defining the directions of EU development in the spatial dimension. The document emphasizes the need for the cooperation of authorities at various levels for the comprehensive use of the unique advantages of cross-border areas. Actions for cross-border integration – as emphasized in the *Territorial Agenda*, are about creating a certain critical mass for development and generating synergies in order to reduce economic, social and environmental fragmentation and negative externalities in border regions. The areas of this integration may be: ecosystems, natural and cultural heritage, labor markets, public services or a network of cities divided by borders, and its instruments: cross-border, transnational and interregional development strategies at the macro-regional, national, regional and local levels (Jakubowski, Miszczuk 2021). Such approach was employed by the European Commission (2018, p. 5), which took steps to direct cross-border programs in the years 2021–2027 to “borders where there is a high degree of cross-border interaction”, i.e. functional linkages.

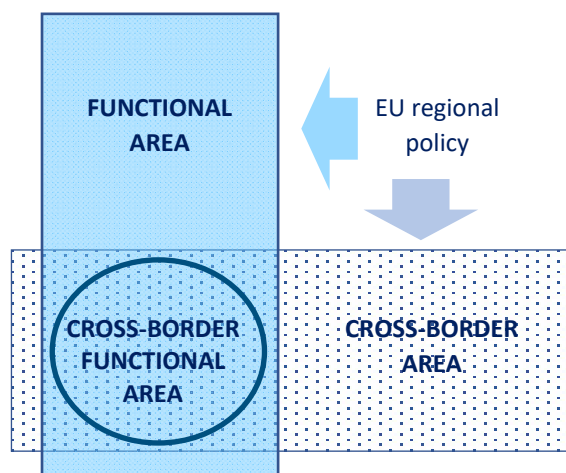


Fig. 6. Conceptualization of cross-border functional areas from the perspective of the EU's regional policy
Source: own study

To date, no universal definition of a cross-border functional area has been formulated. According to Ładysz (2021), a cross-border functional area is consisting of adjacent border areas separated by a national border, with a relatively distinct, intensive and open system of social, economic or natural connections determined by the features of the geographical, natural and anthropogenic environment. Cross-border functional areas, however, are usually constructed not only through their geographical location and linkages across the borders, but also through shared governance platforms aiming to enhance joint strategies of development and ensuring implementation of joint projects and resource management on a functional logic (Sousa 2013). Thus a broader definition was proposed by Jakubowski et al. (2022), according to which cross-border functional area is a specific spatial arrangement located on two (or more) sides of the national border, determined by cross-border functional connections resulting from common and/or integrating spatial or socio-economic features. Cross-border functional area is also characterized by the existence of a system of cross-border cooperation between various stakeholders and the existence of a co-management mechanism allowing for better use of the potential of a given area and solving common problems. Cross-border functional areas understood this way go beyond the dichotomous view in which functional and institutional integration are not always related (Turner et al. 2022).

In the context of EU regional policy, however, a key question remains whether existing instruments of territorial cooperation, including cross-border cooperation, can be an effective tool for the integrated development and management of cross-border functional areas and, if so, which ones are best suited to this role. Since the establishment of the Euregio along the German-Dutch border in 1958, Euroregions remain the most common institutionalised form of cross-border cooperation between border regions or local entities in the Member States of the UE. Their work is regulated by the conventions of the respective international structures – the Council of Europe and the EU. Despite the wide range of actions that they can take, the effectiveness of Euroregions is often limited (Medeiros 2011). Their main weakness is the lack of defined status in the EU context and the fact that, in most cases, they have no legal personality. The European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) were expected to answer the latter challenge. Their purpose was to facilitate and promote territorial cooperation involving one or more aspects of cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation, to enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU. EGTCs have legal personality and are governed by a convention concluded by their members. Thus EGTCs provide borderlands in the EU with legal capacities to act in their interest (Zapletal, 2010). Given the experience to date, however, the EGTCs have not proved to be a main pillar of cross-border cooperation as previously assumed (Raczyk, Dołzbłasz 2017).

The 2014–2020 programming period also brought new instruments that potentially may apply to the development of cross-border functional areas: Integrated Territorial Investments, Community-led Local Development (CLLD) and Joint Action Plans (JAP). As Raczky and Dołzbłasz (2017) note, the first of the above instruments is difficult to apply to cross-border cooperation policy needs, as they are shaped strictly from the perspective of national needs only. CLLD corresponds well to the demands of cross-border cooperation, being characterised by a bottom-up, territorial and integrated approach to collaboration. Its application, however, would require harmonisation of formal modes of transnational activity, while the last instrument, JAP, does not bring anything new to cross-border cooperation, as it is related in practice to the implementation of common objectives by a larger number of partners and the creation of quasi-project consortia (Raczky, Dołzbłasz 2017).

Although some Euroregions and EGTCs have proven to be good examples of cross-border governance platforms ensuring the implementation of joint projects and resource management on functional linkages (Evrard, Engl 2018, Sousa 2013), to date there is no tailor-made material-institutional instrument for managing cross-border functional areas, fostering the further reduction of cross-border barriers and enhancing flows of people and goods. The search for alternative solutions for institutional forms of cross-border cooperation has led to the creation of several Cross-Border Functional Areas (as a new instruments of cross-border cooperation) in the Polish Borderlands. Despite the lack of legal regulations, in the years 2019–2021, initiatives aimed at establishing a CBFA appeared, when CBFA ‘Eastern Beskids’ was established on the Polish-Slovak border, CBFA ‘Kremenaros’ on the Polish-Slovak-Ukrainian border, CBFA ‘Przemyska Gate’ on the Polish-Ukrainian border and the Tourist Cross-Border Functional Area ‘Jatvingia – the land of the Yotvingian tribe’ on the Polish-Lithuanian border. Although currently these peripheral border territories have limited functional relationships (Dołzbłasz 2017), it was recognized that there is a room for creating functional areas and strengthening links in the future, mainly in the tourism and environment protection fields. The aforementioned initiatives, however, were largely declarative in nature. The exception was the Lithuanian – Polish borderland, where not only a detailed plan for the development of the CBFA was developed, but also steps were taken to implement it.

GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LITHUANIAN – POLISH TOURIST CROSS-BORDER FUNCTIONAL AREA

The Lithuanian – Polish borderland is characterized by a few decades of cross-border cooperation, in which the lead role is played by local government units located on both sides of the border. On their initiative, in 2018, a declaration was signed, the intention of which was to create a Lithuanian – Polish cross-border functional area in order to improve the standard of living of the inhabitants of the Lithuanian – Polish border area. Taking into account the natural and cultural attractiveness of this area, it was assumed that tourism could be the leverage for socio-economic development (Nowe kierunki współpracy polsko-litewskiej na szczeblu samorządowym. Wyniki dyskusji. Propozycje działań 2018). The authorities of the city of Sejny on the Polish side played a key role in signing the agreement, and the authorities of the Lazdijai district on the Lithuanian side. An important catalyst for cooperation was the project “Building social, economic, cultural, educational and tourist relations among the inhabitants of the border zones of Poland and Lithuania”, co-financed by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The continuation of activities and the development of organizational and program solutions for the future CBFA was possible thanks to the project “Identification of key elements of the tourist cross-border functional area on the Lithuanian-Polish border” financed by the European Commission (DG REGIO). It enabled the delimitation of the Tourist CBFA area (Fig. 7), held in cooperation with key stakeholders in the Lithuanian – Polish borderland and carried out using a multi-criteria analysis, including five basic groups of criteria relating to:

- socio-economic conditions – to identify units, particularly in need of additional development impulses;
- tourism potential and development – to identify territorial units characterized by a developed tourism function or good conditions for its development;
- existing functional links – manifested in previous experience in cross-border cooperation with other CBFA participants, including implementation of joint projects in the area of tourism;
- declared willingness to cooperate – reflecting common goals and interests of territorial units;
- topology – manifested in the spatial continuity of the selected units.

The project also resulted in the development of assumptions for the structure of coordination of cross-border cooperation and creating and promoting a cross-border tourist destination. TCBFA was officially established on January 25, 2021 under an agreement concluded by the local authorities of three Lithuanian districts (Vilkaviškis, Kalvarija and Lazdijai) and nine Polish municipalities (Giby, Jeleniewo, Krasnopol, Puńsk, Rutka-Tartak, Sejny, the City of Sejny, Szypliszki and Wizajny).



Fig. 7. Delimitation of the Tourist Cross-border Functional Area on the Lithuanian-Polish borderland
Source: own study based on: Kurowska-Pysz et al. 2021

THE IDEA OF CREATION AND PROMOTION OF THE CROSS-BORDER TOURIST DESTINATION 'JATVINGIA'

The idea of creating and promoting a cross-border tourist destination (Fig. 8) assumed the parallel road map for the implementation of activities relating to the destination itself (green) and its brand (yellow). The process was divided into 2 stages. The first stage covered most of the activities carried out under the project financed by the European Commission.

In the context of the development of destinations, they included the diagnosis of the state, development of proposals for cross-border projects and products, the establishment of a structure of coordination of cross-border cooperation under TCBFA and an indication of further activities in the field of tourism destination management. At the same time, as part of brand development activities, an initial audit of brand resources and benchmarking was performed. Proposals for a guiding idea,

elements and visualization of a cross-border brand were developed, and further actions in this regard were indicated.

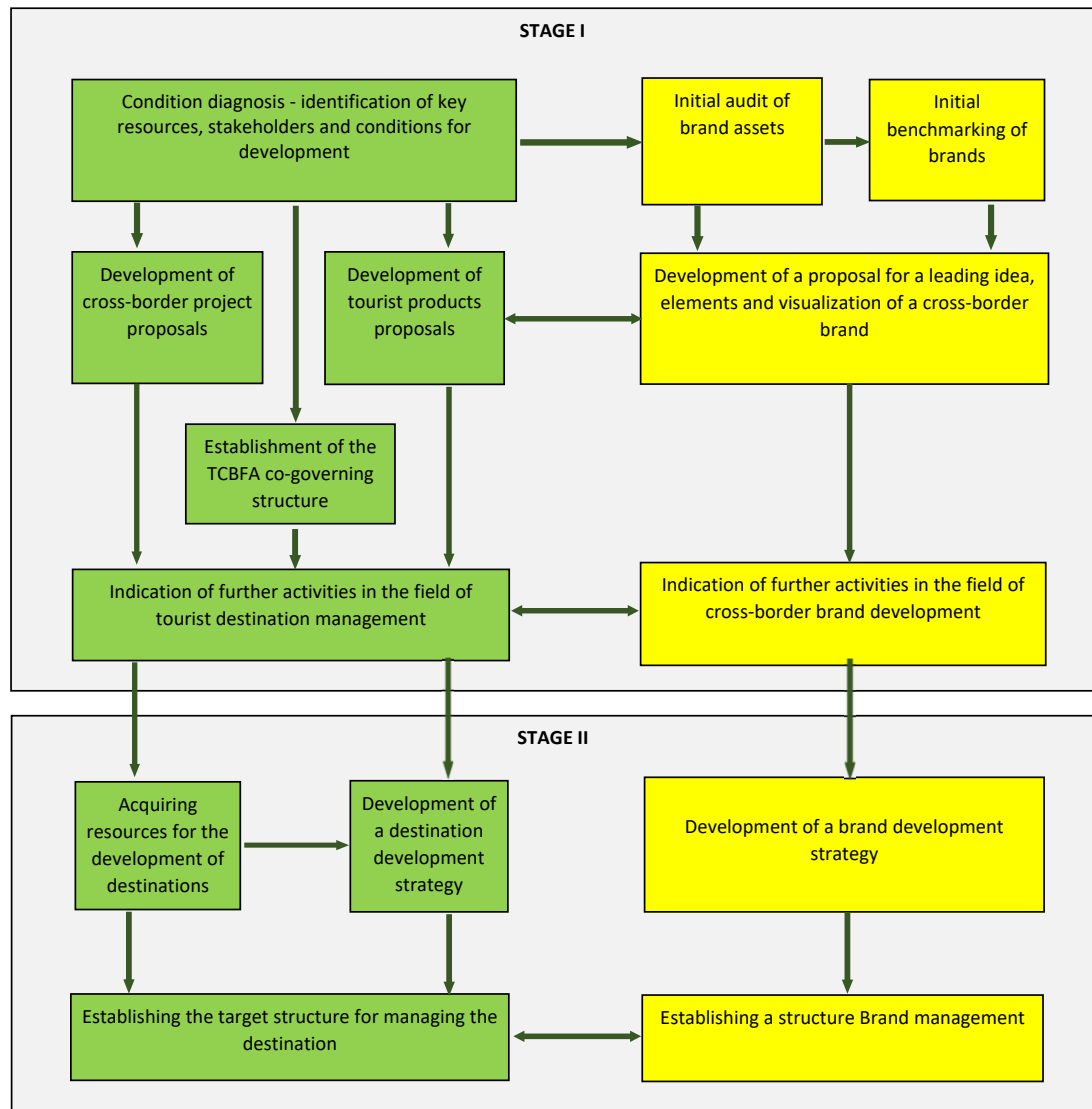


Fig. 8. The roadmap for the development of a cross-border tourist destination and brand

Source: Kurowska-Pysz et al. 2021

The second stage included further activities planned to be implemented after the end of the project, concerning the TCBFA design. It was assumed that their implementation will be the responsibility of the TCBFA coordination structure, which will become the co-managing structure of the destination along with the development of the destination. Its task would be to integrate various types of stakeholders and activate them for the development of the tourist function, to maintain the cross-border cooperation system of partners in the creation of a joint, competitive offer of tourist products and their promotion, as well as to ensure the durability of joint activities in the field of tourism, leading in the long-term to the creation of a cross-border tourist destination.

Based on that research and public consultations, the key resources necessary for the development of the destination and brand creation were identified. They included attractive natural values for tourists, with particular emphasis on legally protected areas. Anthropogenic values, including common

history and culture, were highly rated. In the context of the development of the TCBFA brand, four potential tourism concepts were defined, and recommended for use in further marketing activities:

1. 'Magical Borderland' – it was found that the concept, despite its tourist attractiveness, has no distinctive features on the scale of other borderlands. However, it may be thematically related to the leading concept and provide valuable inspiration for tourist products (e.g. in the field of family tourism), based on well-developed fairy-tale themes of the borderland.
2. 'Mysterious Land of the Yotvingians' – this concept turned out to be particularly capacious and unique, therefore it was considered the leading concept. It was based on the historical identity of the location, referring to early medieval times. It was reflected in the existing tourist offer and had the potential to build the leading idea of a tourist destination. In the opinion of both experts and stakeholders, the choice of this concept would give the TCBFA brand unique features and put it on the tourist map of Lithuania and Poland. In the context of this concept, it was proposed that the destination was promoted under the name Jatvingia.
3. 'Green retreat – Unhurried Tourism and Healthy Life' – the concept fit well with the fashionable trend of slow life and slow tourism. It allows for the building of an authentic offer referring to the preserved heritage of the region, including the culinary heritage. It was decided that the marketing message should be addressed to a precisely defined group of recipients interested in the values represented by the brand, such as: the uniqueness of the location, its naturalness, sustainable development and local character.
4. 'Shared Heritage' – the concept was considered to be a complementary proposition for the future tourist brand. The intention was to use the Lithuanian – Polish heritage reflected in the preserved tangible and intangible cultural heritage of both nations, with particular emphasis on famous people, including Czesław Miłosz and Emilia Plater.

The development of a tourist cross-border destination assumed the construction of a structure of coordination of cross-border cooperation under TCBFA. The barrier turned out to be the incompatibility of institutional solutions, which manifested itself in the existence of different legal and administrative systems, including a different administrative structures. On both sides of the border, the promotion systems were diverse. A relatively efficient system of promotion and tourist information functioned on the Lithuanian side (in the form of a network of Local Tourist Information Centers). There were no such institutions on the Polish side. Few promotional activities were undertaken by the local and regional authorities.

In such circumstances, it was concluded that the long-term development of the destination requires the creation of a new formula for coordinating the activities of local government units and other stakeholders from the Lithuanian-Polish border area. It became necessary to establish joint bodies, define the scope of their competences and the shape of functional relations between them. A structure of coordination of cross-border cooperation under TCBFA was developed, taking into account the existing administrative structures and the scope of competences of local government units in Lithuania and Poland.

Bearing in mind the many years of experience of Lithuania and Poland in the field of cross-border cooperation, solutions derived from the Euroregional cooperation were used and adapted to the needs of the future destination. Adopting such an approach meant it was necessary to establish bodies of a program, executive and control character. It was considered that the structure of the TCBFA should be flexible and as little bureaucratic as possible. Thanks to this, in an efficient and effective way, it allowed the implementation of the set goals and tasks. Bodies as the Council, Presidium, Secretariats and Task Forces were established (Fig. 9). Designing and then establishing such a cross-border structure resulted from the need to synchronize activities important for the development of destinations in the field of creating tourist products, promotion of destinations, commercialization of the tourist offer (including price shaping of this offer on both sides of the border), the distribution of tourist products (with the use of Lithuanian and Polish traditional channels, including tour operators and electronic channels), as well as the education and development of a professional staff developing the tourism market under the TCBFA.

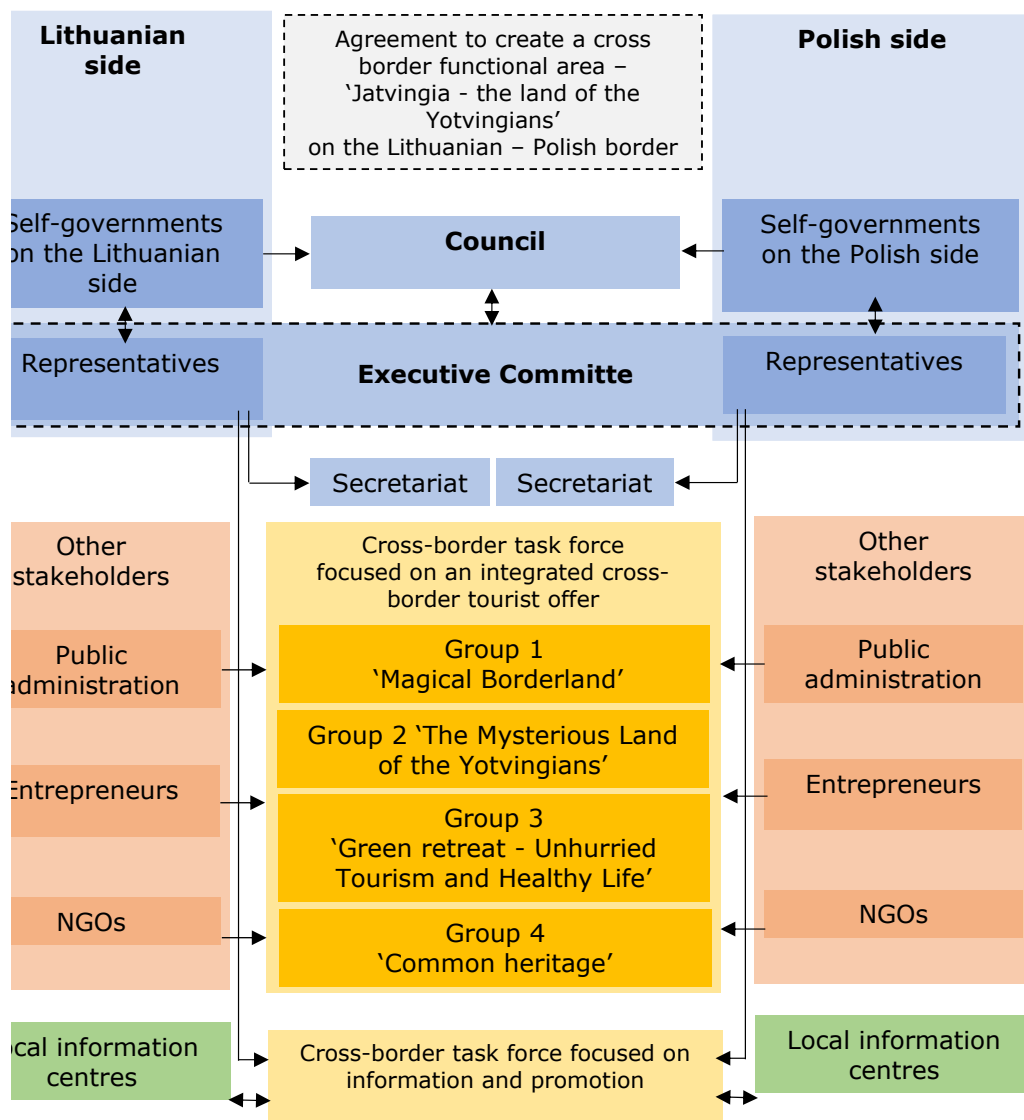


Fig. 9. Model of the organizational structure co-managing cross-border destination
Source: Kurowska-Pysz et al. 2021

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The example of the Lithuanian – Polish borderland proves that the TCBFA may be an instrument used in the development of cross-border tourist destinations. Such a destination meets the basic CBFA criteria, such as a cross-border nature, separation on the basis of functional criteria, sufficiently high intensity of cross-border links, as well as developed cross-border cooperation of stakeholders representing various sectors. Moreover, for the TCBFA established on the Lithuanian – Polish borderland, a structure of coordination of cross-border cooperation under TCBFA has been developed and it fulfills also the requirements for the management of the cross-border tourism destination.

Activities planned for the TCBFA, such as joint projects and individual cross-border projects created under each of the four tourist concepts are directly related to strengthening the functional linkages between actors from the tourism sector on both sides of the border and in this way, they contribute to the development of the cross-border tourism destination. Thus, the implementation of the

activities devoted to TCBFA may serve to strengthen the synergy effect and lead to the reduction of economic, social and environmental fragmentation of cross-border tourist destination, contributing to their multi-faceted development. Therefore, TCBFA is a specific type of cross-border area whose delimitation and development are based on functional links based on the distinguished potentials and resources of the borderland. The tourist potential can be one of them. When comparing Euroregions and EGTCs to the CBFA one can say that the CBFA is more oriented on cross-border cooperation on the functional level, whereas EGTCs and Euroregions are more focused on cross-border cooperation on the institutional level. The research on the Lithuanian-Polish border revealed that the TCBFA stakeholders have greater flexibility in shaping organizational structures (Kurowska-Pysz et al. 2021). They are also better prepared for the accession of EU funds.

The analyzed Lithuanian – Polish CBFA was created primarily for the needs of the development of the tourist function. Considering that the tourism function is dominant, the structure of coordination of cross-border cooperation under TCBFA has been adjusted to this, including task forces responsible for the development of the cross-border tourism offer as well as informational and promotional systems as well as task forces devoted to each of the four tourist concepts created for the TCBFA.

Such structure enables optimal use of the tourist potential. It facilitates more effective cooperation between stakeholders interested in the development of tourism, including representatives of the administration, economic and social sectors. It is a very unique advantage of the TCBFA that in such a cross-border structure companies are involved strongly, whereas in Euroregions and EGTCs public institutions dominate. The tourist industry must be strongly involved in cross-border cooperation when aiming for the development of cross-border tourism destinations. The CBFA offers this kind of engagement for the business.

As in the case of Euroregions, TCBFA in Lithuanian – Polish borderland can become a cross-border tourist destination with its own brand and unique tourist products. Due to the participation of a wide range of stakeholders, a flexible organizational structure and specific marketing objectives, the TCBFA structure of coordination can effectively fulfil the role of a DMO (destination management organization).

It should be emphasized that the example discussed documents only the first stage of building a cross-border tourist destination based on the TCBFA, which took place relatively recently. In the opinion of the authors, the transition to the next stage requires Lithuanian – Polish cooperation under the TCBFA. It should be firmly anchored in the mechanism of coordination of this cooperation which was developed as part of a project financed by the European Commission. The conclusion is that the future development of a cross-border tourist destination, including the implementation of the second stage of the process described above, will be directly related to the efficiency of this structure, which in practice is to take the place of, amongst others, Euroregional cooperation in this area. Therefore, a lot depends on the stakeholders involved in the development of the TCBFA and their interest in creating a cross-border tourist destination in this area. The priority was to establish cross-border task forces and working groups, thus expanding the group of entities that will be directly involved in the development of this destination. This is because this process cannot proceed effectively with only the involvement of a small number of entities, among which so far most were public institutions, local governments and non-governmental organizations, while the representation of the tourism industry was very modest. Ultimately, these relations should develop in a sustainable manner, as is the case in cross-border clusters and networks (Kurowska-Pysz 2016).

When considering the development of a cross-border tourist destination, one should also take into account the impact on this process of at least some barriers to cross-border cooperation (Kurowska-Pysz et al. 2018), as well as other external factors, such as for example, tensions on the Polish border with Belarus and the Kaliningrad Oblast, which negatively impact on interest in this tourist destination. Geopolitical issues significantly determine the future development of the Lithuanian – Polish cross-border tourist destination, but in other borderlands this type of influence may be exerted by other factors, such as the influx of migrants or climate changes affecting the attractiveness of the area to tourists.

An important catalyst for the development of destinations is joint projects, recommended by the authors (Kurowska-Pysz et al. 2021) involving all members of the TCBFA (including training on the development of agro-tourism, expansion of the network of tourist information points, etc.), as well as Lithuanian – Polish individual projects that fit into at least one of the above-described concepts for the development of tourism in the TCBFA area. Their success will determine the dynamics of the development of the cross-border tourist destination in this area.

The idea of the development of a cross-border tourist destination presented in the paper and the related structure of coordination of cross-border cooperation under the TCBFA, unfortunately, do not provide an answer to the question of how to ultimately manage such a destination. Should these tasks be related to the coordination of cross-border cooperation or should they be separated into a separate structure at a certain stage? Based on the results of the research conducted so far and taking into account the attitude of Lithuanian and Polish stakeholders, in this particular case, the optimal solution seems to be the creation of a coordinating structure performing the function of DMO (Destination Management Organization), which, after obtaining legal standing, could function as European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation. However, this problem requires further, in-depth research, which the authors intend to pursue.

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This research was funded by Gdynia Maritime University fund WZNJ/2022/PZ/09.