

## **INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN CITIES BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CITTASLOW NETWORK**

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### **A b s t r a c t**

International cooperation between cities is conducted in numerous spheres, including economic, social, and cultural. It is determined by various factors such as the similarities and previous interrelations between cities, a desire to exchange good practices for management and quality of life improvement and by economic conditions. An example of international cooperation between cities is the Cittaslow network.

The aim of this article is to present the concept of international cooperation between cities based on the example of the cities of the Cittaslow network and to identify the determinants and benefits of such cooperation.

The Cittaslow network is an affiliation of over 230 cities from all over the world. The reason for their cooperation is the similarities between them, in this case, with respect to their size and the development model they have adopted. Within the Cittaslow network, cooperation takes place between small cities which want to grow in accordance with the “slow” movement principles and make such cooperation very advantageous for the following spheres: environmental, social, economic and spatial.

## **MIĘDZYNARODOWY WYMIAR WSPÓŁPRACY MIAST NA PRZYKŁADZIE SIECI MIAST CITTASLOW**

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**Słowa kluczowe:** współpraca miast, determinanty i korzyści współpracy, sieć miast *Cittaslow*.

### Abstrakt

Międzynarodowa współpraca miast dotyczy bardzo wielu płaszczyzn, m.in. gospodarczej, społecznej i kulturalnej. Współpraca ta jest uwarunkowana licznymi czynnikami, wśród których się wymienia: podobieństwa miast, wcześniejsze doświadczenia we wzajemnych relacjach, chęć wymiany dobrych praktyk w zarządzaniu, poprawę jakości życia mieszkańców oraz uwarunkowania ekonomiczne. Przykładem międzynarodowej współpracy miast jest sieć miast *Cittaslow*.

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie idei międzynarodowej współpracy miast na przykładzie sieci miast *Cittaslow* oraz zidentyfikowanie determinant i korzyści współpracy między miastami.

Do sieci *Cittaslow* należy ponad 230 miast z całego świata. Źródłem współpracy tych miast jest ich podobieństwo, które w tym przypadku dotyczy ich wielkości i przyjętego modelu rozwoju. W ramach sieci *Cittaslow* współpracują miasta małe, które chcą się rozwijać na podstawie filozofii *slow*, a we współpracy z innymi podobnymi miastami upatrują wielu korzyści, zarówno w sferze przyrodniczej, społecznej, gospodarczej, jak i przestrzennej.

## Introduction

Over the last century, international relations have witnessed a trend of building positive relations not only on the macro-, but also on the micro-scale. On a micro-scale, cities have also been active in that respect. Partly, it is the result of a contemporary city-centric global economy model (TRZEPACZ et al. 2015, p. 375). Cities are becoming more relevant in international relations than the countries they are situated in. It is true that cities have limited capabilities for enforcing external policies on their own, but to a certain extent they can foster international cooperation between each other. They can enter into agreements and conclude contracts for cooperation with other foreign cities regarding various spheres of social and economic life. They can also belong to various organisations, associations or unions pursuing common goals.

The aim of this article is to present the concept of international cooperation between cities based on the example of the cities of the *Cittaslow* network and to identify the determinants and benefits of such cooperation. The issues discussed in the article result from an overview of the literature and an analysis of secondary data. An interest in cooperation between the cities of the *Cittaslow* network constitutes the basis for further research on its functioning in the future.

### **Concept, determinants and benefits of international cooperation between cities**

Cities have cooperated with each other since ancient times. The first city unions were the Greek *polis*. Another example were the spontaneous city unions called *hansa*. Those were relations between merchants of European

cities who mutually strived at facilitating the exchange of goods and trade cooperation. The most prominent was the German hansa, the legacy of which is still visible today as German cities are most active in cooperation today. Hansas fell out of favour in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, though the desire of cities to cooperate has persisted. Examples of the foundations of cooperation between cities in the contemporary world can be found in the establishment of unions of municipalities and cities of northern France and southern England after World War I and in the establishment of the European Economic Community after World War II, having developed over the years into the European Union.

If one looks at the evolution of reasons for cooperation between cities, one may note that after World War II the main reason for this cooperation was the desire to keep peace in Europe and in the world by fostering partnership and friendship between nations. In the 1990s, the determinants of cooperation included other reasons, e.g. striving for a better quality of life or fostering the unification of Europe. In terms of urban management, a tendency towards marketing was noted; that is why city residents and their needs became the core of all initiatives. Cooperation was increasingly intentional and objective-oriented. Although multiple circumstantial initiatives and projects are still pursued and implemented, there is increasing awareness of the benefits from more systemic and strategic cooperation involving more issues, viable in the longer run, reasonable and socially useful, which extend beyond economic calculations. The self-government practices force a paradigm shift from a competitive view to a cooperative and partner-like view (KACZMAREK 2016, p. 100–116).

Contemporary cooperation between cities is conducted in numerous spheres, including economic, social, cultural, environmental protection, development of tourism, city promotion, municipal economy, education, dialogue between organisations and institutions, etc. Cities also commonly engage in cooperative relations with other cities to solve practical problems related to urban management. Economies of scale in the provision of public functions, such as hospitals, airports, seaports and fire services justify such efforts among both contiguous municipalities and cities linked through networks (DOUGLASS 2002, p. 65).

The most popular example of international cooperation between cities is building partnerships. Twin towns are a form of direct cooperation between cities from different countries in order to achieve common interests of a political, cultural, economic, and informational nature as well as to exchange experiences in various fields (CZAPIEWSKA 2011, p. 41). Twin towns are referred to as friendship towns or twinning towns. In Anglo-Saxon countries they are also known as sister cities, while in socialist countries they are referred to as fraternal towns. Regardless of the nomenclature, the core principle of town twinning is international cooperation.

Cooperation between cities is, in certain situations, limited to interrelations between only two cities, but it is more often the case that its scope is wider and networks of cities and towns collaborating with each other are formed. There are two main types of networks of cities (FURMANKIEWICZ 2002, p. 5–24):

1. Multilateral (international organisations, Euroregions, national, regional and local associations);
2. Bilateral (divided cities, borderland and frontier areas, neighbourhoods and other bilateral relationships).

Cooperation between cities usually begins with casual contact which then leads to joint initiatives allowing for building formal and permanent cooperation that can even result in creating a network of cities cooperating with each other. Cities find cooperation extremely beneficial. Their activity of building international relations is also symbolic in nature as the openness of cities is a very important value during the times of globalisation. Entering into partnership agreements or forming city networks have recently become a crucial tool for the promotion of cities (BUŚ-BIDAS 2012, p. 300–315). In addition, cooperation between cities favours an exchange of experiences, the promotion of tolerance, mutual support, respecting cultural varieties and overcoming prejudices. According to TAYLOR (2004, p. 42), in city networks, cities need each other and all contribute to the well-being of the network.

Determinants of the development of cooperation between cities include similarities between such cities. They relate to the size of a city – small cities in general partner with other small cities, whereas bigger cities more often collaborate with other big cities. The city size was one of the main determinants of the establishment of Cittaslow, a network of small cities referred to further in this article. Other similarities between cities that often affect their cooperation include similar objectives and development directions, similar economic profiles, similar cultural development directions, interrelated historical heritage, a similar language, and also geographical location. Cooperation between cities situated close to each other is more extensive. Despite the development of information technology, geographical distance remains a barrier to their cooperation which, however, does not exclude it but constitutes a limiting factor. The extent, intensity, and nature of cooperation between cities also depends on the authority of territorial bodies and on the level of decentralisation in a given country. An important determinant of cooperation between cities is also the previous experiences in relations between them. Cooperation is built on the foundations of existing relationships. Prejudices or bad experiences from the past may make close cooperation, based on mutual trust, more difficult. It is not always an obstacle that cannot be overcome. For instance, although Poles are historically prejudiced against Germans, Polish

cities have the largest number of partnerships with German cities. Nevertheless, positive experiences constitute a perfect basis for the present intensity and durability of cooperation (KACZMAREK 2016, p. 113). This is the case because they inspire trust, which is the most important resource in cooperation. If trust is adequately high, it strengthens and extends cooperation and facilitates the resolution of problems that may occur. The partners' knowledge of each other, common goals and activities, common projects, similar problems, frequent and positive communication, transparent rules of cooperation, and similar or supplementary potential of cities all combine to foster mutual trust. Yet another important determinant of the development of cooperation between cities is an increased probability of sourcing EU funds when applying for them together. Therefore, it is sometimes only about economic conditions.

However, certain determinants are barriers to cooperation between cities. These include (KACZMAREK 2016, p. 104, 105):

- conflicting interests and particularism in partnerships,
- administrative and communication barriers,
- bad practices and habits of officials and partners (mental barriers),
- inability of partners to think strategically or in the long-term perspective,
- environmental, political, economic, and similar conflicts,
- formal and legal barriers,
- ignorance of benefits from cooperation (assessment of cooperation only in terms of quantitative and measurable objectives).

Notwithstanding various conditions of cooperation, the basis of this relationship is always noting how beneficial it can be for both sides, and the extent of cooperation benefits determines the intensity of intercity cooperation.

### **The Cittaslow network as an example of the development of international cooperation between cities**

Cooperation reaches a new level of development when there is a shift from an approach consisting of “establishment of cooperation between cities during the implementation of joint projects” to one consisting of “establishment of cooperation in order to implement joint projects in the future”. An example of such a development of international cooperation between cities from various countries is the Cittaslow International Network of Cities of the Good Life (Cittaslow for short). It is based on the principles of the slow philosophy whose core objective is to slow down the pace of people's lives. This concept also promotes an environmentally friendly and health-promoting lifestyle, considering individual human needs, with regards to the current and future generations, respecting and fostering the local and the unique in a globalised

world (SZELAŁOWSKA 2014, p. 194). The slow functioning of a city, despite slowing down people's lives, does not mean slowing down the economic growth of the city; quite the opposite, it means development through improving the quality of people's lives, increased attractiveness of the city and, thus, its increased competitive edge (AUGUSTYN 2011, p. 745). Cities cooperating in the Cittaslow network are supposed to employ the latest technologies and develop their advantages which, thanks to proper development strategies, are to give them a competitive edge. In cities growing by the slow philosophy principles, neither the historical and cultural heritage of the city nor its local specificity can be neglected. It is the specificity which is the foundation for the identity of the city. In the case of slow cities, it is crucial to harmonise the past and the present, taking into account future generations at the same time. "Living in a slow city and managing it means making slowness a core value, assigning meaning and tangibility to a time revolution led by those who for historical, cultural or environmental reasons resisted or resist the accelerations that the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought... It means giving oneself time to achieve quality in all aspects of urban life, slowing down in life, and reducing tensions in order to realise now and forever the value of flavours, colours, fragrances of the city and the world" (*Manifest miast SLOW...* 2011).

The slow city philosophy emerged in Italy from the concept of "slow food". The originator of that movement was C. Petrini, who was outraged by a new McDonald's restaurant opened beside the Spanish Steps in Rome. In 1999, the Cittaslow movement was born (*cittá* means a city in Italian), whose purpose was to extend the concept of "slow food" to other aspects of human life, thus offering local communities a new concept of life – a good life. The authorities of Bra, Greve in Chianti, Orvieto and Positano initiated the network. More and more Italian cities became interested in "a new quality of life" and became interested in improving the quality of life of its inhabitants, identifying themselves by being a good and quiet city as opposed to globalised cities always in a rush (BALL 2015, p. 565, 566).

To strengthen and formalise the network, in 1999 the association called the International Network of Cities of the Good Life – Cittaslow was established, which is a non-profit organisation focused on "fostering and disseminating a culture of the good life through research, experiments and new solutions for the organisation of the city" (*Międzynarodowy statut Cittaslow...* 2014). The Cittaslow network can be joined by a city with less than 50 thousand inhabitants. In individual cases, larger cities also can become members, but as a rule it is generally a network for small cities (MAZUR-BELZYŃ 2014, p. 41). Initially, cities are admitted to the international network and then create a national network. In Poland, it is the Polish National Network of Cittaslow Cities.

A city may join the network as an ordinary member or a supporting member. So-called ordinary members are any city admitted to Cittaslow which has committed itself to follow its principles and guidelines. Supporting members may be public institutions (provinces, counties, municipalities, cantons, metropolises, unions of municipalities, etc.) intending to support the network and to foster Cittaslow projects on its area. The Charter of Cittaslow identifies yet another group of entities important for its operation. These are so-called Cittaslow friends. Cittaslow friends can be cultural and scientific associations, chambers of commerce, trade associations, non-profit organisations, private companies, manufacturing and service companies, tourist companies and agricultural bodies. Cittaslow friends can support the activities of Cittaslow financially, by rendering various services, expert opinions or scientific cooperation on various projects. Cittaslow friends can also identify themselves as a "Cittaslow Friend" on their brochures, folders, flyers, digital materials, websites, etc. by using a special logo and, in the case of funding for specific projects – they can promote a project they support financially (*Międzynarodowy statut Cittaslow...* 2014).

As of May 2017, Cittaslow consisted of 235 cities from all over the world. The network is dominated by European cities – there are now about 180 of them. Second place in terms of the number of cities in the network is Asia – about 40 Asian cities foster the good life (*Cittaslow List* 2017). On other continents, the Cittaslow network is not well known, but it has been developing by admitting new members and fostering its activities, promoting the benefits that cities can achieve from being part of it and from organising the city by the slow movement principles. Growing interest in the development of the network resulted in signing the Manifesto of Cittaslow Cities by the European Parliament in March 2011, combining the 2020 EU strategy with the Cittaslow strategy.

In terms of the number of Cittaslow cities from a given country, Italy has the most – as many as 82 cities collaborate with each other within the network. In second place is Poland – 26 cities, whereas third place is Germany with 17 cities. As far as Asian countries are concerned, Turkey has the most Cittaslow cities (14), followed by South Korea (13 cities) (*Cittaslow List* 2017).

Possible benefits for a Cittaslow city include:

- 1) An increase in the satisfaction of city residents, thus a decrease in the migration of young people and others from towns to large cities;
- 2) An increase in demand for products and services, thus an increase in the investment possibilities of the city;
- 3) An increase in the number of investments aimed at providing residents with new places of work as well as an increase in distributable profits;
- 4) Economic development of the city thanks to non-decreasing domestic demand and the number of investments;

5) An increase in the attractiveness of the city from the perspective of tourists which, in turn, stimulates further economic growth;

6) Creation of a distinct, desirable image of the city resulting in a greater interest in it on the part of various managing entities, thus increasing its competitive edge.

Possible benefits for Cittaslow cities in the environmental, social, economic and spatial spheres are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
Benefits for sustainable cities which function by the Cittaslow principles and guidelines

Area	Expected developmental benefits for Cittaslow cities
Environment	clean air, low noise level, proper amount and quality of water, clean soil, high biodiversity and productivity of ecosystems, homeostasis, spatial availability and continuity of green, leisure, and recreational areas, biosecurity, etc.
Society	social justice, high level of basic needs satisfaction, high quality of life, good and healthy conditions of residence and work, high level of services for residents, lack of social conflicts, high level of security, citizenship, good social relations, responsibility for the common good, etc.
Economy	diversified economic structure, development based on the local potential, high productivity and efficiency, implementation of latest technologies, development of an economy based on knowledge, creativity and local entrepreneurship, developed urban public transport, infrastructure facilities, greater resistance to crises, etc.
Space	aesthetic and clean environment, architectural order, respect for cultural heritage, arrangement of public areas, high efficiency of operation of urban structures, efficient spatial management, lack of, or fewer, neglected and degraded areas, spatial order, etc.

Source: own analysis of data gathered by MIERZEJEWSKA (2004, p. 120).

These benefits can only be achieved in cooperation with other cities. Cooperation within Cittaslow has so far mainly been focused on the following joint initiatives and activities (SZELAŁOWSKA 2014, p. 219):

- courses in nutritional education in schools and kindergartens in accordance with the “slow food” philosophy,
- new projects aimed at protecting local products and crafts (re-discovering them),
- programmes of communication between local entities,
- extension of the pedestrian and cyclist zones,
- periodic inspections of water and air quality,
- creation of public green areas,
- establishment of construction companies which meet the environmental protection requirements,
- regulation of construction methods,



- standardisation of electromagnetic overhead installations,
- organic production growth,
- establishment of vegetable gardens in accordance with the “slow food” philosophy,
- promotion of local cultural events,
- publishing tourist guides to slow cities,
- designation of routes for tourists,
- promotion of hospitality among inhabitants.

Benefits seen by Cittaslow cities mean to a great extent opportunities stemming from cooperation. Even if representatives of the cities cannot see such benefits now, they expect them to emerge in the future. Thus, they engage in joint initiatives. To maintain good interrelations, they hold common festivals and promotional activities; they initiate joint undertakings and participate in international meetings of member cities where it is possible to exchange good practices in city management. Cittaslow cities are proud of belonging to an international network; it gives them a sense of exclusiveness and uniqueness. In addition, it is an advantage when applying for EU funding for various initiatives. This is due to the fact that cities in the network have a clear, transparent and achievable vision of development, do not operate in the market in a chaotic manner and their activities are organised and focused on the implementation of specific objectives (see: GRUSZECKA-TIEŚLUK 2013, p. 388–391).

## **Summary**

Contemporary cooperation between cities is conducted in numerous spheres. In international communication, there has been an increased focus on more systemic and strategic cooperation, which is less selective and more multidimensional, and not temporary, but long-term. An approach to building relations with other cities is undergoing a shift – from a competitive to a cooperative view. City authorities and, increasingly often, city residents themselves find such cooperation beneficial.

Cooperation between cities is determined by numerous factors, and the most frequently cited are the similarities between cities. Such similarities may be in regards to the size of cities, their geographical location, development objectives or competitive edges. They also include previous experiences in mutual relations which may sometimes become a barrier to further cooperation. Other reasons for cooperation between cities is the desire to exchange good management practices, joining the processes of the unification of Europe or the intent to improve the quality of life for the residents of cooperating cities. Sometimes, the reasons for cooperation include economic conditions,

since it is easier for cooperating cities to source external capital for joint initiatives.

International cooperation between cities is occasionally limited to embarking on a few joint undertakings, sometimes it is about cooperation between twin towns, and recently it is more often at a deeper and more complex level, which is reflected by the creation and development of networks of towns and cities. An example of such a network on a global scale is the Cittaslow International Network of Cities of the Good Life, affiliating as many as 235 towns and cities from all over the world. Those cities collaborate with each other because they find it very beneficial. Improvement of the quality of life of residents, greater attractiveness of cities for tourists, joint promotional campaigns and easier sourcing of capital (e.g. for city revitalization) are only a few of the benefits Cittaslow cities can enjoy. Therefore, the network is growing and is being joined by more and more new small cities.

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