

# CHAPTER 7

## POLAND

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### Introduction

Over the last 15 years, Polish local authorities have been endeavouring to take advantage of the intensification of relations at the government level and greater interest in Poland and Central Europe by China. **The number of Chinese cities and provinces among foreign partners of Polish regions has increased** (Skorupska, 2016). 11 Polish voivodeships out of 16 declare active cooperation with Chinese partners. Polish local governments are aware that cooperation with China must be treated as a long-term, demanding, but profitable investment.

The first objective of the chapter is to characterize the activities between Polish regions and Chinese provinces and cities – their intensity, scope, advantages and obstacles. When it comes to a broader perspective – the bilateral state government relations – the chapter answers the question whether there is any correlation between relations at the state level and at the regional level. Moreover, taking into consideration that one of the main objectives for the whole project is to analyse the correlation between the EU-China relations and paradiplomacy, the question is: do the voivodeships see any role for the EU in their activities with Chinese partners? Do they need any support from the Union to have more intense and effective cooperation?

In the first phase of the project an online survey was sent to all Polish voivodeships. All of them responded. In the second part of the project three territorial units were selected for a deeper analysis of the character of their cooperation with Chinese partners. The selected regions are quite diversified in a socio-economic sense, but they are also distinguished by their intensity in cooperation with China. Dolnośląskie voivodeship has renewed cooperation which has developed intensively since 2017. The Mazowieckie voivodeship case is interesting because of its privileged location and status (the capital of the country is in this region). The best known case in Poland is the partnership between Łódzkie voivodeship and the Sichuan province because of a rail connection between these regions' capital cities. However, here the cooperation of the first two regions will be referred to since the latter case is described in detail in other publications (Kamiński, 2019b; Mierzejewski & Chatys, 2018).

The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first one starts with some general information on the bilateral state relations, as well as the society perspective. There are also some basic characteristics of the paradiplomacy regulations in Poland. The objective of the second part is to characterise the sub-state unit relations with China and to present the research results. The article finishes with some conclusions and perspectives for future cooperation.

## Cooperation at the intergovernmental level

Despite the official visits to China of the Polish Prime Minister, Waldemar Pawlak, in 1994 and President Aleksander Kwaśniewski in 1997, in the first years after Poland's political and economic transformation, **Sino-Polish relations were correct, but not very intensive**. After 1989, relations with neighbouring countries and then the preparation to join NATO and the European Union were at the top of the Polish government agenda. Moreover, Chinese diplomacy at that time was focused on the "old" EU members. Poland's reluctance towards communist regimes was also an important factor (Szczudlik, 2014).

The first ever visit of the PRC's Chairman to Poland was of primary significance for the slight intensification of bilateral relations was. In June 2004, just after the accession to the EU, Hu Jintao paid an official visit to Poland.

The states signed a joint declaration upgrading their relations to a “friendly cooperation partnership” (*The People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Poland’s Joint Statement*, 2004). A few months later, the Polish government announced the *Republic of Poland’s Strategy for Non-European Developing Countries*. The document included claims that China is a priority country for Polish diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region (*Strategia RP w Odniesieniu Do Pozaeuropejskich Krajów Rozwijających Się*, 2004).

However, the real change in bilateral relations began at the time of the global economic crisis (from 2008), when the economic role of China increased very quickly. The Polish economy was overdependent on the European (mostly EU) market – more than 80% of trade and investments were conducted in Europe. Poland needed new markets and new sources of capital. Moreover, the government being aware of the rising position of China in the world, wanted to intensify also the political Sino-Polish relation. Polish foreign policy started to become more global. Cooperation with Asia, including China, was listed among the priorities of Polish foreign policy.

In August 2009, the branch of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade signed an agreement with the Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency<sup>42</sup>, as a result of which an information campaign for entrepreneurs from both sides was launched (Mierzejewski & Chatys, 2018).

The preparation for the Shanghai Expo 2010 was one of the more important events in the process of intensification of the relations. The exhibition was a chance to promote the Polish transformation model and cultural heritage to Chinese authorities and society. The event also had a regional dimension: delegation from the Pomeranian Voivodeship, headed by the Marshal Mieczysław Struk, presented the investment offer of that region and its cities (Nelke, 2010).

Another result of this intensified dialogue was the visit of the Polish President, Bronisław Komorowski, to China in December 2011. It was perceived as **a new opening in the bilateral relations**. The aim was to change the image of Poland, strengthen relations and improve economic development.

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<sup>42</sup> Nowadays, it is PAIH: Polish Investment and Trade Agency (*Polska Agencja Inwestycji i Handlu*).

The Polish President took part in three bilateral forums – an investment one in Shanghai, an economic one in Beijing and an educational one at the Beijing Foreign Studies University. **The main political result was the declaration of upgrading the relationships to a strategic partnership** (*Wspólne Oświadczenie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej w Sprawie Ustanowienia Partnerskich Stosunków Strategicznych*, 2011). The document announced a more intensive political dialogue at a high level, a new mechanism of cooperation at the level of vice ministers of foreign affairs, and **strong support for a new dimension to the bilateral relations – cooperation between regional and local authorities**. The document was a clear signal that Poland is an important partner for China. Poland was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to sign such a strategic partnership.

The intensive contacts were continued in 2012. During Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit to Warsaw in April, a new formula of cooperation between China and Central Europe – 16+1 – was established (Kaczmarek, 2015; Szczudlik, 2019). The new initiative was proof of the growing interest of China in this part of Europe. The Prime Minister presented China's new strategy towards Central and Eastern Europe.

The establishment of the strategic partnership was followed by other political, economic and regional initiatives. In November 2012, the Polish Prime Minister established an Inter-ministerial Team for Coordination of Activities for the Development of a Strategic Partnership between Poland and China. The Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency (PAIIZ) and the Ministry of Economy launched the "Go China" programme. It was an internet platform to collect economic information about China to help entrepreneurs launch business contacts in that country.

The Polish government engaged in subsequent Chinese activities. In 2013, Poland supported the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was seen as a chance to increase Polish exports to China, attract investment and improve infrastructure<sup>43</sup>. In March 2015, Poland submitted an application to the Asian Infrastructure Bank (AIIB) in order to obtain the status of a founding member. Supporters of Poland's participation in the AIIB hoped that, thanks to this,

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<sup>43</sup> However, no significant project for Poland has yet been launched under the Silk Road banner.

the trade balance of Poland with China would improve (*Polska w AIIB. Nasz kraj weźmie udział w chińskiej alternatywie dla Banku Światowego*, 2016).

After the change of the ruling political party in Poland in 2015 (The Law and Justice Party won the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015), there was continuity in the policy towards China. The new elected Polish president, Andrzej Duda, visited China in November 2015. He also took part in the 4th 16+1 summit held in Suzhou. The president confirmed the continuity in the Polish policy of strengthening bilateral relations and invited the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, to Warsaw. The official visit of the Chinese leader in Warsaw took place in June 2016. He took part in the International Silk Road Forum. The most important result of the visit was the declaration of **elevating bilateral relations to a “comprehensive strategic partnership”**.

Although the economic dimension has remained the main goal for Poland, the biggest problem in bilateral relations is the high and still rising trade deficit. In 2011, the deficit amounted to nearly 12 billion euros and it was at the level of 10:1 – Poland imported 10 times more from China than it exported to it. In 2015, the ratio increased to 11:1 (the deficit – to 18.6 billion euros), in 2016 and 2017 – to 12:1. The deficit reached 22 billion euros in 2017 and 24 billion in 2018 (*Syntetyczna Informacja o Eksporcie i Importie Polski Styczeń–Grudzień 2018 r. w Mln Euro*, 2019). **Poland’s goal is not to limit imports from China, but to expand exports to China.**

The goals towards China were not modified in 2017 and the representatives of the Polish authorities took part in important events. The situation started to change in mid-2017. A Polish expert in the bilateral relations writes about a “cautious approach towards the PRC” (Stanzel et al., 2016). Since the beginning of 2018 the representatives of the Polish government have openly admitted that the strategic partnership does not work well, and the deficit is still rising. The Polish government has also started to be more **cautious about Chinese investments**. The political dialogue has become less intensive. As the China analyst Justyna Szczudlik notices, “the modification of Poland’s approach is also connected with the wider global assumption such as the recent discourse that China might not only be a partner, but also a challenge”. **The lower number of bilateral meetings** observed at the central authorities’ level in 2018 also translated into a smaller number of visits and initiatives at the regional level of Polish-Chinese contacts.

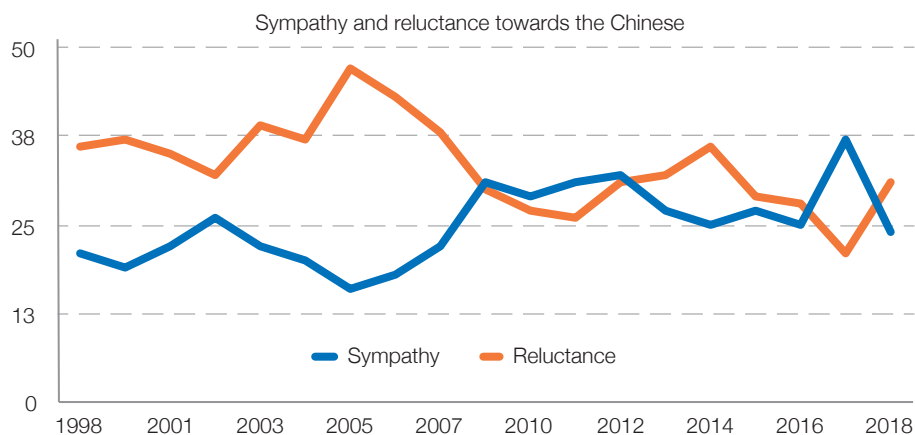
## Society level

**Polish society does not have a well-defined attitude towards China** and Chinese people. There is a downward trend when it comes to reluctance towards this nation, but with some volatility. In the last year of research (2018) conducted by the Polish public opinion centre, reluctance towards Chinese people prevailed over sympathy – 24% of Poles declared a positive attitude, 29% were indifferent and 31% stated a reluctance. However, one year before the results were just the opposite: only 21 % of Poles declared reluctance to China and 37% had a positive attitude in 2017. It is particularly interesting that the positive attitude to the Chinese declared in 2017 had been at the highest level since 1998 (*Komunikat z Badań. Stosunek Do Innych Narodów*, 2018). However, it is important to notice that the year 2018 was generally the time of worsening attitudes towards most of the researched nations<sup>44</sup>. The same short-term change can be observed in the Eurobarometer results. The “total ‘Positive’” and “total ‘Negative’” view of China was at the same level (42% in both categories), but one year earlier more Poles had been positive (48%) and fewer negative (37%). The highest level of reluctance and the lowest level of positive attitude towards the Chinese was observed in 2005, the year after joining the EU (47% – reluctance). This negative attitude towards the Chinese in 2005 could be connected with society’s focus on the process of European integration. In the next years, an increase in the number of people with a positive attitude could be observed (Figure 17).

Regardless of the general perception of China, there is a **growing interest in learning Chinese**. Sinology at Polish universities has become one of the most popular fields of study. At Warsaw University, in the oldest sinology department in Poland, there were 15 – 20 candidates for one place in the years 2010-2018. Currently, sinology can be studied at six universities in Poland, and more and more institutions offer Chinese language courses (Jastrzębska, n.d.).

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<sup>44</sup> Almost all European nations plus Americans, Israelis, the Vietnamese, and the Japanese.



**Figure 17.** Sympathy and reluctance towards the Chinese 1998-2018

Source: CBOS

The Confucius Institutes established in Poland play an important role in promoting the Chinese language, culture and a positive image of China. The first one was opened in Kraków at the Jagiellonian University in 2006. There are four more Institutes in Poland at the following universities: Wrocław, Adam Mickiewicz (Poznań), Gdańsk, and the Opole University of Technology. Moreover, two Confucian classes were launched at the Vistula University in Warsaw and at the Wrocław University of Technology. In 2018, the Institute, operating in Kraków, opened a branch, at the SWPS University in Warsaw (Przychodniak, 2018).

Poland also attracts students from China. Due to competitive prices in comparison to universities in Western Europe, the number of Chinese students in Poland is growing. In 2010/2011 it amounted to 515, in 2015/16 – 845, in 2016/17 – 953 and in 2017/2018 it totalled 1,164. In 2018 the students from China accounted for 1.6% of foreign students (the largest group were the Ukrainians – 52%) (*Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* 2018, 2018).

Looking from the Chinese perspective, Poland is not very well recognized in China. Opinion polls conducted before Expo 2010 showed that the Chinese society had neither positive nor negative associations with Poland. This was an impulse for Polish decision-makers to prepare a long-term promotional campaign to be carried out in China. The Polish authorities wanted to promote the

country, culture and language. The aim was also to **attract Chinese tourists and students** to visit Poland and study there, and to build people-to-people relations. These soft goals were seen as long-term investments. To support these goals, in May 2014 the Polish Institute was established in the Polish embassy in Beijing.

In mid-2016, there were more than 6,000 Chinese people with an official permit to stay, accounting for 2.7% of foreigners. At the end of 1989, the number of Chinese residents in Poland totalled approximately 600 persons. The dynamics started to change a little after accession to the EU. The Belt and Road Initiative was important for the recognition of the region of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, in the Chinese mind. Taking into consideration data from 2014-2016, the Chinese were the second fastest growing diaspora in Poland after the Ukrainians (Wardęga, 2017).

There was also an increase in the number of Chinese visitors to Poland in the three preceding years. The number of trips to Poland covering at least one night in 2015 amounted to 60,500, in 2016 – 81,200 and, in 2017, Poland was visited by 130,300 Chinese<sup>45</sup>. This data from GUS (Statistics Poland) do not recognize the aim of the visit. However, experts from Polish Tourism Organisation (POT) assume that about 75% of these visits had a touristic character (*Zagraniczny Ośrodek Polskiej Organizacji Turystycznej w Pekinie. Sprawozdanie Rok 2017*, 2018).

## Regional level – legislation

The territory of Poland is divided into 16 regions, called voivodeships, further divided into counties (districts). The lowest level of public administration is communes (municipalities). The current system was introduced in the 1990s. Administrative authority at the voivodeship level is shared between a central government-appointed governor, called the voivode, an elected assembly, and an executive chosen by that assembly. The leader of that executive is called *marszałek*.

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<sup>45</sup> Almost 130,000 tourists from China had visited Poland in 2018, by November 2018. There is no data for December 2018. Główny Urząd Statystyczny.



**The regulations regarding the international cooperation of local governments are found both in the Constitution and in local government acts.** Article 172 para. 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997 states that all levels of local governments have “the right to join international associations of local and regional communities and cooperate with local and regional communities of other countries” (*Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, 1997).

More detailed regulations concern the international activity of the voivodeship self-government. According to the Regional Governments Act of 5 June 1998, the *sejmik* (provincial legislature) adopts the priorities of foreign cooperation of the voivodeship, defining the main goals, geographical preferences of future cooperation and intentions regarding membership in international regional associations. All the activities must comply with the Polish domestic law, as well as the state’s foreign policy and its international commitments, within the competence of the province’s authorities. A resolution on a region’s international cooperation priorities, and all international initiatives, must be approved by the minister responsible for foreign affairs. The law treats the international activity of the regional government as one of the basic elements of formulating and implementing the voivodeship development strategy (*Ustawa o Samorządzie Województwa*, 1998). In addition, the regional government has among its statutory tasks “organizing cooperation with the structures of regional self-government in other countries and with international regional associations”.

Separate regulations cover cross-border cooperation. Initially, it was regulated in the documents of the Council of Europe. The European framework convention on cross-border cooperation between communities and territorial authorities, drawn up on 21 May 1980 in Madrid, known as the Madrid Convention, was ratified by Poland in 1993. The Convention obliges the state to facilitate and support cooperation between cross-border communities and local authorities, thus contributing to the economic and social progress of border areas.

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is a relatively new legal instrument of territorial cooperation of the EU. Although the EGTC assumes the possibility of cooperation between territorial units not only from border areas, so far the existing EGTCs with the participation of Polish entities have covered only cross-border areas.

## Poland-China Paradiplomacy

The geography of the local government international activities corresponds with Polish foreign policy priorities. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was a period of building new relations, primarily with partners from the neighbouring countries and from the European Union. After Poland's accession to the EU, Polish regions became more attractive to more geographically distant countries. There were more activities with Asian countries, particularly with China. Many delegations from China began to come to Poland to observe the situation of Polish cities, regions and possibilities of cooperation. China recognises the growing importance of Poland because of its political and economic stability, and its position in the European Union (Mierzejewski, 2016; Szczudlik-Tatar & Skorupska, 2014). The increase in the number of partners from China was the result of both the interest of the Chinese authorities and business in closer relations at regional levels, and of Polish foreign policy priorities. Local authorities have benefited from the intensification of political relations. Paradiplomacy gained the political support of Warsaw and Beijing.

**Upgrading Polish-Chinese relations to a strategic partnership in 2011 became a symbol of a closer cooperation between the two countries.** However, the relations at the top level are not sufficient to exploit the full potential of the partnership. Local administrations are best positioned to stimulate the development of practical cooperation. The important role of cooperation at the regional level was emphasized in the strategic partnership declaration. One of the points of the document was to reinvigorate local cooperation between cities and regions. Article seven of the agreement stated that “both sides express their satisfaction with current stage of local governments exchange and will promote interprovincial and intercity cooperation, in order to deepen understanding between two countries' societies, promote local economy development and cultural and educational exchange”.

Moreover, it was agreed to establish **the Polish-Chinese Regional Forum**. It was supposed to serve as a platform for establishing contacts with local authorities, universities and cultural institutions. The first Regional Poland-China Forum was held in April 2013 in Gdansk on the initiative of the authorities of the Pomeranian Voivodeship. The next one was organized by the Chinese side and the meeting of the territorial authorities of both countries

took place in Guangzhou in June 2014 in the Guangdong province. Between 2015 and 2016 subsequent forums were held in Łódź and then in Warsaw, respectively. The organisation of the last forum was combined with the visit of China's President Xi Jinping to Poland, in June 2016. Unfortunately, the forum planned for 2018 did not take place. It was postponed to 2019 and it was supposed to take place in Chengdu (the capital of Sichuan, the Łódzkie region partner). However, despite the interest of regions and provinces, there is no certainty that the forum will be organized.

The "16 + 1" Initiative, a forum for 16 Central European countries and China, is another platform for meetings. There are also thematic forums, including a forum for representatives of Chinese provinces and cities, as well as regional and local governments of Central Europe. Apart from the representatives of local authorities, there is attendance from business representatives. The first meeting of local and regional leaders from China and Central and Eastern Europe was held in Chongqing in 2013. The meeting was devoted to the cooperation and development of territorial units from China and CEE. The next meeting took place in Prague in July 2014, and the main subject discussed was the mechanisms of supporting the economic cooperation of local authorities in the "16 + 1" format. An important event was the establishment of the Association of Chinese Provincial Governors and Presidents of the Regions of Central and Eastern Europe. Representatives of local authorities and entrepreneurs also took part in the newly created Chinese Investment Forum, whose task was to promote economic cooperation, trade and investment. The third local and regional government forum was held in Tangshan, in the Hebei province in 2016. It was accompanied by another meeting of the Association of Governors of the Chinese Provinces and the Presidents of the Regions of Central and Eastern Europe (Mierzejewski & Chatys, 2018). The meetings of the Association were attended by, among others, representatives of regional offices from Łódź, Warsaw and Lublin. Representatives of the cities were also present at the meeting. The cities of Uniejów, Łęczyca and enterprises from the Łódzkie region also presented their offer. The fourth Local Leaders' Meeting of the Central and East European countries and China "16+1" was held in October 2018, in Sofia. The motto of the event was "Global Thinking, Local Action" (*Outline of China-Central and Eastern European Countries Cooperation in Sofia*, 2018)

Additionally, **as part of the 16 + 1 initiative, the *Forum of Mayors of the Cities* was established.** Sofia was the host of the first forum in 2016. The main topic of the meeting was the promotion of tourism and culture. Another forum, one year later, was organized in the capital of Montenegro and the main theme was “Green Cities”, sustainable development, and environmental protection in general (Mierzejewski & Chatys, 2018).

Another important political and economic initiative, which is interesting for regions, is the Belt and Road initiative. The concept is seen as an opportunity not only for countries, but also for cities and regions. It is presented as a chance to strengthen trade and attract Chinese investment, including in infrastructure.

The third multilateral platform for cities and regions is the local cooperation in the EU. There are some initiatives and programmes organized by the Committee of Regions, the representation of European local and regional units in the EU, which offer the possibility to exchange experience. Most activities are concentrated in the fields of regional policy, urban planning, smart cities, and generally sustainable development. The beginning of the EU-China dialogue on regional policy dates back to the end of 2004 at the 7th China-EU Summit. On 15 May 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on regional policy cooperation was signed to exchange information and best practices on experiences in setting up and implementing cohesion policy. The launching of the exchange programme known as CETREGIO (Chinese European Training on Regional Policy) was an important bilateral initiative. In the period 2010-2014, 220 Chinese decision makers from all 31 provinces shared experience and good practices in more than 45 regions of 17 EU Member States. The Dolnośląskie voivodeship was among the regions was. Another example of cooperation was the China-EU Partnership on Urbanization. It was set up in 2012 and aims at promoting exchanges and cooperation in sustainable urban development (Kamiński, 2019a).

Although the most considerable increase in regional contacts occurred in the period after Poland's accession to the EU and the signing of the Polish-Chinese strategic partnership, the history of the first contacts at the local level dates back much further, to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. **The cooperation between Pomorskie voivodeship and China has the longest history.** It is connected with the first Chinese-foreign company Chipolbrok (Chinese-Polish Joint

Stock Shipping Company) established in Gdynia in 1951, with the headquarters in Shanghai (Wróbel, 2016). In the mid-1980s, an agreement was signed to establish friendly relations between the former Gdańskie voivodeship and Shanghai, the oldest Polish-Chinese partnership agreement. The agreement with Shanghai was renewed in 2005 by the new voivodeship – Pomorskie<sup>46</sup>. The participation of Pomorskie in Expo 2010 in Shanghai was an important event for this partnership. It was the only Polish region which took part in the exhibition. The representatives of the voivodeship and some Pomorskie cities (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot, and Słupsk) presented their offer. They also prepared seminars on subjects such as the cooperation of universities, exchange of students and scientists, environmental protection, tourist offer and economic issues. Events were accompanied by artistic performances.

## Survey results

All the Polish voivodeships adopted international cooperation priorities in the years 1999-2000, after the regional self-government reform in Poland. China was indicated by seven voivodeships (Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Lubelskie, Lubuskie, Łódzkie, Pomorskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Zachodniopomorskie) as a direction of cooperation, out of which only three indicated the names of the partner provinces. In addition, Śląskie identified Asia as a potential direction of co-operation. In the following years, after Polish entry into the EU, the list of potential or actual partnerships was expanded on the occasion of the adoption of new priorities. Chinese provinces appeared in the documents of the Dolnośląskie, Małopolskie, Opolskie, Świętokrzyskie and Wielkopolskie voivodeships, while Asia was generally indicated in Mazowieckie and Podkarpackie voivodeships. **Only one region (Podlaskie) did not indicate directly China or Asia as a direction of cooperation**<sup>47</sup>. Changes in priorities confirm the thesis of increasing interest of Polish regions in distant Asian countries.

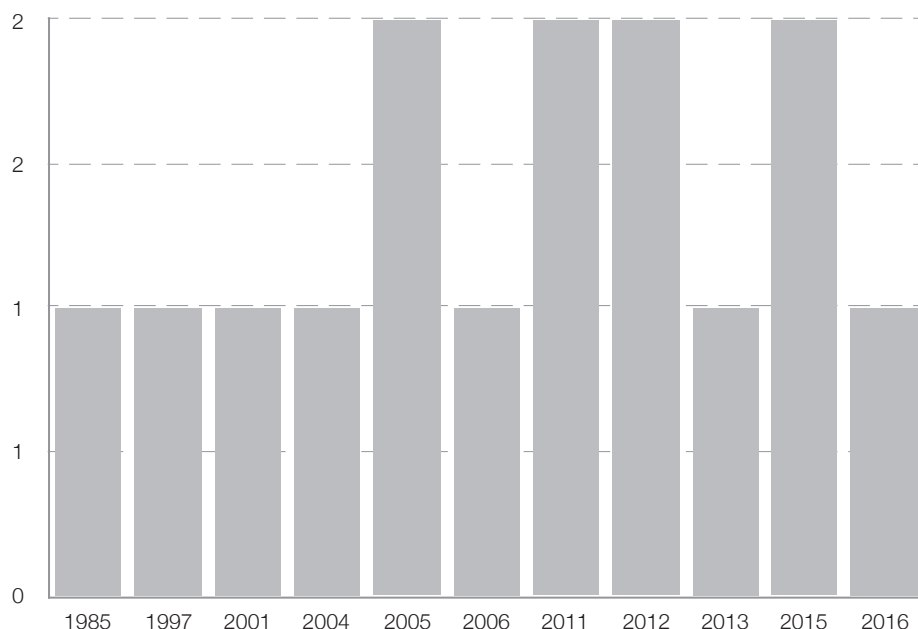
<sup>46</sup> The Pomeranian Voivodeship was established as a result of the local government reform.

<sup>47</sup> There is just one sentence about other directions that can be important for the region.

Cooperation with Chinese provinces was declared by 13 voivodeships at the beginning of 2017, of which only two – Zachodniopomorskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie – defined those contacts as not active (which means that no action had been taken in the previous two years, however, it does not mean that cooperation is not possible in the near future or there are not any contacts between the partners). Only three regions – Świętokrzyskie, Podlaskie and Wielkopolskie – did not have any partners in China. However, the latter two regions were planning to establish this type of partnership in the future. **Most regions had one partner in China**, except for Mazowieckie and Śląskie, which declared cooperation with two provinces.

**Only two out of 15 declared partnerships have not been formalized** yet. However, the beginning of co-operation does not always coincide with the date of the partnership's formalization. Signing a contract or a letter of intent is usually preceded by at least a few months or sometimes several years of relationship focused on getting to know one another, agreeing on principles and spheres of cooperation. Nevertheless, when analysing these dates, there are some regularities. There is a connection between the signing of new contracts and the broader context in international and bilateral relations. Only Pomorskie declares the beginning of cooperation in the 1980s. The next two partnerships were established after the system transformation in Poland (Dolnośląskie, 1997 and Zachodniopomorskie, 2001) but before EU accession. EU membership had a significant influence on Poland's position in the world. The Polish regions became more attractive partners for China. Between 2004 and 2006, four new relationships were established. Then, there were no new partnerships until 2011, when the strategic partnership between the countries was signed. In the years 2011-2012, four contracts were established. Initiatives such as the "16 + 1" and the announcement of the "Silk Road" concept resulted in new co-operation agreements. In the 2013-2016 period, four partnerships were launched. In the case of Dolnośląskie it was the renewal of an agreement and cooperation with Anhui in 2017 (Figure 18).

**In most cases the cooperation initiative was on the Chinese side.** Polish regions were often just one of the stages of longer tours around Europe. The increasing number of Chinese delegations visiting the Polish regions and cities were interested in the Polish experience in system transformations, and



**Figure 18.** New partnerships of Polish regions with Chinese provinces 1985-2016

Source: own elaboration

regional policy and were keen to sign letters of intent or cooperation agreements, but this did not always entail immediate action.

## Regions and cities

Polish-Chinese relations are characterized by **high asymmetry**. This concerns both the population (the number of people living in some provinces exceeds the number of inhabitants of the whole of Poland) and the economic potential. In spite of these differences, the cooperation is most often carried out at the level of the Chinese province and the Polish voivodeship, or between cities. The exception is Pomorskie, whose partner is the city of Shanghai (a city with provincial status). This Polish region, with about 2.3 million inhabitants, cooperates with the city of Shanghai, which has the status of a separate city, and has a population of about 23 million.

**Table 29.** The cooperation between Polish voivodeships and Chinese Provinces

No.	Region	Chinese province	Beginning of cooperation	Active/ not active
1	Dolnośląskie	Anhui	1997/2017	active
2	Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Hubei	2011	active
3	Lubelskie	Henan	2005	active
4	Lubuskie	Hainan	2006	active
5	Łódzkie	Sichuan	2013	active
6	Małopolskie	Jiangsu	2004	active
7	Mazowieckie	Shandong	2015	active
		Hebei	2016	active
8	Opolskie	Fujian	2012	active
9	Podkarpackie	Guangxi	2011	active
10	Pomorskie	Shanghai (city)	1985/2005	active
11	Śląskie	Liaoning	2012	active
		Shanxi	2015	active
12	Warmińsko-mazurskie	Heilongjiang	2005	not active
13	Zachodniopomorskie	Guangdong	2001	not active

Source: own elaboration

The map of partnerships at the level of regional cooperation is complemented by relations between cities. According to data from the National Institute of Local Government (NIST), **almost 20% of the 100 largest cities in Poland declare cooperation with at least one partner from China** (only the City of Łódź declares three partners in the PRC and Elbląg – two partners). 10 out of the 16 regional capital cities have partners in China. Among them are Poznań, Kielce and Białystok, cities from the voivodeships which currently do not have partners in China. In two other cases the partner city is also the capital of the province which is a partner for the Polish region – this is the situation of Łódź-Chengdu and Katowice-Shenyang partnerships. These are



examples of cooperation facilitating, but also strengthening the partnership with such a remote yet important partner. In the case of Łódź and Łódzkie Voivodeship, the cooperation at these two levels has resulted in the opening of a city and regional office in Chengdu, the partner city.

### Local partners and the sphere of cooperation

Developing relationships on several levels (with different types of local partners) gives more chance for long-lasting and effective partnerships. Regional governments which initiate international cooperation involved higher education institutions, scientific institutes and entrepreneurs in common initiatives with foreign regions. **All the voivodeships which declare active cooperation with Chinese partners additionally indicate the involvement of universities in joint activities.** Polish language courses are opened in partner provinces, representatives of territorial units promote their regional universities, encouraging Chinese students to come to Poland, and organize student exchanges and internships. A China analyst from local universities also assists the local government in organizing visits, conducting projects, and promoting the region and local business.

Local business is another important partner frequently involved in joint ventures. 10 voivodeships point to entrepreneurs and various types of business entities as important local partners in cooperation with China. In many regions, **the economic dimension has become the main objective of partnerships.** Entrepreneurs from both countries are invited to study tours, conferences, and also to represent their regions in their partner's country. Eight out of 13 regions indicate the support for local business as an advantage of cooperation with China. Two regions (Łódzkie, Pomorskie) have regional offices in China, in their partner's provinces. Business missions, participation in fairs and economic missions are among the most frequently mentioned forms of cooperation.

In the case of cooperation with partners from Eastern Europe or Asia, the regional authorities provide additional legitimacy for business partners. Business contacts can also be an inspiration or a starting point for broader cooperation. An example of a local government partnership where it was the business that started the contact is Łódzkie voivodeship. In 2013, a private company opened a freight rail link from Łódź to Chengdu, the capital of the

Sichuan province in central China. Both the city and the region joined the initiative later. The city of Łódź has the ambition to become a transport hub for reloading goods. Due to the prospect of further development of cooperation, the Chengdu Regional Office was opened in 2014 in Łódź. A letter of intent between Łódzkie and the Sichuan province was signed in 2015.

On the other hand, there is an example where the cooperation between a region and a province came first and business links were established later. The beginning of the cooperation between Opolskie and the Fujian Province dates back to 2012. In January 2017, the Hongbo Company from Fujian launched their investment in Opole. They started to produce LED lamps in Poland.

**Cultural and educational institutions are involved in collaborating with the Chinese provinces less often than universities and business.** Among the local partners, non-governmental organisations joined the partnerships the least often (only in the case of two voivodeships). Cultural interdependencies or school exchanges are more often the domain of partnerships which are geographically closer. However, delegations from the local government or the economic organisation are often accompanied by cultural groups promoting the region or country. Promoting the Polish culture is indicated as a cooperation profit by almost all the regions cooperating with China. In terms of education and culture, the Confucius Institutes, which are opened at Polish universities, play an important role. Their task is to promote the Chinese culture and language in other countries. A good example are the cases of Opolskie and Dolnośląskie, where the representatives of the CI support the regional government in organizing the visits.

## Problems

Among the major difficulties, the representatives of Polish regions most often report the large **geographical distance** (11 regions) and the **high costs** (10 regions) involved in cooperation. Much less often (in the case of two, three regions) language barriers or cultural differences cause some issues. This is undoubtedly the result of the already mentioned enhancement of the competences of the people involved in cooperation. Some regions (3) also indicate inadequate commitment of Chinese partners to the cooperation. The representatives of provinces insist on signing a document formalizing the

cooperation, but after that, they lose interest and the intensity of activities and the number of meetings decrease.

## Case studies

### Dolnośląskie

International cooperation is an important element of development for Dolnośląskie Voivodeship. The region, situated in southwestern Poland, borders the Czech Republic and Germany. As a result of its geographical location there are many partnerships with the regions from the neighbouring countries (three German lands and five Czech counties). In addition, Dolnośląskie also has partners in other European countries, as well in Georgia, Brazil (albeit the cooperation is not very active) and in China. The region is also active in multilateral initiatives, such as the NOVUM European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation and the Odra Partnership<sup>48</sup>.

The document setting forth the priorities of the international cooperation of Dolnośląskie, adopted in March 2016 by the regional parliament, starts with a statement on the compatibility of international cooperation actions of the region with the assumptions of Polish foreign policy, respecting the unitary system of the state and its internal law. The first chapter of the document also indicates the role of paradiplomacy in the state foreign policy:

“In connection with the contemporary processes of globalization and decentralization of tasks of diplomacy carried out by the administration at the governmental level, public diplomacy realized in the local government dimension became an important aspect of international contacts. The activity of the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship in the field of international relations fully falls under it and makes a significant contribution to the foreign policy of the state” (*Priorytety Współpracy Międzynarodowej Województwa Dolnośląskiego*, 2010).

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<sup>48</sup> The informal cooperation network of four western Polish regions and four East German lands established in 2006.

Cooperation with China is included in the document in the sub-chapter dedicated to non-European partners, however, the name of the province is not specified. The title of the fragment discussing the cooperation with more distant partners indicates the character of the actions taken in this kind of cooperation: “Contacts with partners from non-European countries as an element supporting the internationalization of enterprises and the economic development of the region” (*Priorytety Współpracy Międzynarodowej Województwa Dolnośląskiego*, 2010). As noted in the document, the dynamics of international contacts and the economic situation in Europe and in the world make it necessary to continue and further develop cooperation with, among others, Asian countries, including China. The document also points out other local subjects/entities that are recommended to cooperate to create “favourable conditions for exports and foreign investments”. This means economic chambers and associations of entrepreneurs and employers (*Priorytety Współpracy Międzynarodowej Województwa Dolnośląskiego*, 2010).

Currently, the Lower Silesian Agency of Economic Cooperation Ltd. (Dolnośląska Agencja Współpracy Gospodarczej – DAWG), a company with a 100% stake held by the Self-Governing Authority of Dolnośląskie, operates on its behalf and for its benefit. The Agency is responsible for supporting entrepreneurship, stimulating the region’s innovation and the competitiveness of the SME sector, as well as shaping the image of the voivodeship abroad. In July 2017, the Agency launched a project, financed from the Regional Operational Programme entitled “Gaining new sales markets and building brand recognition in Dolnośląskie at home and abroad”. It was the first such a comprehensive project on economic diplomacy in the voivodeship, with a budget of almost 1.4 million PLN.

“DAWG is the implementer of the economic diplomacy project of our region, in several locations we will organize the promotion of our province” (Interview with Officials in Dolnośląskie Marshal’s Office, personal communication, 2018)

Among the companies which are the showcase of the region and invest in China are *Selena* (a global producer and distributor of construction chemicals) and *KGHM*. “Dolnośląskie is characterized by the highest share of exports

in regional GDP in Poland”. The region also belongs to the voivodeships which have the largest share in generating domestic exports. According to the data for 2014, the main directions of the region’s exports were Germany (33.9%), the Czech Republic (10.8%), the United Kingdom (7.1%), France (5.9%) and then China (3.8%) (*Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Dolnośląskiego 2030*, 2018).

The Strategy for Development of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship 2030, adopted in autumn 2018, is another important document **confirming the priority of the economic cooperation**. The strategic objective is to effectively use the economic potential of the region, while the operational objective is to strengthen the national and European competitiveness of the region and its brand. Strategic activities include: economic promotion, supporting entrepreneurship and development of business environment services, development of the economic network, including cluster initiatives; and support for the internationalization of enterprises (*Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Dolnośląskiego 2030*, 2018).

**The history of cooperation with Chinese partners dates back to the 1990s.** In 1997, an agreement was signed between the Wrocław region<sup>49</sup> and the Anhui province. Although the partnership was formally taken over two years later by the newly created province, no joint actions were taken. In 2017, the Chinese side announced a desire to renew cooperation through the Polish consulate in Shanghai. On the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of signing the agreement, over 70 delegates from China visited the capital of the region and a cooperation agreement was reinitiated. The document on cooperation was also renewed by the Dolnośląskie Chamber of Commerce, which had co-operated with its Chinese counterpart in 1997.

From the beginning of the cooperation, the stress was put on the economic sphere. A significant part of the Chinese delegation in the spring of 2017 were entrepreneurs interested in potential cooperation and investments. Both regions focus on innovation. The Anhui Province has the development of new technologies among its goals.

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<sup>49</sup> Before the local and regional government (1998) there were 49 voivodeships. Wrocław voivodeship was one of them.

“This province was initially perceived as such an agricultural province; but later we started to receive information that this province was chosen by the Chinese government to develop new technologies .... Dolnośląskie is also innovative ... also from this point of view, this province seems good for cooperation” (Interview with Officials in Dolnośląskie Marshal’s Office, personal communication, 2018).

The second sphere of cooperation is connected with academic activities. During the Anhui representatives’ visit to Poland in 2017 **a special forum for the universities from both sides was organized**. The contract was signed, inter alia, by the Medical University of Wrocław, which is particularly important here. The medical industry/sector is the third sphere of cooperation. The Anhui province wants to promote Chinese natural medicine.

“The structure of this delegation that came to us – it defined our ideas. It was a large business delegation and therefore we count on economic cooperation and building relationships between companies. It was also an incentive for Chinese investors to come to our region and do their businesses here. The second issue is the cooperation of universities... there were probably eight-nine universities at our place; we have made such an inter-university forum, in which all our Wrocław universities participated – ranging from the Wrocław University of Technology to the Wrocław University and private schools such as the College of Banking and the College of Logistics and Transport. The College of Logistics and Transport is very active in this Chinese field” (Interview with Officials in Dolnośląskie Marshal’s Office, personal communication, 2018).

The fourth area of cooperation is **city partnerships**. Two Chinese cities from the Anhui Province (Bozhou and Luan) were interested in cooperation. Finally, Bozhou established cooperation with the City of Legnica. The relationship will be developed in cultural cooperation and the tourism sector. To encourage Chinese tourists to visit Dolnośląskie, the region was planning to sign an agreement with the Central Bohemian Region – the region around Prague (the Czech Republic) to present a joint offer, in order to attract Chinese tourists also to come to the Polish region. The Lower Silesian Tourist Organization is responsible for this cooperation.

“The Anhui province is considered to be a very attractive tourist destination, the Chinese go there very willingly. It is a very old and very photogenic province. It is popular among film producers. Some scenes from the movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* were shot in Anhui. We also have a guide published in Polish about the province (the Adam Marszałek publishing house). So, this province is also promoted for tourists” (Interview with Officials in Dolnośląskie Marshal’s Office, personal communication, 2018).

In the autumn of 2017, the first economic forum for entrepreneurs from Anhui and Dolnośląskie took place in Wrocław. The next year, in May 2018, a “return visit” of the Polish region to China was arranged with the Marshal of the Region’s participation. Representatives of the Marshal’s Office were accompanied by an economic delegation. Dolnośląskie presented its economic and tourist offer. In cooperation with DAWG, two economic forums were organized at the Polish Consulate in Shanghai and at Hefei, the capital of Anhui. Among the prospective sectors for cooperation, the agency selected the food, photovoltaic, electric vehicle and tourist industries. One of the elements of such meetings were B2B talks – direct talks of companies from both countries. One of the first effects of contacts was the investment of *Capchem*, which will produce lithium-ion batteries in Dolnośląskie.

In the opinion of the representatives of the region, **the attitude of Chinese partners is changing considerably**. Even a few years ago, the visits of the Chinese were very official, and the talks were on general subjects. They did not result in any concrete projects. However, recent visits from the partner province were very well prepared, the Chinese are now very engaged in cooperation, present a concrete offer of joint activities and invite the representatives of the region to visit their province. They also encourage Polish students to come to their universities, and presented scholarship offers.

“We also note an evident change in the attitude of the Chinese side towards us over the past years; the staff that came to us was completely new. Now there are people, who have been working in this administration for two-three years. They are very young for China. And they have a whole new outlook on many things (...) there was a moment when they only wanted to come

to us – and now it has changed” (Interview with Officials in Dolnośląskie Marshal’s Office, personal communication, 2018).

Regardless of the partnership with Anhui, the representatives of the region also participate in other bilateral and multilateral initiatives with partners from China. In January 2015, a delegation from the voivodeship took part in meetings on regional policy in Beijing, Tianjin and Guangzhou within the EU CETREGIO programme. Local entities such as regional development agencies, chambers of commerce and tourist agencies were also involved in the project. However, in the case of Dolnośląskie, activities under the EU initiative did not translate into permanent cooperation.

In June 2015, a delegation from the region also participated in the First Polish-Chinese Intergovernmental Committee in Beijing and in the Polish-Chinese business forum in Chengdu (the Sichuan province). The trip took place under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the occasion of the opening of the Polish consulate in Chengdu.

The representatives of the region underline **the need for cooperation between the representatives of local government and the state government** as well as the exchange of information, and they recommend enabling the representatives from different levels of administration to participate in the official visits of Polish delegations to Chinese provinces. They also see the need to activate such platforms as the Forum of Poland-China.

“We always say that these official visits at the ministerial level or generally at the state level should also take into account local and regional perspectives. I think that it is also worth drawing on our experience and well-developed contacts because we already have a specific history of such cooperation” (Interview with Officials in Dolnośląskie Marshal’s Office, personal communication, 2018).

## **The Mazowieckie case**

Mazovia, located in the east-central part of the country, is the biggest and the richest region in Poland. It produced about 22% of the whole GDP of the state



in 2014 (Godlewska-Majkowska et al., 2017). The capital of the voivodeship – Warsaw – is also the national capital, the biggest city in Poland and a centre of science, research, education, industry and infrastructure. The presence of the state capital within the region is a strong factor influencing the interest in cooperation on the part of foreign partners.

The international cooperation priorities of Mazovia voivodeship adopted in 2006 open with the emphasis that the region, when working with foreign partners, follows the directions of Polish foreign policy, and operates within regional competences, but also takes into account the importance of the city of Warsaw for the development of the entire region. Through its activity, Mazovia wants to support Poland's foreign policy and create the image of a strong region, facilitating the development of entrepreneurship, the transfer of modern technologies, and sharing experience in the field of decentralization processes. The document does not mention individual partners, or even countries (only regions of the world are presented). It mentions Southeast Asia as a dynamically developing region (*Priorytety Współpracy Zagranicznej Województwa Mazowieckiego*, 2006).

“In shaping the conditions of dynamic economic and social development of the Mazovia, the voivodeship will seek to use it from the experience of the world's leading economic leaders, i.e. OECD member states, including the United States of America, as well as the dynamically developing countries of Southeast Asia” (*Priorytety Współpracy Zagranicznej Województwa Mazowieckiego*, 2006).

Mazovia is one of two Polish regions cooperating with China which has two formalised partnerships – with the provinces **Hebei** and **Shandong**. In both cases the agreements are quite new (respectively 2016, 2015), however the contacts started much earlier.

The **Hebei** province is the region surrounding Beijing. It has a rather agricultural character. A letter of intent on the future Mazovia-Hebei interregional cooperation was signed during the first visit of the Chinese to Warsaw in September 2005. At the same time, a delegation of entrepreneurs from this province presented its investment projects in Warsaw. However, after these events, there was no contact for many years. The growing interest of

the Hebei Province Governor's in Central and Eastern Europe, including the 16 + 1 format, was the impulse to renew contact. Soon after the Local Leader Summit 16+1 in Prague, a provincial delegation visited Warsaw in September 2014. The talks focused on cooperation in the field of economy and tourism. The delegation also included entrepreneurs and representatives of tourist organisations.

The contact has intensified ever since. After the next visit of the Chinese delegation to Warsaw in February 2015, representatives of Mazovia organized a return visit to China in May 2015. The trip to the Hebei Province was combined with the participation of the Marshal of the region in the first meeting of the Association of Governors 16 + 1 and participation in international trade fairs in Lanfang (a city in Hebei province). In the same year, Mazovia organized the Economic Forum in Hebei and Shandong, as part of the project "Mazovia – the economic promotion of Poland's heart" (September 2015).

The agreement between the Mazovian and the Hebei Provinces on establishing friendly interregional relations based on the principles of partnership was signed during the third working meeting of local and regional leaders of Central and Eastern Europe countries and China in June 2016. There was a reference to both the Polish-Chinese intergovernmental agreement of 2004, concerning economic cooperation, as well as to the agreement on strategic partnership from 2011. Partners declared cooperation in the following areas: economy, science and technology, environmental protection, education, health care, and culture. It was declared that the cooperation between the Hebei and Mazovia provinces would take place in the form of official and study visits, conferences, participation in fairs and cultural events. The partners reserved the possibility to extend the scope of cooperation to other areas within their competence (*Porozumienie Między Województwem Mazowieckim (Rzeczpospolita Polska) a Prowincją Hebei (Chińska Republika Ludowa) o Ustanowieniu Przyjaznych Relacji Międzyregionalnych*, 2016).

**Shandong** is the second partner of Mazovia. The province, located on the east coast of China, is among the regions considered the cradle of Chinese civilization. It is also the birthplace of Confucius. The province is one of the richest regions in China. In terms of GDP (USD 711 billion), Shandong takes third place in the provinces after Guangdong and Jiangsu.

The first contacts, initiated by the Chinese side, date back to April 2012 and a visit by the vice-governor of Shandong to Mazovia. A year later, another visit took place with the new vice-governor. Then, in July 2014, the Chinese organized tourist fairs in Warsaw. There was also the Shandong-Poland Trade & Investment Promotion and Business Matchmaking Forum, organized by PAIIZ, the Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) and the Trade Department of the Shandong Province, under the patronage of the People's Government of the Shandong Province and the Polish Ministry of Economy. The next meetings with the representatives of the economic sphere of Shandong in Mazovia took place in August 2014. When assessing the cooperation with partners from China in autumn 2014, the representatives of the Marshal's office stated that the interest in cooperation with Mazovia increased significantly in 2014.

“And when it comes to China, this is the direction that has intensified recently. China and Korea. Poland may not be their target, but it is definitely a gateway to Europe, which is clear given the number of visits. This cooperation will certainly focus on economic issues. But what seems equally intense is also tourism, which is obvious during every meeting. For now, these are timid plans, but we are also talking about increasing the air connections, or about the development of tourist products that could be sold to the Chinese from partner provinces” (Interview with Officials in Mazovia Marshal's Office, personal communication, 2014).

A year later, on 14 September 2015, the representatives of Mazovia signed an agreement between Mazowieckie and the Shandong Province on friendly inter-regional cooperation during a visit to China. Among the declared areas of cooperation were economy, culture, education, renewable energy, and tourism. There were also references to intergovernmental relations in the contract. Less than a month later, the partner regions signed a Memorandum on cultural exchange between the Province of Shandong and Mazovian Voivodeship. On the Polish side, the Mazovian Institute of Culture was invited to cooperate.

In 2016, three subsequent visits of the representatives of the Shandong province to Mazovia took place. In June, the meetings focused on cooperation

in the field of culture. The visit in October was connected with Shandong's participation in the World Travel Show in Nadarzyn, near Warsaw. In November, the talks focused on the topics related to cooperation in the field of agriculture and agritourism. In addition, one of the employees of the Marshal's office went on a scholarship awarded by a partner province to learn Chinese at one of the provincial universities.

In 2017, there was another visit of the representatives of the Government Academy in the Province of Shandong. It was connected with a wider programme within the framework of the 16 + 1 initiative. Provincial representatives were acquainted with the political and administrative conditions in 16 + 1 countries. However, as one representative of Mazovia noted in 2017, after the agreement was signed, the cooperation was not so intense.

“After the agreement was signed – there really is not much interest on the part of the Chinese to implement this agreement” (Interview with Officials in Mazovia Marshal's Office, personal communication, 2017).

Regardless of the cooperation with the Hebei and Shandong provinces, Mazovia has contacts with other provinces. They are not formalized. There are some ad hoc meetings, initiatives or projects as a result of specific actions and interest. For example, the Hunan Province was interested in economic cooperation with Mazowieckie. In March 2017, the Economic Promotion Conference of the Hunan Province was organized with the participation of Polish and Chinese entrepreneurs.

**The economic dimension of the cooperation clearly dominates in various types of contacts.** Almost all Chinese and Polish delegations are accompanied by representatives of enterprises and business organisations. The Mazovia Development Agency (Agencja Rozwoju Mazowsza S.A.) plays an important role here. The agency, established by the Marshal's Office, is responsible for promoting the region and supporting enterprises in foreign contacts. The Agency also has an Investor and Exporter Service Centre, which is responsible for, among other things, issues connected with investment areas and preparation of offers. Companies from China are interested in political support from regional authorities.

“The Chinese expect political support in addition to market incentives. They expect that if there are problems, someone will help them solve them” (Interview with Officials in Mazovia Marshal’s Office, personal communication, 2017).

The meetings organized by the Marshal’s Office are also attended by representatives of Polish organisations, such as the Polish Investment and Trade Agency (PAIH), whose main task is to increase the inflow of foreign direct investment to Poland and to support the internationalization of Polish enterprises. On the other hand, the companies from the Mazowieckie region take part in business missions organized by PAIH. Emphasis is also put on the development of tourism, which is favoured by direct flights from Warsaw to China.

Warsaw and the surrounding area is also often chosen for international fairs and exhibitions. Some of them are organized or co-organized by the local government. It is an opportunity to present offers from regions and establish direct relations between entrepreneurs. For years, Mazovia has been taking part in the annual China Homelife and China Machinex fairs in Nadarzyn near Warsaw. The event is referred to as the largest trade fair of Chinese products in Europe (1,300 exhibitors in 2018). In 2019, for the first time, the promotion of exhibitors from China was accompanied by Expo Export, which brought together exporters from Central and Eastern Europe, representing various industries. The fair attracted representatives of over 50 chambers of commerce from Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Hungary. The Mazowieckie region also presented its companies and organized some cultural events to promote the region. Among the patrons of the event were the PRC Embassy in Poland and the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Technology, but also the Marshals of 10 Polish voivodeships, including Mazowieckie and Dolnośląskie.

The educational/university dimension also appears in contacts with partners from China. The parties are interested in **student exchange** and **research cooperation**. Chinese delegations coming to the Marshal’s Office also visit Polish universities.

The difference in the competences of the authorities of Chinese provinces and the Polish voivodeship is among the obstacles to cooperation is. Chinese provinces have more prerogatives to invest and do business. Polish units may primarily support their local entrepreneurs in their internationalization.

“The Chinese economic and financial structure gives the regions some economic autonomy in shaping or adapting the central government’s plan to local needs. Moreover, it gives them autonomy when it comes to financing investment, stimulating economic sectors” (Interview with Officials in Mazovia Marshal’s Office, personal communication, 2017).

**For Chinese partners it is not clear what the division of competences is and what the system of functioning of the local government administration in Poland consists in.** The representatives of Chinese provinces expect a quick decision, contacts and agreements, especially on the occasion of events at the central level.

“The Chinese side does not understand the functions of the office (Marshal’s Office), what things an office can do and what not” (Interview with Officials in Mazovia Marshal’s Office, personal communication, 2017).

Another problem, as in many other European regions, is the issue of disproportion and scale. For the regions and the local companies, it is difficult to find the opportunities to get involved, meet the expectations of Chinese partners and find a niche in business dealings. Poland is interested in importing agri-food products, however, the potential export goods are primarily luxury goods.

## Conclusions

The cooperation between Polish cities/regions and Chinese partners has two important dimensions. On the one hand, by joining the governmental activities (the strategic partnership, the “16+1”, the BRI), **paradiplomacy**

**stimulates the development of a practical.** Due to the great emphasis on the economic dimension in relations with China, entrepreneurs and central institutions play an important role. They perceive these contacts as an opportunity for regional economic development and the internationalization of Polish companies. Local government initiatives have a chance to contribute to large national strategies: the Polish Responsible Development Plan (the Morawiecki Plan) and the Chinese Belt and Road initiative.

On the other hand, establishing contacts with China contributes to the development of competence in the local government administration and to the cooperation with local partners. More partnerships and meetings result in more conferences, forums, where the representatives of local and regional authorities can share their experience. Universities play a special role here. By engaging in cooperation, they can promote themselves, as well as support local governments with their China analysts. Business is another important local partner. Local companies perceive cooperation with China as having great potential. However, they need the support of regional authorities. They need the political umbrella, the legitimacy of business partners.

Poland's accession to the EU was an important element in building the position of the state and the regions also benefited here. China's interest in the regional with the new EU members has increased. Representatives of local governments also gained platforms for meetings and discussions with their Chinese partners. However, the opinion of **the representatives of the surveyed regions does not indicate any direct impact of the EU on cooperation.** According to information from 2017-2018, regions did not use any EU programmes directly supporting contacts with China. When travelling on business missions or in the organisation of fairs, regions typically use their regional funds for promotion. Moreover, there is no unambiguous opinion on possible EU programmes for cooperation. In the case of support for economic initiatives, the conditions for granting EU subsidies to entrepreneurs would not be effective. Competition procedures are usually long, and entrepreneurs on both sides expect quick actions and decisions.

**The problem which besets paradiplomacy with China is asymmetry.** It does not relate only to the territory and population dimension, but also to the expectations and competencies of regional authorities. As one of the representatives of the researched regions underlined "the Chinese provinces

have money and tools to invest, meanwhile, Polish regions have the support of their companies inscribed in their strategies and aims of regional development, but they have no means to do this” (*Interview with Officials in Mazovia Marsha’s Office*, personal communication, 2017). That is why the Regional Forum Poland-China was a very good opportunity to provide effective support on building business and other types of relation.

Among the challenges, but also opportunities for Polish local governments for the coming years are tourism, infrastructure projects, and greater interest in Polish food and culture. The Chinese are eager to travel to Europe, but they know very little about Poland. Fewer tourists come to Poland than to the neighbouring Czech Republic. Poland, however, is beginning to be associated with healthy food. Taking into account the cooperation and the willingness to support entrepreneurs, one should bear in mind the specifics of the local market. Despite the opening of China to the world, it is not a free market economy. China defends its market. The economic with China is a long-term investment requiring knowledge of the country, language and people. Hence, the mediation of the authorities from the territorial administration can be an important asset. Scale also remains a big problem. It is important to launch the cooperation among Polish entrepreneurs from one region or one type of industry to meet the demands of the Chinese market.