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A new form of cross-border cooperation

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REVIEWS



A NEW FORM OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Joenniemi, P., Sergunin, A. 2012, Laboratories of European Integration: City-Twinning in Northern Europe. Tartu: Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation, 70 p.

The monograph under review is the result of many years of joint work by two researchers — A. Sergunin, professor of St. Petersburg State University and P. Joenniemi, senior researcher of the Karelian Institute, the University of Eastern Finland. Over the past two decades, they have studied various forms of cross-border cooperation in the north of Europe, in the region that, according to these scholars, is a kind of European "laboratory" of regionalism¹.

The main purpose of the monograph is to study the notion of "Twin Cities" in the North of Europe. The "Twin Cities" model is known as a relatively new form of cross-border cooperation, which developed in Europe in the last two decades. The "Twin Cities" Association, established in 2006, includes seven "pairs of cities" from the countries of Central, Eastern and Northern Europe.

The authors emphasize that the concept of "Twin Cities" differs significantly from externally similar terms — "sister cities", related /connected cities, etc². If the latter can be located far away from each other, "twin cities" are communities located in close proximity to each other and separated by a

¹ See: Joenniemi, P., Sergunin, A. 2011, When two aspire to become one: city-twinning in Northern Europe, *The Journal of Borderland Studies*, Vol. 26, no. 2, p. 231—242; Joenniemi, P., Sergunin, A. 2011, Another face of integration: city twinning in Europe, *Research Journal of International Studies*, no. 22, p. 120—131; Sergunin, A. 1999, Regionalizatsiia Rossii: rol' mezhdunarodnykh faktorov [Regionalization of Russia: role of international factors], *Polis*, no. 3, p. 76—88; Sergunin, A. 2001, Mezhdunarodnaya deyatelnost subyektov Rossiyskoy Federatsii: pravovoye regulirovaniye [International activities of the subjects of Russian Federation: Legal Regulation], *Vestnik of N. I. Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod*, no. 1. p. 276—283; Sergunin, A. 2002, Pravovoye regulirovaniye mezhdunarodnoy deyatelnosti subyektov Rossiyskoy Federatsii [The legal regulation of the international activities of the Russian Federation], *Sravnitelnoye konstitutsionnoye obozreniye* [Comparative Constitutional Review], no. 1, p. 183—190; Sergunin, A. 2003, Vneshniye faktory rossiyskoy regionalizatsii [External factors of Russian regionalization], *Politicheskaya nauka* [Political Science], no. 3, p. 121—141.

² Attempts to clarify the terminology unit in this field of research have been recently made by Russian scientists. See: Anishchenko, A.G., Sergunin, A.A. 2012, "Twin Cities": A new form of cross-border cooperation in the Baltic region?, *Baltic region*, no. 1 (11), p. 27—38. doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2012-1-3.

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state border. Typically, in the past, they used to form a one single settlement (for example, Valga — Valka on the Estonian-Latvian border), or one of the cities was established as a replacement of the other (Tornio — Haparanda on the Finnish-Swedish border, Imatra — Svetogorsk on the Finnish — Russian border). Twin cities alternately may have stood opposite to each other (outposts of warring nations), or may have existed as a single administrative unit (Narva — Ivangorod) (p. 11).

Another feature that makes "Twin Cities" qualitatively different from other forms of international cooperation at the municipal level is the desire to overcome the dividing effect of borders and to establish common mechanisms for managing economic, infrastructural, administrative, social, environmental, cultural and other processes (*ibid.*). The most "advanced" "twins" (Tornio — Haparanda) not only "eliminated" the border as such, but also created unified economic and trade, transport, postal, recreational and educational systems (p. 21—26). Although formally these cities are governed by different municipalities, in practice there are supranational institutions that conduct a common policy in all major fields. For Tornio — Haparanda and Valga — Valka, there is no particular problem even in the fact that they have different currencies (the euro in Finland and Estonia, and the Swedish krona in Sweden and the lat in Latvia).

Despite the apparent success of the "Twin Cities" movement in the region of Northern Europe, the authors of the book do not ignore the numerous barriers that exist in the way of inter-municipal cooperation. Among the obstacles to successful collaboration, problems between the states, in which the "twin towns" are located, should be mentioned. Thus, in the case of Narva and Ivangorod, which in Soviet times were developing as a single economic, transport and social complex (they even shared the water drainage and sewage systems), one would think they could establish a much closer cooperation tested by time. However, due to the tension in the bilateral relations between Estonia and Russia, which unfortunately still prevail nowadays, the potential for cooperation between the two cities could not be fulfilled (p. 27—31).

At the same time, Imatra and Svetogorsk, which from the very beginning were two adjacent urban settlements separated from each other by the state border and which, apparently, were less likely to succeed, could still create a more efficient model of municipal cooperation (p. 32—36). In the case of Imatra and Svetogorsk, this cooperation was based on pragmatic principles, free of ideology and politicking, aimed at solving specific problems and achieving mutual benefits. Since Soviet times, the Finns have been providing assistance for a regular modernization of the Svetogorsk paper plant. Both parties are interested in the development of transport and border infrastructure, and joint environmental monitoring. All this set the stage for the development of more advanced forms of cooperation (for instance, both cities had plans to build a joint industrial park and an industrial area located on the border). Only the financial crisis prevented both parties from implementing those ambitious plans.

An illustration of the growing popularity of the city-twinning model is the emergence of another "pair" in the North of Europe — Kirkenes (Norway) and Nickel (Murmansk, Russia), which concluded an agreement on cooperation in 2008, and may in the near future join the "the Twin Cities" Association (p. 41—45).

In short, despite all the problems and difficulties encountered by the "Twin Cities", this form of inter-municipal cooperation has already proved its consistency, having become a promising form of cross-border cooperation in the north of Europe.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the monograph by A. Sergunin and P. Joenniemi is an interesting and meaningful research, which significantly expands our understanding of contemporary forms of cross-border cooperation in the north of Europe. The book can be used for training generalists and experts in regional studies; it may also serve as a basis for future research in this area.

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