

*Piotr Krzysztof Rzeńca**

REGIONAL TOURIST ORGANISATION OF THE ŁÓDŹ VOIVODESHIP AND ITS ROLE IN THE PROCESSES OF TOURISM-BASED LOCAL PRODUCTION SYSTEMS' DEVELOPMENT

Abstract. Whether we call them local production systems, clusters or industrial districts, all of these co-opetition arrangements can be considered stimuli in developing and implementing innovations as well as local and regional growth. The complexity of a tourist product and specific requirements connected with it make the particularly prone to the forming of clusters and cluster initiatives. In 2012 tourism industry ranked second in Poland with 27 cluster initiatives and a stable growth dynamics. Tourism is dominated by top-down initiatives, contrary to other industries, where bottom up arrangements prevail.

Regional cluster initiatives may be built on regional tourist organisations. The Regional Tourist Organisation of the Lodz Voivodeship (RTO LV) was established, inter alia, to create the image of the voivodeship as an attractive tourist region, to promote tourism in the region and to improve the quality of a tourist product. Since networking of the regional economy is required, the organisation joins entities representing different industries, territorial self-government units, associations, foundations, etc. According to the Board of the RTO LV, the organisation has reached an optimum representation of various industries. The RTO LV also creates smaller clusters, which flexibly enhance its potential. Focus on networking makes the organisation closer to the network cluster idea of the OECD rather than to Porter's co-opetition relationships. As formally, the RTO LV has not got the status of a cluster, it seems justified to use the term *cluster initiative* or *quasi-cluster structure*.

Keywords: tourist cluster, local production system, regional tourist organization, tourism management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social, economic and environmental changes, which nowadays are at the same time the reasons and effects of two opposite processes of globalisation and territorialisation, face territorial units, institutions and organisations with the challenge of intensifying competition. The adoption by the European Union of the Lisbon Strategy, which codified the building of a knowledge-based

* University of Lodz, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, Department of Regional Economy and Environment.

economy and information society, resulted in the developing of innovation programmes and institutional support systems at the level of EU Member States and their regions. Clusters, organisational solutions that stimulate the creation and implementation of innovation, are vital elements of such systems. Clustering, at global, EU, national or regional level, is one of crucial and priority activities and a key attribute of social and economic development strategy (Malina 2014: 21).

Clusters, independently of their territorial impact and definition, surely give competitive advantage to places (locations) and businesses as they open up the opportunity to improve the quality of service. By shaping favourable conditions for specialisation, they foster innovation and investment attitudes and counterbalance fluctuations, which accompany economic stagnation in a substantial part of the world following the financial crisis of the first decade of the 21st century. The impact of clusters upon regional and local development largely depends on specific conditions in their environment. Clusters emerge in almost all sectors of the economy. We can find them in manufacturing and in services, in traditional and high-tech sectors. Clustering is relevant to the development of tourism, in particular in regions, which stand little chances of successfully competing with others and, because of their poor tourist attractiveness, they must avail themselves of sophisticated and innovative creation, advertising and sales arrangements in their regional tourist offer. The idea of a tourist product composed of complementary services rendered by various specialised operators forces out cooperation alongside the value chain (Kusa 2008: 520).

The research aim of the study is estimating the significance of regional tourism organisations (RTO), functioning in Poland since 2002, in generating the cooperation of entities of the tourism branch, organizations, associations, local government bodies and others for the sake of the development of tourism economy. Among the main RTO's tasks there is creation and promotion of the image of voivodeships and their popularization as tourist attractive regions and support of the development of a cohesive promotion system of a voivodeship within the country and abroad. It has been stated that RTOs that are mainly supposed to stimulate the processes of creation, development and raise the quality of a tourist regional product, and only indirectly create favourable conditions for branch cooperation, in reality created forms similar to classical clusters. During the research, the organizational structure of the RTO LV underwent analysis. On the basis of expert interviews with the representatives of RTO management we have carried out the assessment of the character of relations and forms of cooperation between the members of the association and the main core (management) of RTO LV, treated as a potential core of a cluster.

2. CLUSTERS – SELECTED DEFINITIONS

According to the definition by Porter a cluster is “a geographic concentration of competing and cooperating companies, suppliers, service providers, companies and associated institutions (e.g. universities, sectoral associations) in individual industries”. Clusters, which achieve their critical mass (necessary number of businesses and other institutions, which create the agglomeration effect) and can compete successfully are typical of almost any national, regional, state, urban, etc. economy in economically developed countries (Porter 2001: 246). In literature we can find an abundance of cluster definitions. According to one of them, a cluster is a purposefully developed network of economic operators located in territorial proximity. Co-opetition is an important relationship among operators within a cluster; we are dealing with it when former competitors deliberately develop cooperation network, where:

- competition and cooperation coexist,
- parties cooperate to achieve common benefits but they remain competitors,
- the community of interests and the wish to confront each other lead to formal agreements,
- competitive part of the relationship remains informal (Cygler 2007: 64–65).

In the context of cluster theory, the following terms are semantically close: clusters, industrial clusters, local production systems (Fr. *systemes productifs locaux*) and cluster initiatives (sometimes considered synonyms of a cluster). Moreover, the theory is materially and logically linked to regional innovation systems, innovation networks, industrial districts, etc. (Rzewuski 2007: 253). Cluster initiatives involve representatives of economy, science and the public sector, who use their own as well as public resources within the framework of cluster development schemes (Palmen, Baron 2011: 14).

Most definitions take the concentration of independent businesses operating in the same or related industries within a given area as the main distinguishing element. Interactions and functional links among operators as well as supra-sectoral dimension of a cluster with its horizontal and vertical links are also considered.

In the wide variety of approaches we can identify two main lines of thinking the most common for cluster researchers concerning the definition and nature of the phenomenon. The first one clearly focuses around the works by Porter and stresses competition and cooperation relationships and localisation. The second one results from the OECD approach and highlights the idea of a network cluster (Nowakowska 2011: 86).

3. ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF CLUSTERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL ECONOMIES

If we want to identify the role of clusters and their importance, we must specify benefits that they bring to regional economy and businesses. It is worth stressing that the establishing and development of clusters in a region positively impact the competitiveness and innovation of local economy by, e.g., developing the market of specialised production factors, stimulating the transfer of knowledge, learning and absorption processes, generating innovation thanks to spatial proximity and interactions of various operators. Cluster initiatives engage SMEs, which deepens their specialisation and efficiency resulting from indirect economies of scale. They also positively impact the environment as cooperating businesses undertake environmentally friendly investment projects and initiatives and implement environmentally friendly innovation (*Kierunki rozwoju klastrów...* 2013: 6). Last but not least, cluster initiatives create conditions for *spin-off* processes.

As a result of deepened co-opetition of its members, clusters may ensure competitive advantage to regions at different levels and produce synergy effects. That, in turn, contributes to faster development of companies and of the regional economy. When in a given area associated operators start to compete more intensely, it is also much more likely that links among them will tighten. Next, efficiency will get enhanced as cooperation helps better use the available production factors, which improves investment capabilities (especially in the area of infrastructure), leads to joint marketing or lobbying, which is vital for the development of regional policy. Formal and informal relationships increase the level of trust among business partners and contribute to faster transfer of new technologies and more effective diffusion of knowledge and innovation. According to Rzewuski (2007: 257) this is how the resources of indispensable specialist knowledge available to all cluster members expands. The multiplicity of operators working together lets them pursue simultaneous activities along the same development lines without compromising their independence and diversification of operations, which improves the chances for success.

4. TOURIST CLUSTERS – SPECIFICITY

Tourism is particularly predisposed to cooperation and developing clusters due to its heterogeneity and market requirements concerning the development of a tourist product. For tourism the factor, which enables and justifies the establishing of a tourist cluster is the presence of specific natural or anthropogenic conditions in regional economy. Tourist assets – which provide the basis for the development of tourist infrastructure, that, in turn, enables the “consumption” of the

assets in question – are important here. A tourist area usually hosts many strictly sectoral operators, whose main activities consist in rendering tourist services (e.g. hotels, restaurants, tourist agencies and operators who manage tourist attractions) or services in support of tourism.

Specificity of local tourist market allows to identify both, competition and cooperation, in the activities of tourist companies. The way a tourist product is developed and its final characteristics as a package of services and facilities addressed to potential and actual tourists make all usually competing businesses, such as hotels, travel agencies, transport companies, insurance companies, entertainment facilities, leisure and information businesses, which offer advisory and institutional support, analyse tourist traffic and conduct many other activities, without which tourist industry could not operate efficiently, collaborate to achieve mutual benefits. Cooperation needs a continuous flow of knowledge and information as their availability to tourist industry operators is a precondition for proper development and consistency of the quality of service across a given production chain (Rzewuski 2007: 261).

Clusters and cluster initiatives contribute to economic growth of Poland and of its regions. Last decade witnessed a continuous increase in their numbers. Until March 2012 in total 212 cluster initiatives were established. Mazovia region leads in the ranking (26). Clusters are also numerous in the regions of Warmia and Mazury (18) and Silesia (17) (*Klustry w Polsce...* 2012: 8). They are most frequently initiated by companies, which confirms the move towards self-organisation and cooperation of the business community. Business environment organisations are also active (e.g. regional development agencies, associations, foundations) together with R&D entities and science. The majority of initiatives are relatively young (*Benchmarking klastrów...* 2012: 8).

The analysis of sectoral structure of Polish cluster initiatives shows that they emerge both in innovative and more traditional industries. The first most numerous is the ICT sector represented by 28 cluster initiatives. It is followed by tourist industry with 27 cluster initiatives in 11 voivodeships (*Klustry w Polsce...* 2012: 8).

To many territorial self-government units, tourism has become a vital area of economic growth. Due to co-opetition links, in many regions it may be and is an effective tool of improving the competitiveness and innovation of regional and local economies striving to achieve global level in, inter alia, the quality of service to tourists, scope of services or innovativeness of tourist products.

In Poland we observe a gradual increase in the number of tourist clusters. Country-wise in the period 2009–2012 every year 5 new initiatives emerged; in 2009 there were 11 tourist clusters, two years later almost twice as many (21 tourist clusters) (Sikora 2012: 59) and in 2012 six new were recorded. However, the already achieved level does not allow us to conclude that they have significantly enhanced the efficiency of exploitation of tourist resources.

Clusters may be created as bottom-up initiatives of potential members of a cluster or as top-down arrangements as systemic elements of regional policy started by, e.g., self-government organisations. In Poland, generally, bottom-up initiatives dominate but according to Staszewska (2009: 28) each tourist cluster existing back in 2009 was the effect of a top-down initiative, which may suggest the perspectives of their future operations are rather poor. A probable reason is low awareness of local communities of the importance of cluster initiatives and general unwillingness to undertake joint initiatives. Tourist clusters are mainly joined by micro and small traditional businesses, revealing a high level of mistrust vis-à-vis top-down cluster initiatives. Low innovativeness of tourist clusters is typical, probably due to traditional nature of the industry (Sikora 2012: 56).

A tourist cluster, like any other cluster, should meet three basic conditions when it comes to how formal and efficient its operations are:

- concentration of operators from related industries within a particular geographic area,
- entities within a given cluster should cooperate with one another,
- cluster should not eliminate competition among its active operators (*Klasy. Innowacyjne rozwiązania...* 2004: 13).

Studies of cluster initiatives developed in the Lodz Region have shown a diversity of development stages of individual initiatives. Development stage identification model for clusters helped identify the organisational advancement of undertakings, taking account of the level and scale of interactions among cluster participants. Thus, we could identify homogenous clusters and divide the initiatives into: operating clusters, clusters in organisation stage, cluster initiatives and seed initiatives, which may transform into clusters (Figure 1) (*Ocena funkcjonowania...* 2009: 2).

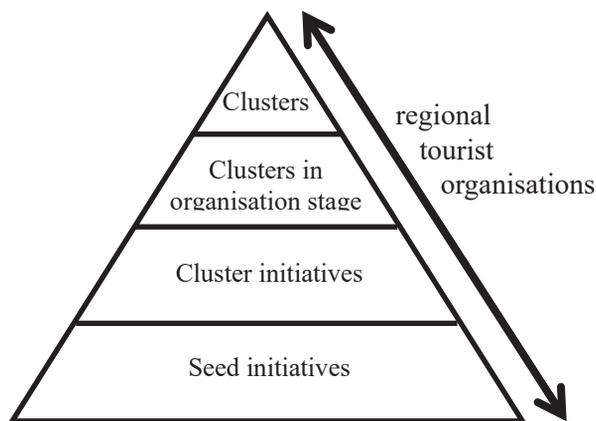


Figure 1. Regional tourist organisations in Poland against the development level of cluster initiatives

Source: own study based on the *Ocena funkcjonowania...* (2009).

5. TOURISM ORGANISATION IN POLAND AND POSSIBILITIES OF NETWORKING LOCAL AND REGIONAL TOURIST ECONOMIES

Tourist organisations promote the integration of tourist industry in regions as a result of cooperation between the public sector – territorial self-governments with tourist sector of the economy, tourist associations, as well as individuals, institutions and organisations interested in the development of tourism¹. At the same time, they facilitate cooperation at regional and local level to all stakeholders. This type of activity, which uses territorial cooperation structures, is to improve the professionalism of undertaken promotion operations and the efficiency of creating attractive tourist products based mainly on local and regional resources and human capital.

Since the beginning of 2000, in Poland we have a three-level system of organisation. It is based on the activities of Polish Tourist Organisation (PTO) at the central level and regional and local tourist organisations (RTO and LTO, respectively). Unfortunately, local and regional tourist organisations do not have any tools that would enable them effective and efficient functioning. Their budgets are limited and their existence is largely dependent on the involvement of their members in, e.g., attracting or allocating their own financial resources. The scale and effectiveness of their operations depends, first and foremost, on how active, resourceful and competent their members are as well as on the will to cooperate.

Regional tourist organisations initiate cooperation with central and self-government administration, companies from the tourist sector and any entities, which deliver goals and tasks connected with the promotion and development of tourism. Their main tasks include the creation and promoting the image of voivodeships (regions) as attractive tourist destinations, tourism promotion and development in voivodeships, stimulating the creation, development and improving the quality of tourist product, consistent promotion of tourism and voivodeship domestically and abroad through publishing activities, promotion, cooperation with media, participation in fairs and exhibitions, organising workshops, presentations and access to tourist information. As networking is required in tourism at regional level, stimulating the establishing of local structures that could promote and develop tourist products, submit applications, conduct general and sectoral training courses, events with active involvement of various entities also from outside of the organisation has become a particularly sensitive task. We should stress that regional tourist organisations are not directly involved in the development of tourist products because they focus on final elements of the process, i.e. promotion and advertising.

¹Regional Tourist Organisation of the Lodz Voivodeship (Polish Abbr. ROT WŁ) is the first in Poland example of an organisation acting as a private-public partnership (PPP). It is an association with legal personality established according to the Act on Associations and the Act on Polish Tourist Organisation.

Already back in 1920 Marshall pointed to the importance of the so called “industrial atmosphere”, which develops as a derivative of the coexistence of an industries within the same area. In the case of tourist regions its equivalents are manufacturers of tourist products together with potential recipients of tourist offer. The region of Lodz does not compete in the same category as coastal, lake or mountain regions. Its tourist assets (anthropogenic, natural and specialist) are less impressive and it may fight for a market place only with the help of specialist attributes and marketing campaigns. For the Lodz Region, a “Cinderella” on the domestic tourist market, the major issue is to build-up an adequate “tourist atmosphere”, paraphrasing Marshall’s words. It relates to the revaluation of the opinion concerning low tourist attractiveness of the Lodz voivodeship and the need to build a positive image of the region, which, undoubtedly, is one of the main tasks of a regional tourist organisation.

6. TOURIST REGION AS A CLUSTER AND CLUSTER-FORMING (NETWORKING) ORGANISATIONS IN THE REGION (EXAMPLE OF REGIONAL TOURIST ORGANISATION OF THE LODZ VOIVODESHIP)

Regions, which can offer various tourist attractions and host specialised companies and organisations from tourist industry are often treated as specific tourist clusters (Kusa, Peszko 2006: 183). The statement appears in some studies on the collaboration among businesses from the tourist industry. Besides, representatives of businesses, territorial self-government units, universities and research institutes, business environment institutions and NGOs, there is environment (natural and social), an important element of a tourist cluster, often omitted in traditional initiatives. The environment is, under these circumstances, an equivalent of a “business environment institution”. Tourist resources of regions are a specific bank of natural and cultural goods, although one may treat them only instrumentally as a background or space for regional and local tourist activity.

A cluster-forming organisation in the region may be the Regional Tourist Organisation of Lodz Voivodeship (RTO LV). Since the moment of its establishment in 2003, the number of its members has been systematically increasing. At the end of 2010 these numbers (75 members), as assessed by representatives of the organisation, got closer to maximum and “optimum”². The biggest number of members of the RTO LV was recorded in the years 2011–2013, when there were 77–78 entities, predominantly from the tourist industry, territorial self-government units, associations, and foundations (Table 1). The RTO LV represents a wide variety of entities and, simultaneously, a stable membership when it comes to the number and

²Based on the interviews of the employees of the RTO LV Board (data: April 2014).

organisational structure. It may suggest that RTO LV members are more oriented at inter-sectoral cooperation rather than at intra-regional competition, which places RTO LV activities within the network idea of a cluster (Figure 2), i.e. within the approach favoured by the OECD.

Table 1

The structure of RTO LV membership in 2013

	Type of entity	Number	%	Exemplary entities
A.	Territorial self-government units	21	26.9	county of Wieruszow, the town of Leczyca, Parzczew commune
B.	Entities from the tourist industry	22	28.2	Aqua Park Lodz, Lodz Airport, Consortium of Polish Travel Agencies, Indian village – Tatanka
C.	Associations and foundations	17	21.8	Agro-tourist Association of Poddebice Region, Foundation of Polish Narrow Gauge Railway
D.	Local tourist organisations	3	3.8	Local Tourist Organisation in Belchatow
E.	Educational and cultural entities	6	7.7	Lodz City Museum, Economic – Tourist – Hotel Schools in Lodz
F.	Sectoral chambers and unions	4	5.1	Lodz Chamber of Commerce and Industry
G.	Other entities	5	6.4	Publishing and advertising House Sagalara

Source: own study based on the *Annual report on the activities of the RTO LV for 2013* (as at 31.12.2013).

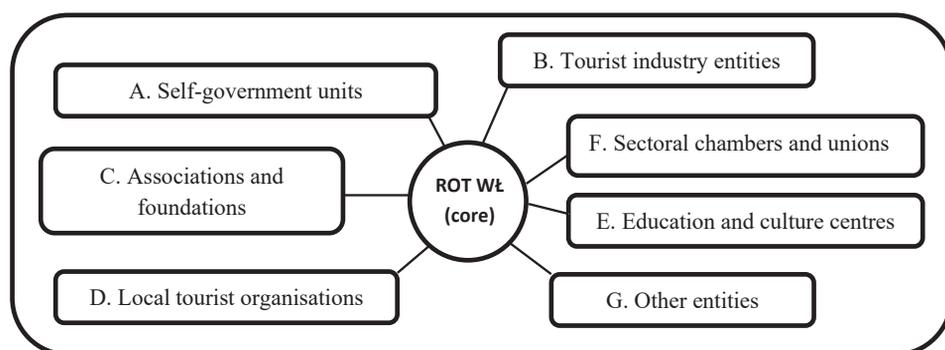


Figure 2. Types of entities – members of the RTO LV

Source: own study.

If we consider regional tourist organisations as cluster initiatives, they seem to be more flexible with respect to the type than clusters in other sectors of economy because of the cooperation of entities from various industries and more loose relations among them. At the same time the institutional barriers can be indicated as a threat to the functioning of such initiatives.

Within the 10-year history of the association (2003–2013) cooperation, in various periods, was undertaken by ca. 90 institutions interested in the development (not only in terms of tourism) of various areas and fields in the Lodz voivodeship. Rotation of a portion of member organisations was recorded mainly among entities from tourist industry and the main reason of resignation or exclusion was the ceasing or suspension of economic activity (Table 2).

Table 2

Reasons of exclusion from the RTO LV

Type of entity	Justification
territorial self-government units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – no sense in cooperation due to poor development of tourism in a commune (Piatek commune) – negative relation between membership premium and the budget of a territorial self-government unit
economic operators in the field of tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ceasing economic operations (liquidation or sale of a travel agent, hotel, etc.) – change of the profile or restructuring of operations – personal issues – lack of understanding for the importance of cooperation with other institutions acting for the development of tourism in the region

Source: own studies, based on the interview with the representatives of the RTO LV Board.

In the opinion of RTO LV representatives, the ceasing of direct, formalised collaboration, in case of resignation or exclusion from the regional or local tourist organisation, does not degrade already existing relations among them. Further cooperation takes the form of informal relations; it does not exclude further cooperation with the RTO LV under concrete projects.

RTO LV is the key player in the field of organisation and, depending on actual needs, co-creates smaller clusters, which more flexibly improve its potential. For the needs of applying for the EU funds, it sets up special task forces composed also of institutions from outside of its membership, which at a given moment may contribute to positive outcome of the competition. Such structures, which may be referred to as “sub-clusters”, are usually dissolved when project works are completed. Positive effects include increased social awareness of the role of regional tourist organisation and more stable relations with the RTO LV

reflected in the applications for membership filed by some of these operators with the organisation.

The structure includes local tourist organisations, its equivalents in smaller areas, which seem to be naturally predisposed to collaborate with the RTO LV. In the Lodz Region by the end of 2013 there were four local tourist organisations, which placed the voivodeship in one group with the voivodeships: Silesia, Lubuskie and Podlaskie *ex aequo* at the last place in the country. To compare, in the Pomerania voivodeship there were six times more of such organisations (23), 11 organisations were recorded in the voivodeships of Mazovia, Warmia and Mazury and West Pomerania. They make a diversified group when it comes to the scope of their activities, number and structure of members as well as the type and intensity of their activities. Unfortunately, two out of four local tourist organisations in the Lodz Region practically have not operated at all in 2014. Interestingly enough, the LTO of Spala Area, a very active association, resigned from the membership in the RTO LV and remains outside of its structure. It is worth noting that outside of the cooperation network there are more active local action groups. That is the effect of divergences in their main goals; LAGs develop local products (not only tourist) while the RTO LV promotes final tourist products.

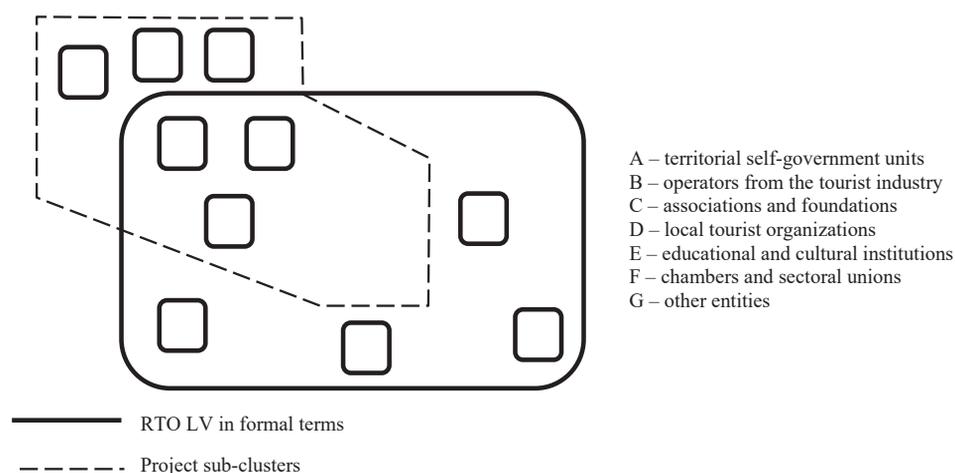


Figure 3. Project sub-cluster (exemplary) in the structure of the RTO LV

Source: own study.

Common goals and interests as well as restricted competition among the members of the RTO LV resulting from the structure of represented industries and, first of all, the orientation at the development of cooperation network make the organisation better-suited for a network cluster idea applied by the OECD than for Porter's co-opetition relations. Since the RTO LV has not got a formal

status of a cluster, it seems right to refer to it as a cluster initiative or quasi-cluster structure.

It meets the criteria imposed on clusters in the scope of concentration in a certain area of the enterprises functioning in the same or related service sectors (or industry), interaction and functional connections between companies and also an over-sectoral dimension of a cluster. Since the RTO LV has not got a formal status of a cluster, it seems right to refer to it as a *cluster initiative* or *quasi-cluster* structure.

On the one hand, we may consider the RTO LV a formalised sectoral organisation operating within a specific framework but, on the other hand, it is an entity subject to cluster structure involved in various forms of cooperation.

For RTO LV we may point to two juxtaposed vectors of the development of regional cooperation, apparently independent of each other. On the one hand, a leader (core) of the system was identified, by formal and legal means, who from the top joins the activities of individual permanent members and institutions, which occasionally are involved into tourist projects, on the other hand, there are divergent entities who voluntarily join the system and support it mainly with their experience and practice. Legal and organisational background of the RTO LV contributes to the stability of the network initiative. Even if some points in the network get destructed or liquidated as a result of resignation, the ceasing of operations or the conflict of interests, they may be replaced with another system of network links. "Sub-clusters" established to deliver concrete tasks are ephemeral and could be described as "project-related".

7. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we should state that nowadays clustering is not only an opportunity; it is also a need and economic necessity. In striving to fine tune products and services, companies enter into cooperation, which unleashes creative and innovative approach to available resources, which they use or process.

The system of cooperation in the organisation of tourism in Poland favours the development of networks and cooperation sub-clusters at local and regional levels. What the RTO LV is doing may serve as good example. The organisation initiates activities aimed at the development of tourism at local and regional levels by networking the collaboration among sectoral operators and it contributes to the setting up of project sub-clusters, which, however ephemeral, lead to the development of informal (lasting) relations. It also builds positive "tourist atmosphere", which helps create a positive image of the Lodz voivodeship. In terms of internal structure, the number of members, nature and scope of activities of the RTO LV and the needs of operators involved, the organisation has reached its specific critical mass to become a formal tourist cluster.

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