

We are undoubtedly witnessing an intensified process of globalization, which also applies to international relations. The phenomenon of migration, the removal of trade barriers or the participation of international corporations in creating public opinion results from this process. It also determined the increasing importance of cities and regions on the world's political map, taking into account the rapidly developing urbanization process. Cities promote themselves through culture or tourism, which enable them to attract investors, including the Chinese. Years ago, politicians from China realized what huge and unused potential lies in European cities and regions. For this purpose, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative was established. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is perceived through a separate prism, which due to its political and economic diversity, is a friendly environment for expanding Chinese influence. This part of Europe includes 218 cities with over 50,000 inhabitants and 64 regions for which cooperation with China is an opportunity for development in tourism, environmental protection, educational programs, urban transport, and even spatial planning. This policy is most often implemented by cities and regions. These policy sectors are not sufficiently relevant in the overall policy conducted by the states. That's why this topic is of little interest to scientists and the public.

The project aims to examine the scale of cooperation between cities and regions in Central and Eastern Europe with Chinese partners. The results will illustrate the scale of this phenomenon. After all, cooperation between China and Central and Eastern Europe states is very intense, especially in the 16+1 initiative. However, the question remains whether the potential of such bilateral relations is appropriately used by city and regional authorities?

Through the implementation of the project, I want to find an answer to the following questions: which cities and regions in CEE cooperate and which do not cooperate with China? What factors determine the success of subnational cooperation between CEE and China? What is the scope of policy coordination towards China at the subnational level in CEE?

My research was divided into three stages. First, I will create a map of connections between cities and regions with China based on a survey. At this stage, I will also determine the causes and effects of such cooperation. The next part of the research project will be a case study on the example of six selected cities and regions of CEE, whose cooperation with China is intense. I will have interviews with city/regional officials, local business representatives, and academia, as these are the actors most often involved in such relationships. Thanks to this, I will examine the detailed motivations that drive subnational relations with China. The third and final stage of my research will define the cooperation model between sub-state entities in CEE and China. As a result, I will get a complete picture of China's multi-level cooperation with the CEE region.

The result of the project will be my doctoral dissertation and two scientific articles mapping the connections of CEE cities and regions with China. Project results will raise awareness of the importance of diplomatic activities carried out at lower levels than the state level. That is why examining the patterns of international cooperation of cities and regions in CEE is so crucial from the point of view of the analysis of the whole issue of the significance of multi-level foreign policy.