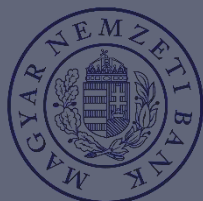




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Sopron, 2021. november 4.
4 November 2021, Sopron



**PANDÉMIA – FENNTARTHATÓ GAZDÁLKODÁS
– KÖRNYEZETTUDATOSSÁG / PANDEMIC
– SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT – ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS
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(LEKTORÁLT TANULMÁNYOK / PEER-REVIEWED STUDIES)

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Challenges and Chances for the Social and Economic Development of a Russian Border Region (the Case of the Samara Region)¹

Prof. Dr. Galina KHMELEVA DSc

Full Professor, Head of Department

Samara State University of Economics, Russian Federation

Dr. Marina KURNIKOVA PhD

Associate Professor

Samara State University of Economics, Russian Federation

Abstract

The paper is aimed to verify the significance of the border situation as an impetus for regional social and economic development capable of creating new opportunities for the region in the context of global challenges on the example of the Samara Region as one of the Russian border subjects. The authors use the case analysis to conclude that the competitive advantages of the Samara region created by its border position have the potential to be converted into specific development opportunities for municipalities, located along the border with the Republic of Kazakhstan. A separate section of the paper analyses the obstacles to the development of cross-border cooperation in the region.

Keywords: border region, cross-border cooperation, socio-economic development

JEL Codes: F15, O19, R11

1. Introduction

Being at the forefront of international cooperation, border regions have a unique feature – direct access to foreign markets. As a rule, border regions of neighboring countries have a long shared history and an established ethnocultural context. In this sense, border regions should benefit from their border situation and increase their competitiveness in the world market. To this end, it is important to understand current trends and the factors that shape competitive advantages, taking into account the specificities of borders. The extent and dynamics of cross-border cooperation determine the effectiveness of regional competitive advantages in relation to border situations. In this paper, the authors explore the competitive advantages of the Samara region, created by its border position with Kazakhstan, in comparison with other Russian regions of the «Kazakhstan border». As the authors have confirmed by the results of the examination of specific cases of border cooperation in the municipalities of the Samara region, the potential for converting the frontier situation of the region under study is linked to specific possibilities for the economic and social development of its municipalities located near the border with Kazakhstan. In addition, the article identifies cross-border cooperation trends and factors that increase understanding of how regions can benefit from the border situation.

2. Literature overview

The study of a ‘neighboring’ factor and frontier regions is widely reflected in the scientific literature at the interface of geographical and regional sciences (Tatarkin–Animitsa, 2012; Artobolevsky–Vardomsky, 2010; Savelyev et al., 2014; Kolesnikov, 2012). Particular attention is drawn to the importance of the border factor by Artobolevsky A. A. and Vardomsky L. B., noting that «the geo-economic peculiarity of border regions is usually that they are in most

¹ The reported study was funded by RFBR and FRLC, project number 21-510-23002.

cases far from the national market, but close to the markets of neighboring countries» (Artobolevsky–Vardomsky, 2010).

The diversity of regions inspires economists from around the world to find answers to the questions of converting spatial features into economic benefits (Savelyev et al., 2014). The research topic of borders is widely discussed especially in the Russian national scientific literature, as such regions are usually important for the Russian economy (Kolesnikov, 2012). Such regions are assigned the role of a kind of bridge in cooperation (Antonova et al., 2009). Vardomsky L. B. noted that cooperation with neighboring regions plays an important role in the development of the regions, but varies considerably depending on the neighboring countries (Vardomsky, 2009).

In recent years, ideas of spatial competition (Pilyasov, 2010) have become increasingly common in the regional economy. M. Porter (Porter, 1993, 1998, 2008) identifies the nature of domestic competition in the market and the national specificities of the strategy as a determinant. M. Porter's competitive advantage model emphasizes the existence of related and supporting industries as a factor contributing to national competitiveness (Porter, 1990). The transfer of knowledge and efficiency from related and ancillary industries can enhance the competitive advantages of firms (Grant, 1991). This aspect of foreign economic activity is revealed through the prism of integration of individual regions in world economic relations in the works by Rugman (2012) and Minakir (2020).

3. Methodology and Methods

Our research is aimed at studying the opportunities of socio-economic development created by the border situation of a region, as well as the factors and conditions for the realization of the region's competitive advantages through the development of cross-border cooperation. A test site for research is the Samara Region – one of 85 subjects of the Russian Federation, one of Russia's leading industrial regions. The Samara region is located in the south-eastern part of the European territory of Russia in the middle of the largest in Europe river – the Volga and occupies an area of 53,600 sq. km, which is 0.31% of the Russian territory.

The realization of the research goal is achieved by the use of a set of methods: (1) statistical analysis – for the investigation of the totality of external competitive advantages created by the border situation of the Samara region with the Republic of Kazakhstan, in comparison with other Volga regions of the Kazakhstan frontier – the Orenburg region and the Saratov region; (2) a case study method – for the analysis of development possibilities for non-urban territories located directly near the border with the Republic of Kazakhstan; (3) sociological analysis methods – an interview conducted to identify challenges and opportunities for transforming border situations into competitive advantages at the level of enterprises carrying out export activities.

4. Findings

It is widely recognized that the regional capacity to integrate into national and international production and economic systems is a critical factor for the well-being and prosperity of any region, which can provide additional resources for its development. The border regions of countries in this sense have a unique resource – the possibility of direct access to the foreign market.

Traditionally, a border region is a part of the natural space where the existence of an international border directly and substantially affects economic and social life. In this sense, we can distinguish between open or potentially open regions and closed regions (Hansen, 1977). At the same time, the state border in theory performs three main functions: contacting, barrier, and filtering (Topaloglou et al., 2005).

The peculiarity of the Russian border regions is that most of them (90%) became so after the collapse of the USSR, when huge areas of Russia had got the position of a border region, forming the so-called 'new border zone'. Today, two types of borders can be distinguished in

Russia: old and new ones. The so-called old borders were formed in the period before the collapse of the USSR. New borders are with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and the Baltic countries.

Such territories of the new «Eurasian frontier» include the Samara region – the subject of the Russian Federation having the land border with Kazakhstan. This border is about 300 meters long, while the border between Kazakhstan and Saratov Oblast stretches for 500 km, between Kazakhstan and Orenburg Oblast – for 1670 km.

Nevertheless, for many years the Samara region has been actively cooperating with the Republic of Kazakhstan, which is one of the region’s most significant trading partners among the CIS countries, is among the top ten countries – the main trading partners of the Samara region. The volume of foreign trade turnover of the Samara region with Kazakhstan for 2020 amounted to \$397 million. (93 percent higher than in Saratov oblast and 46 percent higher than in Orenburg oblast), with exports accounting for just under 10 percent and imports accounting for 90 percent (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: Basic economic indicators of border cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan (by three border regions of the Russian Federation)

	Orenburg Region	Samara Region	Saratov Region
<i>Trade turnover with the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2020. thousands of United States dollars, including:</i>			
<i>export</i>	227687,0	36915,9	171227,3
<i>import</i>	43316,0	359770,7	34265,7

Source: Authors, based upon the database “Regions of Russia”

The Samara region exports to the Republic of Kazakhstan mineral products, machinery, equipment, products of the chemical industry, plastics and products thereof, metals and products thereof, means of land transport, etc. It is estimated that more than 50 percent of goods entering the West Kazakhstan region from the Russian Federation pass through the Samara region. Metals and their products, mineral products, machinery, equipment, chemical products, food products, agricultural raw materials, etc., are imported from Kazakhstan. Most of the products of the agro-industrial sector of Kazakhstan enter the Samara market.

In our view, the close economic ties between the Samara region and Kazakhstan are due in large part to the social relationship between the two territories. Migration is also a social indicator of cross-border interaction (see *Figure 1*).

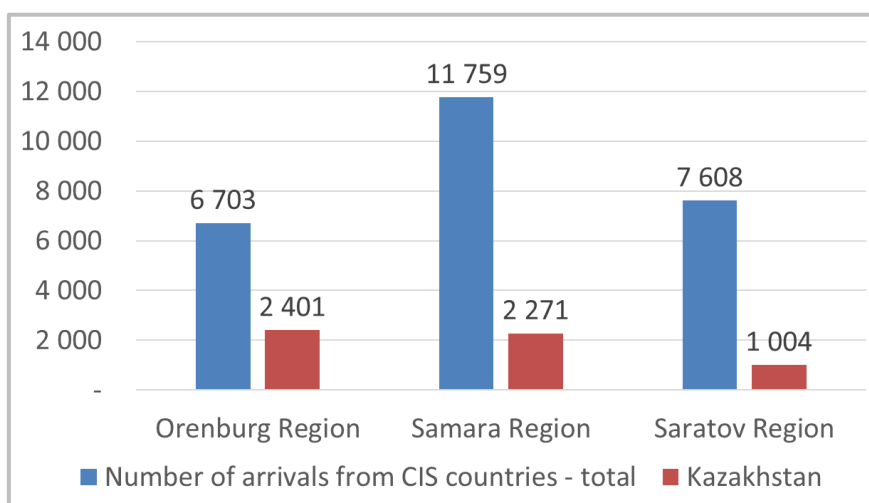


Figure 1: Migration of the population of the Russian subjects with the CIS countries and Kazakhstan in 2020

Source: Authors, based upon the database “Regions of Russia”

The Russian Ministry of Labour, Employment and Migration Policy estimates that approximately 70 percent of migrants from Kazakhstan are migrant workers. In addition, a large proportion of migrants are students (according to the statistics of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, in the Russian Federation one out of every four foreign students is from Kazakhstan, and in the Samara region the figure is twice that of the Russian average) who prefer to receive Russian education in the Samara region

The relations between the border regions of Russia and Kazakhstan are based on the implementation of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union, which was adopted in 2014. This Union was established based on the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus as an international organization for regional economic integration, ensuring freedom of movement of goods, services, capital, and labor. Today, along with these countries, the Eurasian Economic Union includes Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

It should be noted that the Eurasian integration has not yet fully developed specific mechanisms for cooperation, both at the federal and the regional levels. However, certain Russian regions independently make efforts to organize mutually advantageous cooperation with neighboring territories. In this sense, the border factor can become a unique competitive advantage, providing a wider market for regional products and a potential for socio-economic development through the implementation of major projects, aimed at promoting integration.

For the Samara Region, the border situation with Kazakhstan provides both external and internal competitive advantages.

The realization of a large infrastructure project for the development of the road network and at the same time a paid alternative to the M-5 «Urals» road with the prospect of further use as part of an international transport route is a significant external competitive advantage «Europe – Western China». The construction of a bridge is of great strategic importance for Samara oblast – it will have a significant impact on the economic development of the city of Togliatti – the second largest city of the Samara region will be a powerful stimulus for the development of the economic space of the Volga Federal District of Russia as a whole.

Table 2: Cross-border cooperation cases of the Samara region and the Republic of Kazakhstan at the municipal level

Criteria for the review	Case 1 – Agricultural Market Expansion	Case 2 – Cultural Cooperation
<i>Municipality</i>	Village of Marjevka, Pestravsky municipal raion	Aul Kazakh as part of the rural settlement of Bogdanovka, Kinelsky municipal raion
<i>Distance to the border with Kazakhstan</i>	50 km	250 km
<i>Form of cooperation</i>	Kazakh investments in the construction of an enterprise on the territory of a rural settlement, the total sum investment – 200 mln roubles	Cooperation in preserving the authentic culture of the local population
<i>Initiator of Cooperation</i>	Republic of Kazakhstan	Samara Region
<i>Briefcase</i>	Construction of a meat processing plant for the production of ground meat and semi-processed meat for meat-processing plants, located in Kazakhstan	Provision of methodological assistance in the implementation of cultural policy, preservation of traditions, holding of traditional Kazakh holidays to local inhabitants – descendants of Kazakhs who settled in Kuibyshev region in the 1940s in response to numerous repressions in Kazakhstan in those years
<i>Advantages for territorial development</i>	Creation of non-urban jobs, the economic base of non-urban development	Development of a single cultural space

Source: Authors

The formation of the region’s internal competitive advantage based on the border factor is linked to the fact that the border area of the Samara region is, in a spatial sense, the peripheral territory of the region, the nucleus of which is formed within the borders of the Samara-Tolyatti Agglomeration which is the third-largest Agglomeration in Russia. According to the data of the local Ministry of Economic Development and Investment, more than 86 percent of the population of Samara Region live in the territory of the Samara-Tolyatti agglomeration, 78 percent of industrial and 43 percent of agricultural production are produced and 81.5 percent of investment is absorbed. For the southern extra-agglomeration territories, border cooperation forms a significant stimulus not only for the economy but also for the socio-cultural development of local territories – that is the conclusion that can be drawn from the two cases presented in *Table 2*.

Thus, at the sub-federal level, the prospects for cross-border cooperation are linked to the development of peripheral territories, and the region is therefore making its own institutional and regulatory efforts to develop the legal framework for inter-municipal cooperation in border areas.

One of our methods of gathering information on the factors of development of border cooperation between the regions of Russia and Kazakhstan was a sociological study, which we carried out in the form of a survey on the Google platform. 128 people from the border regions of Russia and Kazakhstan took part in the survey. The survey included several questions on obstacles and prospects for expanding and developing cross-border cooperation between the Samara region and Kazakhstan. Here, however, we will focus on just a few of them, the responses to which have enabled us to understand how regional entrepreneurs perceive prospects for cooperation with Kazakhstan and access to Kazakh markets.

We asked respondents to assess two of the most important barriers to cross-border cooperation: information on partners and their previous experience with international cooperation and export activities in general. The results of these assessments are presented in *Figures 2* and *3*.

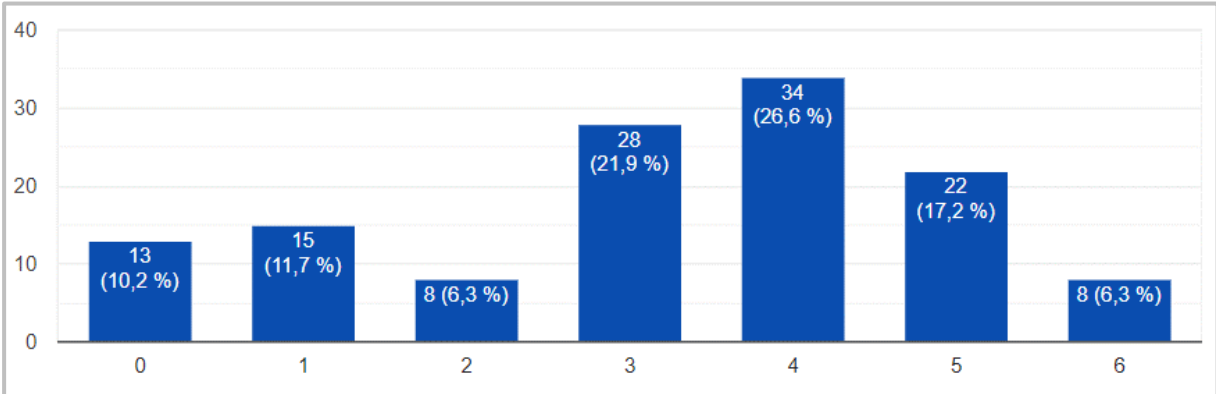


Figure 2: Respondents’ assessment of barriers to cooperation with Kazakhstan: information on a partner

Source: Authors

However, despite the many positive aspects of cooperation between the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan at the regional level, several problems hinder the further development of Eurasian integration. First of all, the main obstacle to deepening Eurasian economic integration remains the commodity orientation of the two countries – Russia and Kazakhstan simply have too few segments and industries where they could complement each other. Even where Russian and Kazakh companies are developing non-commercial exports – agriculture, chemical industry, metallurgy, some types of engineering – they are fighting for the same market niches within the Eurasian countries and beyond, which does not contribute to deepening economic ties. As it is seen from *Figure 2*, the difficulty of finding partners was quite appreciated by our respondents.

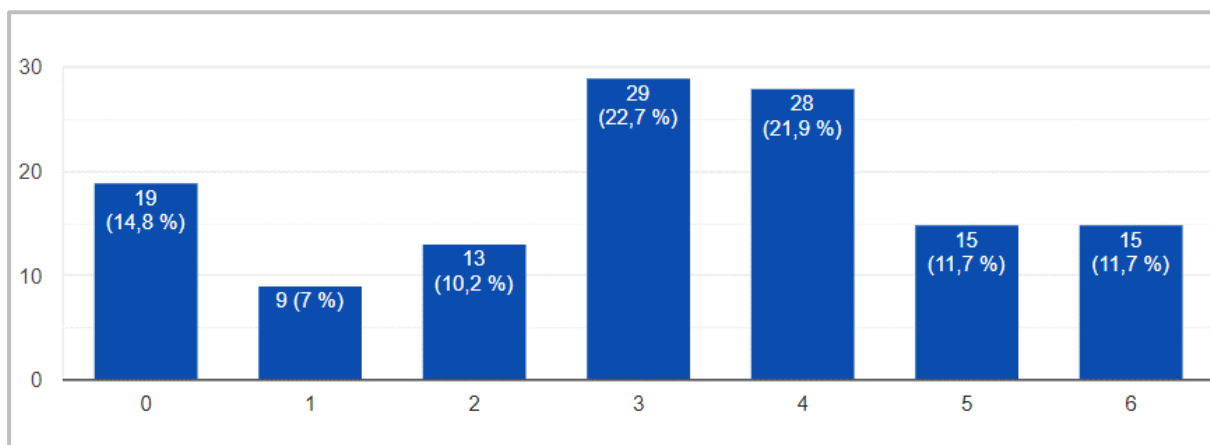


Figure 3: Respondents' assessment of barriers to cooperation with Kazakhstan: previous experience

Source: Authors

Moreover, the legal and regulatory framework for the economy and foreign economic relations is still not harmonized in the countries of Eurasian integration. This inevitably leads to dumping, re-export, and counterfeiting in the trade of countries. Consequently, respondents consider the negative experience of cooperation to be a rather significant barrier to the implementation of joint projects (*Figure 3*).

In the survey, we asked respondents to answer the question on which areas they consider the most promising for cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan. The results are shown in *Figure 4*.

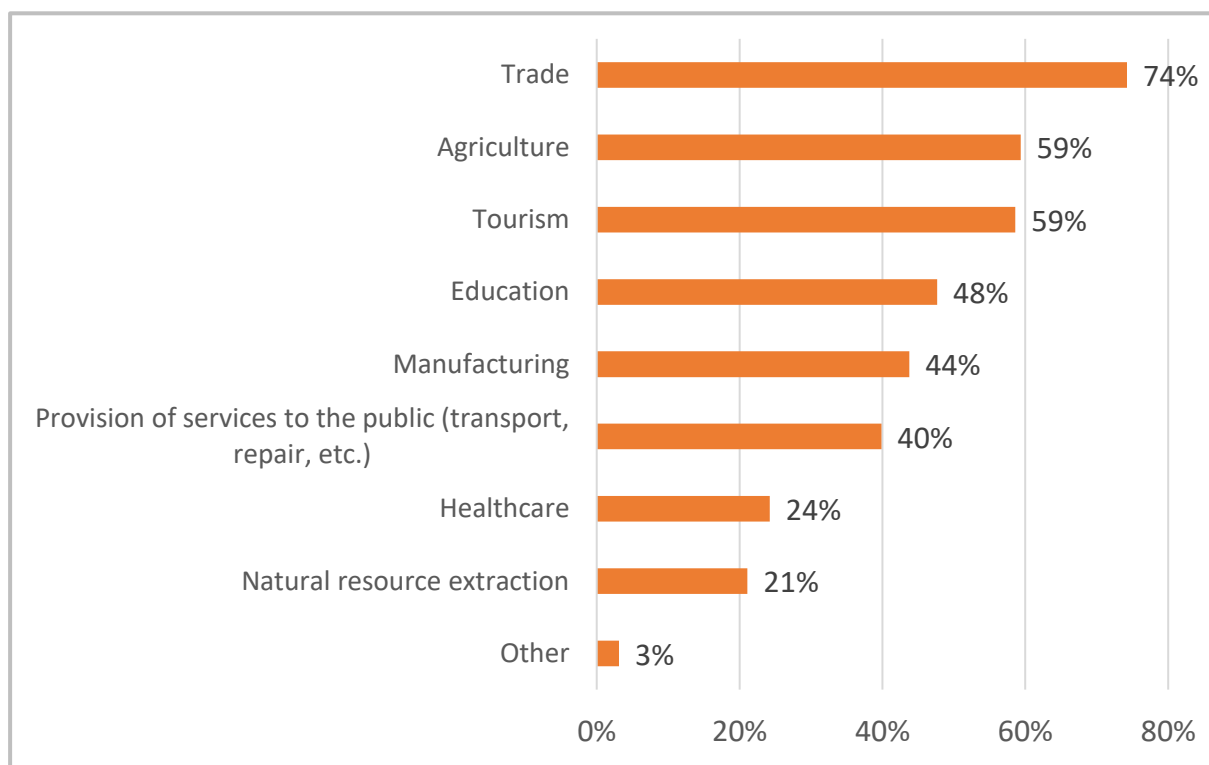


Figure 4: The most promising areas for cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan

Source: Authors

Border trade appears to be a major driver of cross-border economic cooperation. For example, food products are of primary interest to Russian citizens crossing the border into Kazakhstan to buy consumer goods. However, the flow of Kazakhs to Russia to buy various goods is small, due to higher prices for alcohol, confectionery, meat products, and fuel (gasoline) in Russia.

Agriculture was the second most important area of cooperation, as successful projects were already being implemented. The products of Kazakh agriculture are in demand on the Russian market.

Tourism is also an important component of modern cross-border trips by nationals of the two countries. In addition, there is a great potential to attract additional tours to Russia and Kazakhstan from far abroad by developing common cross-border tourist routes.

5. Summary

To sum up, the good starting points for the comprehensive integration of Russia and Kazakhstan in the form of common historical development and political interests, the interpenetration of economies, and general integration processes create additional advantages for the social and economic development of border regions, one of which is the Samara region, whose case was discussed in the paper.

The interface between local issues and the global agenda, for example in achieving sustainable development goals, environmental issues, and security, may well be the most successful practice. In general, addressing common problems together in an innovative manner should form the basis of cross-border cooperation policies. This will provide important common ground for the growth and harmonization of the socio-economic development of neighboring regions.

Under such conditions, the development of good-neighborly relations within the framework of the implementation of specific forms of border cooperation will contribute to the development of specific local territories and will provide strategic development directions for the constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

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