

CIESZYN AND ČESKÝ TĚŠÍN MAYORS' MANAGEMENT OF THE PUBLIC COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES AND RESIDENTS

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Purpose: To assess the manner and instruments used by the authorities of Cieszyn and Český Těšín for the purpose of managing public communication with residents.

Design/methodology/approach: The research was conducted in the form of an individual in-depth interview with Gabriela Hřebačková, MA, the mayor of Český Těšín (22.09.2021) and Gabriela Staszkiwicz, BSc, the mayor of Cieszyn (28.09.2021).

Findings: Social communication is a multi-layered issue. It can be assessed from the perspective of how it facilitates relaying information to residents and businesses, as well as from the point of view of the effectiveness of the communication between Cieszyn and Český Těšín during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authorities of the cities in question are aware of the challenges they are faced with, and make use of varied forms and instruments of public communication. Their messaging is aimed at various stakeholder groups, including residents, businesses, potential investors and tourists.

Research limitations/implications: The study is worth repeating in the future for the purpose of identifying possible changes in the strategies applied by the authorities of the cities in their communication with residents and other stakeholder groups.

Practical implications: The methods and instruments of social communication, including marketing communication, utilised by the local authorities when communicating with residents, have a significant impact on the image of the cities and their authorities. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the purpose of communication is to satisfy various vital needs of the residents of Cieszyn/Český Těšín, including healthcare, commuting to schools and work, as well as crossing state borders.

Originality/value: The article illustrates how selected public communication instruments are utilised in Cieszyn and Český Těšín.

Keywords: Public communication in a city, place marketing.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The process of communication is analysed by a great many authors from various disciplines. An untold number of its definitions exist, giving rise to differing assessments of how humans communicate with one another as part of society. According to J. Podgórecki, the essence of communication is that it is not a value in and of itself, requiring a receiver to complete and co-create. Its value is incomplete if there is no one to accept, experience and participate in it. This participation is individual and social in nature, and thus individuality combines with generality to shape communication and its perception (Podgórecki, 1998, p. 322).

Communication is also a means of socialisation, enabling individuals with a strong local identity and aliens to familiarise themselves with the environment they are navigating, and if they can communicate, they will be accepted by and integrated into that environment (Heger, 2012, p. 10). Therefore, communication is a determining factor in social integration. In various communication-related situations which occur between people and organisations, it can be noted that it is the form of communication, and not only the relaying of information, which determines whether the act succeeds or fails. Communication skills are also important to public officials and individuals involved in marketing activities. Indeed, society is forced to communicate. The importance of interpersonal and broader social relations cannot be overstated, as they consist in creating, conveying and receiving information. However, we live in a time plagued by an ever-growing paradox: the easier we create and convey increasing amounts of information, the more difficult it becomes to process and understand it. In a time of media proliferation and permanent virtuality, information becomes something external to us, even though we may feel that we are always in control of and benefit from it (Heger, 2012, p. 12).

High-intensity communication may give rise to situations sometimes referred to as information overload. Such situations are commonplace among professionals whose tasks include collecting, verifying, selecting and assessing various information. These include officials, politicians, managers, journalists, scientists and teachers, who, often voluntarily or inadvertently, fall victim to the ease with which excessive public communication can be created and disseminated. In addition, in comparison to a more traditional lifestyle, this phenomenon can be viewed as the entirety of modern civilisation being overloaded (Heger, 2012, p. 21).

The current age is referred to as the age of knowledge and information, and factors which contribute to success include innovation, creativity, mobility and access to information. Moreover, the rapid development of new information technologies has led to profound transformations taking place in the economy, whose manifestations include such terms as the digital, electronic, network and knowledge-based economy (Hajduk, 2019, p. 68). A knowledge-based economy is based on four major pillars:

1. Human capital, which is formed by highly-skilled and well-educated workers who are mobile, are proficient in foreign languages and the use of information technologies, and who are motivated to creatively and effectively contribute to the development of the modern economy;
2. Financial institutions, whose purpose is to provide capital for high-risk economic ventures (i.e. venture capital), which are an inherent feature of an innovation-based economy. These institutions render it possible to commercialise the most promising ideas for innovative products and services;
3. Universities and R&D institutions, without which a modern economy is impossible to build, as they serve as business incubators, constituting the foundations of the economy, able to effectively compete for resources on the global market;
4. ICT infrastructure, which comprises information and communication technologies and the methods used by society and economic entities to adopt them (Ciechomski, 2013, p. 89).

In a knowledge-based economy, the Internet plays a leading role. Its purpose is to build an information society, the main feature of which is the ability to effectively communicate, and thus use a wide spectrum of methods of collecting and processing data and communication tools. In this type of society, computer networks are of tremendous importance, as they provide access to information and opportunities for learning and communicating with an enormous group of users, including institutions and public administration organs. The role of ICT networks and specialised software only grew during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the lockdown period, social communication, including between municipal authorities and residents and as part of the e-learning process in schools and universities, would not have been possible on such a large scale if not for the highly advanced ICT solutions available.

Communication can serve multiple purposes in local governments, including:

- Informational, the purpose of which is to familiarise the addressee with the resources available to the territorial unit, as well as its location and attractions, and consists in conveying information about what the area has to offer;
- Persuading, whose purpose is to convince stakeholders, stimulate particular behaviours, increase the degree to which residents and investors identify with a given destination, and to create desirable attitudes towards the authorities of the territorial unit;
- Promotional, which involves placing the territorial unit's product mix such that it is present in the perception of the addressees of the promotional efforts, and in general also competing for its rightful place, as well as optimal image, in the minds of stakeholders. This issue is analysed in more depth in Szromnik, 2016 (p. 274);
- Educational, which is related to the above functions, while focusing on the learning of expected behaviours by territorial marketing stakeholders;

- Integrating, the purpose of which is to facilitate the relationships between community members – locally, regionally and country-wide;
- Competitive, which refers to the competition between individual territorial units for subsidies, investors, tourists etc. (Kogut-Jaworska, Smalec, 2018, p. 50).

2. Communication in public administration

Modern researchers, economic practitioners and local government members have access to increasing amounts of knowledge and instruments which facilitate the planning and implementation of public and marketing communication. However, the integration of the measures being implemented remains a challenge (Hajduk, 2019, p. 19). The power of local authorities is multiplied thanks to communication, discussions and being aware of their own needs. Social participation, partnerships and mutual engagement become important as a result (Kogut-Jaworska, Smalec, 2018, p. 86). This is because such actions facilitate the identification of resident needs, help create attractive offerings, coordinate the actions of local government staff, satisfy local residents and achieve the goal of developing the city (Kalisiak-Mędelska, Nowak, Król, 2018, p. 29).

Communication is essential for public administration officials, and is an integral part of administrative processes. On the one hand, it provides the information necessary to objectively assess any issues which require solving and make correct decisions, and, on the other hand, it is the primary means of enforcing decisions and influencing and organising residents (Rektořík, Šelešovský, 2002, p. 52). Residents occupy various positions as regards their relationships with the state or local authorities, and the private and public spheres are constantly intertwined in their lives. Political, economic and organisational relationships differ at the state, municipality, city and regional level. These are not only quantitative differences arising from the total area of the territory in question, the number of residents being administered or the size of the office, but also qualitative differences related to the skills, financial and material resources, as well as the means of mutual communications used in everyday life.

In order for communication to be effective, it is necessary to be familiar with the needs, wishes and opinions of residents. It is also necessary to provide them with information about what is happening in the city, to ensure that they are sufficiently informed about the actions and decisions of the administrators. If a resident is not informed about the intentions of the authorities, it is not the fault of that resident, but the authorities. Thus, the latter should opt for content, forms and tools of communication which ensure that it reaches the resident in the right place at the right time, and is intelligible to them (Foret, 2008, p. 370). The resident should know where they can obtain the information they need, and should also know why it is useful. Information relayed by public administrators should be accessible, objective and offer utility in

the decision-making processes of the administrators and regular residents alike. This is contingent upon the access to information offered by the public administration system, the selection of appropriate direct and indirect forms of communication which guarantee that information is distributed in a transparent manner, the monitoring of feedback and ensuring that opinions can be corrected (Institut pro evropskou politiku Europeum [online], 2014).

A range of public administration communication studies were conducted by the Czech Asociace moderně komunikujících občanů a starostů (AMKOS). The institute is a legal entity established to serve as a public utility institution, its main activity being the lay and professional education of society centred around the communication between residents and mayors, primarily in the form of specialised seminars, training sessions and lectures and organising and publishing research and analyses. The name can be translated as the “Association for Modern Communication between Residents and Mayors”. According to a poll conducted by AMKOS and published by Jana Brožková, the majority of Czechs would like to be informed about events happening in their place of residence (Brožková, 2017). As many as 89% of the respondents would prefer it if the city or municipality provided them with information using alternative means, as 80% of them visits the websites of their municipalities less than once per year. Publishing information exclusively on a website or notice board, which meets the legal requirements which apply to mayors, is completely unsatisfactory for residents.

As demonstrated by AMKOS, the connection between residents and municipality and city authorities is paramount. Unfortunately, even in the 21st century, ineffective methods of communication are still in use, and residents must spend time to overcome various obstacles when searching for information on official notice boards, websites and in local bulletins. The majority of the respondents admitted that they did not remember the last time they had visited the website of their city or village, with many respondents reporting never doing it. At the same time, the residents did state that they would like to be informed about what was happening in their municipalities, and that it was important to them.

As far as traditional media are concerned, the residents only regularly perused the bulletin, which was read by 55% of the respondents, while the other 45% never read it. Certain respondents rejected all forms of printed media, either due to ecological reasons or due to the fact that the regular printing and distribution of a bulletin can result in expenses of up to hundreds of thousands of korunas. If given the choice between a printed and an e-mail bulletin, 93% of the respondents would choose the e-mail version, as well as the option of the information being sent to their mobile phones. As many as 79% of the residents stated that they would feel better informed if that was the case.

The residents also emphasised the need to be able to select the type of messages received from their cities and municipalities. Modern communication systems allow for sending messages targeted at selected addressee groups. Residents can select the types of content which they find relevant, and not only in relation to their interests, enabling them to receive messages for dog owners, seniors or families with children, in addition to being able to enter their place

of residence and receive only information pertaining to their area. The residents praised this option primarily because they would be able to receive information about power outages, street renovations, etc. According to the AMKOS study, more than 80% of all respondents would welcome this solution.

It should be noted that, on the one hand, municipalities tend to avoid overburdening the city treasury with resident communication expenses, while simultaneously spending exorbitant sums on local radio stations. A local radio station is not only more expensive, but also less effective considering the lifestyle of young people today, who primarily use social media. In addition, information provided to residents via local radio stations is frequently unavailable in rural areas, and improving radio reception costs hundreds of thousands of korunas. The effectiveness of city notice boards is also limited, especially considering that more than two-thirds of the population commutes to work or school outside of their place of residence, which means that they have limited opportunities to see any announcements. Due to these reasons, residents prefer direct communication which is available in any place and at any time, even during a holiday stay in a different location. According to the respondents, preferred information channels included text messages (64%), as well as electronic municipality bulletins (25%) and smartphone applications (11%). Information deemed valuable included unexpected weather events and other hazards, which could help prevent the loss of life or damage to health or property.

Nearly 90% of the respondents stated that they would like to be included in decision-making processes pertaining to such issues as bus stop renovations, playground construction etc. via mobile phone voting. This demonstrates that programmes facilitating the participation of residents in the management of their city or municipality are held in high regard. Smart cities commonly make use of information and communication technologies to increase the interactivity and efficiency of urban infrastructure and its individual components. In addition, it is important to make constant efforts to raise resident awareness. The idea of smart cities involves rendering urban spaces more amenable to residents, businesses, tourists and the authorities via the implementation of modern digital solutions. Smart cities also emphasise looking after the environment, human capital and businesses. A smart city should operate similar to an effective organism whose individual components work together to ensure harmonious development, leading to increases in functionality and quality of life.

When asked if they would approve of being able to submit civic complaints regarding such issues as illegal waste dumping, wild animals or various other hazards, the majority was in favour of such solutions. This leads to the conclusion that, if local authorities offered residents the ability to participate in improving the quality of life in their communities, treating them as equal partners in solving the problems of their city, then the residents would become more involved in the public life of their little homeland.

3. Information expected by residents

AMKOS expert W. Lukas, in his article “O jaké informace z místa bydliště mají občané největší zájem?”, or “What information from their area are residents most interested in?”, demonstrates that, in general, not all residents are interested in all types of information. Traditional local radio stations frequently broadcast all types of information targeting all audiences, including advertisements and general information which may be irrelevant to residents. Certain residents are satisfied with changes being announced on an official notice board, while others appreciate a new schedule of cultural events, with some residents preferring to join groups centred around hobbies of their choosing, e.g. cycling, angling or regional history. Modern systems enabling direct communication with residents allow for accurately selecting which information and announcements a resident would like to receive. In the aforementioned poll, 647 citizens of the Czech Republic who were interested in receiving information from their municipality to their phone were asked which information was most desirable to them. In line with the expectations, the majority of the respondents, i.e. a staggering 99.5%, would subscribe to receiving emergency information, 88.2% would be interested in being updated on official matters, 80.3% would be interested in cultural events, and more than half (66.6%) of the respondents would appreciate polls and conferences during which they could talk to their councils about certain decisions pertaining to the development of their municipality. In comparison to a traditional referendum, the costs of carrying out a poll or a conference are extremely low.

More than half of all respondents would also be interested in receiving information about events relevant to their interests taking place in the city. As many as 61% of the residents would like to receive information about sports matches and their results. Information for senior citizens was relevant to 60% of the respondents, which completely disproves the stereotype according to which senior citizens are uninterested in modern communication systems due to being unable to use them. Other popular types of messaging included information aimed at families with children, e.g. invitations to exhibitions, fairy tale plays, dragon parades and various other activities. Such information was of interest to 57.5% of all respondents (Lukas, 2016).

4. Public communication from the perspective of the mayors of Cieszyn and Český Těšín

In order to compare the quality of communication in both cities, a field study in the form of an individual in-depth interview was carried out, whereby both mayors were asked a set of identical questions pertaining to the following four topics:

1. Public communication (between the cities and their residents, its forms and tools),
2. Communication between the two cities (Cieszyn and Český Těšín),
3. The quality of public communication management (the instruments used, national projects and programmes to improve quality, assessment of whether the city authorities participated in these programmes),
4. Changes in public communication during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the purpose of acquiring specific information on the forms and instruments of communication used in these two partnered cities, interviews were conducted with Gabriela Hřebačková, MA, the mayor of Český Těšín (22.09.2021) and Gabriela Staszkievicz, BSc, the mayor of Cieszyn (28.09.2021).

5. Communication between the cities and their residents

The Český Těšín City Hall utilises the local radio to inform its residents about matters relevant to their lives, and also to relay information about cultural events. In addition to this, residents are informed about cultural events via folders sent by mail. A traditional notice board is also still in use. The *Těšínské Listy* monthly magazine is also a rich source of information. More modern sources used by the authorities of Český Těšín include a Facebook profile, websites and cable television, which regularly broadcasts the *Těšínské minuty* programme. The authorities also relay information with the help of the POLAR Moravian-Silesian Regional Television, which broadcasts programmes aimed at specific cities in the Moravian-Silesian Region. Twice every month, it broadcasts programmes for the cities of Karvina and Havířov, which also provide their residents with information about events taking place in Český Těšín. The City Hall also organises discussion forums which can be attended by residents. Two such forums took place in 2019. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic rendered it impossible to organise the planned events. This year, however, one such forum took place on 20 September, and was widely considered a success.

As part of the project “Changing Hlavní” (which refers to the altering and modernisation of the city’s main street), polls were distributed among the city’s residents, who were also polled in the streets. The purpose of this was to learn their opinions and involve them in the discussion and decision-making related to the transport-related changes taking place in the city.

In the spring of this year, a poll was conducted as part of what is known as the “Projects from the Drawers” programme. All residents had an opportunity to co-decide which projects should be carried out first. From 1 to 15 April 2021, a joint poll was conducted among the residents of Český Těšín and Cieszyn. The residents of Český Těšín proved to be more involved, with 444 electronic votes cast and 32 paper questionnaires submitted. The winning

project, which received 161 votes, involved expanding a playground to include new equipment for games and entertainment.

Public communication is organised somewhat differently in Cieszyn. The City Office Spokesperson works together with the City Culture Promotion Department, which also comprises the editorial board of the local newspaper, *Wiadomości Ratuszowe*, which is a biweekly publication. The newspaper contains information about current and future events, as well as announcements related to such issues as public consultations, new resolutions, plot sale proposals, and occasionally also recruitment advertisements by the City Office and local businesses. It is a comprehensive source of information on the life of the city and matters which the City Hall deems important for the residents to know about. In recent months, this information has also included announcements related to any vaccinations drives organised in the city.

The city hall also uses more modern forms of communication. It has its own website, as well as a Facebook page, which is titled “Cieszyn robi wrażenie” (Cieszyn leaves an impression). In the past, the city advertised with a similar slogan, “Ciesz się Cieszynem” (Enjoy Cieszyn). The page is primarily focused on cultural events, and is targeted to a greater degree at visitors, particularly tourists. It also contains the *Miasto Cieszyn* folder, which contains information related to transportation, road closures, entertainment and other local events. The mayor of Cieszyn also has her own Facebook page and website. A comprehensive analysis of the communicative, informative and promotional role of websites, as well as the benefits of utilising social media profiles such as Facebook in the electronic communication of city and municipality offices can be found in Kancik-Kořtun, 2017 (p. 165).

The authorities of Cieszyn also organise monthly live streams. Every first Monday of the month at 7 PM, they connect with the residents via the Internet, enabling them to ask questions which are answered by the mayor and her representatives. As a result, the residents can ask for specific information and clear any doubts they may have. The range of questions received by the authorities from the residents is usually extremely vast, primarily pertaining not only to planned and ongoing infrastructural projects, but also the cultural life of the city, social assistance for those in need and various other matters.

6. Communication between Cieszyn and Český Těšín

The two cities are involved in a number of joint projects, which requires effective communication on various levels (Gabryřová, Ciechomski, 2018, p. 97). The most important of these include “Czeski Cieszyn i Cieszyn razem” (Český Těšín and Cieszyn together), the goals of which include developing a shared logo which illustrates the partnered cities' intention to organise joint events. In late September of the current year, the results of the logo

contest were published. The winning entry is a perfect non-verbal depiction of the concept of partnership. Its three colours – white, red and blue, are the national colours of Poland and the Czech Republic.



Another of these projects is aimed at visualising both information centres and ensuring the uniformity of communication related to joint events.

In late 2019, a common strategy was adopted by Cieszyn and Český Těšín. As part of this strategy, six working groups were established, each comprising 7-8 members focusing on various aspects of the partnership, including urban spaces, green areas and safety. Certain groups focus on joint cultural events and other shared projects, in addition to a group tasked with ensuring the quality and accuracy of information relayed to the other city. As an example, if a street is closed for renovation in Polish Cieszyn, this information is relayed to the Czech side so that it can be posted on its Facebook page or in *Těšínskýe Listy*. Another working group is responsible for the marketing efforts of both cities. Traditionally, the Czech and Polish Municipality Councils hold meetings four times a year, in which the working groups report on their activities and achievements. After the official working part is over, the social part begins, the purpose of which is to meet with and better understand the other side.

7. Public communication management quality

The mayor of Cieszyn states that no distinct public communication quality improvement programme aimed at cities and municipalities exists in Poland, however, the city of Cieszyn has been involved in benchmarking for local authorities. The overarching goal of the project is to increase the quality of public services by increasing the effectiveness of existing management systems. The research is conducted by the Silesian Union of Municipalities and Counties. Cieszyn has scored highly in the study, and is among the top performing cities. The efforts of the City Office which benefit the residents are monitored. The Association of Polish Cities, whose membership exceeds 300 towns and cities, also conducted a study on the presence of city and town mayors on Facebook, i.e. what types of messages are published, how many recipients they have etc. Cieszyn compared favourably with other urban centres.

The City Hall is legally obligated to ensure that City Council sessions are available to the public, which is why they are recorded and uploaded to the city's websites. In addition, the authorities strive to reach as broad an audience as possible with regard to public consultations. For this purpose, a project was launched as part of the Norwegian Funds programme, to which Cieszyn applied for participation. Cieszyn was one of the smaller Polish cities to participate, suffering from such major issues as young people leaving for larger cities, an ageing society and other problems which commonly affect provincial areas, including a dire need for rapid infrastructural development. Cieszyn has approx. 35,000 inhabitants, with a relatively large number of senior and disabled residents, as well as individuals who require temporary or regular assistance.

As part of its application process to the Norwegian Funds programme and for the purpose of planning local development, the city authorities launched a wide-ranging consultation project targeting the residents. White tents were set up in the town square in which the mayor and her deputies, as well as the heads of selected departments, including the Municipal Development Strategy Department, the Real Estate Management Department and presidents of city-owned companies, were available at certain hours of the day throughout September, communicating with the residents and gathering ideas pertaining to areas which could potentially be improved in the city, how it could continue to develop, how the residents perceived the authorities' achievements, and what their long and short-term goals should be. These extensive public consultations served as the basis for developing and submitting a project. The project was a success, leading to Cieszyn becoming one of the laureates of the programme. The city received EUR 3.5 million for local development, which is a tremendous success. In addition, Cieszyn is entitled to apply for another EUR 2.5 million to expand its plans.

To ensure the high quality of public communication with stakeholders, the mayor has personally visited key businesses operating in the city in recent months, the purpose being to learn about the problems they are experiencing and their development plans. Over the course of these visits, it was discovered that many businesses find it difficult to recruit new employees. On the other hand, the city features numerous schools, with 4500 children commuting to Cieszyn every day. However, it was determined that upon graduating from secondary school or university, many young people leave the city, which means that the authorities must find ways to demonstrate the potential of Cieszyn to young people, and prove that they can find work in the city as well.

The Czech Republic has implemented its Common Assessment Framework (CAF) programme, which is a total quality management (TQM) instrument developed by the public sector to facilitate quality management. It is utilised to improve the quality of the services and everyday functioning of public sphere organisations, particularly public offices (Oficiální portál Rady kvality ČR). Český Těšín did not participate in this programme, however, and neither does it utilise any quality improvement instruments to aid its operations and communication. Instead, it improves its public communication by ensuring that customers are treated better by the City Office staff.

8. The impact of COVID-19 on public communication

The pandemic has greatly affected the work of the Český Těšín City Office. Its communication with the residents of the city was subject to government restrictions, and was primarily limited to on-line forms. The City Office communicated with its Polish partners regularly once per week, but only remotely. The working groups worked on-line for the entire period, which proved to be less effective, especially in the case of larger group meetings, discussions and in situations when important decisions had to be made.

Polish Cieszyn was among the first cities affected by COVID-19, and was forced to close its schools and certain other institutions. This was an unexpected situation which required completely new forms of communication. From the perspective of the mayor, more frequent communication with the residents was indispensable at the time for the purpose of providing support and assuaging their fears. The flow of information was saturated with inaccurate data on the number of cases, which caused panic among residents. It was very important to explain to them what was happening and what the situation in the city really was. To facilitate this information campaign, for a period of time, the authorities used live streams to communicate weekly with the residents. In addition to this, the city created posters which were placed in every housing block with the help of the Housing Cooperative. The posters offered information on where to acquire face masks and the possibility of food deliveries by the city for those remaining in quarantine who could not rely on a family member to help. Pursuant to applicable law, the city compiled a list of goods which it could help procure during this time. A special hotline with the State Sanitary Inspectorate was established, which offered access to information on the number and names of residents currently in quarantine, and also worked together with the city authorities and the fire department on providing the necessary support. The residents were also informed about the bars, bistros and restaurants which offered food to go or food deliveries. More information on crisis management can be found in Gabryšová and Ciechomski, 2019 (p. 123).

The businesses which were renting their premises from the city were exempted from paying rent. Information regarding the rules of crossing the state border, which bisects Cieszyn into its Polish and Czech parts, was also of great importance during this period. The closure of the border during the pandemic was a painful restriction imposed on the partnership of the two cities, although the collaboration did not cease to function, as the issue of cross-border workers remained to be solved. Voivodeship and state authorities were consulted in this matter. A poll was conducted to help the city authorities determine the scale and nature of the problems affecting those residents of Cieszyn who worked on the Czech side. The authorities communicated frequently with the cross-border workers, and their efforts were viewed favourably as a result.

A new challenge for public communication was organising vaccination drives in the Cieszyn entertainment arena, where 15,000 people were inoculated, including local residents and visitors from the rest of Cieszyn County and other areas.

9. Conclusions

The partnership between the two cities is so advanced that it was not affected even by a change of mayors. “This partnership may become better or worse, but it will continue,” states Gabriela Staszkiwicz, the mayor of Cieszyn. This opinion is shared by the mayor of Český Těšín, Gabriela Hřebačková. The communication styles of the two partnered cities obviously differ in certain respects, especially with regard to the past. In general terms, however, the mayors and the residents alike perceive the Polish and Czech parts of Cieszyn as a unique, single organism, and the lockdown period demonstrated that any restrictions imposed on their mutual relations are detrimental to both parties. This relationship manifested itself in the signs and billboards which appeared during the pandemic on both sides of the River Olza. Written on the billboards was “Stýská se mi po tobě, Čechu”, or “I miss you, Czech”, and, in response, “Chybíte nám Poláci”, or “We miss you, Poles”. During the pandemic, spontaneous initiatives such as this are highly desirable, serving as a symbol of the relationship between the two cities.

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