

Cooperation between Japan and Visegrad Group Countries on Subnational Level:

The Case Study of Kantō Prefectures

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Abstract

When analyzing relations between countries, one should not forget to add additional dimension to this analysis - relations on subnational level. With advancement of globalization and regionalization processes this new dimension has been actively participating in shaping relations between countries.

This study is focused on analyzing relations between Japanese prefectures from Kantō area and regions from Visegrad Group countries. Do Kantō prefectures cooperate with regions from East-Central Europe? If yes, what are the main areas of cooperation? If not, is there any possibility to form partnership in the future? This study is aimed at seeking the answers to above questions.

Keywords: Japan, Visegrad Group, Paradiplomacy, International relations

I Introduction

Advancing globalization and regionalization processes have led to the emergence of new actors in the global scene. Those new actors started to have enormous influence on international relations, not only on political level but on economic as well, including trade relations. Among them there are subnational governments which engage themselves in paradiplomatic activities. Paradiplomacy refers to the involvement of consistent units (regions) of national states in the international affairs. This involvement is performed in many different ways, like opening trade and culture missions abroad, signing treaties and agreements with foreign state and non-state actors, or participating in international networks of regional cooperation, and so on. What is more, in some cases, paradiplomatic involvement of subnational units influences shaping the foreign and domestic policy of central governments. An increase in power of subnational governments over global issues, especially their ability to shape economic cooperation, leads to the necessity of including them in analyzing international relations between countries. In recent years Chinese provinces have been very active in developing closer links with regions from East-Central Europe, resulting in signing many agreements with European part-

ners. Considering Japanese-Chinese competition over being leader of Asia as well as leading global economy, the following issues arise: does Chinese increased interest in forming relations with East-Central Europe had any influence on activity of Japanese prefectures? Has similar trend been observed within Japanese prefectures? Are Japanese prefectures active players in developing international relations with partners abroad? Do Japanese subnational governments show any signs of interest in this part of a world? This study is aimed at analyzing involvement of prefectures from Kantō area in developing cooperation with regions from Visegrad Group countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). Throughout this study the answers to the following questions will be sought:

- Do Japanese prefectures from Kantō area have partnerships agreements with regions from Visegrad Group countries? If yes, with which? If not, why?
- Are Japanese prefectures interested in forming closer economic cooperation with regions from Visegrad Group countries in the near future?
- What are obstacles for closer cooperation?
- What are possible benefits for Japanese prefectures of such a cooperation?

The paper is divided into six sections. The “Paradiplomacy” section introduces the theoretical concept that this study is based on. “Methodology” briefly explains the methodology used in this study, in particular the source of statistical data as well as analytical frameworks which was chosen for the purpose of this paper. “Japan’s Subnational Government” introduces legal framework for conducting autonomous activities by prefectures in Japan. “Overview of Japanese – Visegrad Group relations” provides an outline of hitherto areas of cooperation between those two regions. In “The case study of Kantō Prefectures” section, the relations between prefectures from Kantō area and regions from Visegrad Group countries are analyzed. The last section “Recommendation for the future relations” presents suggestions for further research and presents questions for policy makers which it provokes.

II Paradiplomacy

Active participation in shaping international relations is no longer considered as a sole privilege of sovereign states. With advancement of globalization and regionalization processes the emergence of new actors in the global scene have been observed. Soon those new actors started to have an enormous influence on international relations, not only on political level but on economic as well, including trade relations. Those newcomers in international relations include entities such as: multinational corporations (MNCs), transnational non-government organizations (NGOs), transnational regimes, like EU or NAFTA, transnational organized criminal groups, celebrity diplomacy and regions (subnational governments - SNGs), which are the focus of this paper.

The concept of active participation of regions in international relations has been present in scholars' attention since 1980s, when Ivo Duchacek (1984) published his article *The International Dimension of Subnational Self-Government*, in which he proposed a typology of the involvement of regional governments in international affairs. He categorized all their activities into global micro-diplomacy and transborder regionalism. Duchacek also came up with neologism "paradiplomacy" in order to name this phenomena. However, it took some time before this controversial term was popularised and became commonly used by scholars and policy-makers (Kamiński 2018). At the beginning phenomena of external activities of regional governments has been referred to as "microdiplomacy" (term also created by Duchacek), "protodiplomacy," "subnational governments' diplomacy," "regional diplomacy," and "constituent diplomacy". Other terms such as "subnational foreign affairs," "subnational foreign policy," "substate diplomacy," "multilayered diplomacy," "local government external action," "local diplomacy," "local foreign policy," "regional diplomacy," "plurinational diplomacy," "pos-diplomacy," or, one may speak of "foreign policy localization" have also been used (Tavares 2016). Nowadays "paradiplomacy" is commonly used term and it will be also used throughout this paper.

As is has been mentioned "paradiplomacy" refers to the international activities of regions which can be seen as: *a form of political communication for reaching economic, cultural and political or any other types of benefits, the core of which consist in self-sustained actions of regional governments with foreign governmental and non-governmental actors* (Kuznetsov 2015).

Paradiplomacy is now considered as global practice which is undertaken by not only regions from federal and unitary countries, but by cities as well, although "in each regional context it usually adopts some specific profiles" (Cornago 2013). Subnational governments actively participate in international affairs in different ways: they open trade and cultural missions abroad, sign treaties and agreements with foreign state and non-state actors, they participate in international networks of regional cooperation and they sometimes even challenge the official foreign policy of their central governments through their statements or actions (Kuznetsov 2015).

Even though there are difference between regions in terms of objectives and means of accomplishing them, subnational governments managed to create and implement a truly innovative diplomatic field, with its own channels for international cooperation and new policy instruments (Cornago 2013).

Since nowadays the role played by subnational governments in creating and developing international affairs has been becoming bigger and bigger as well as more visible, it is important to include studies on abroad activities conducted by SNGs in order to fully understand relations between countries. That is why, this study is focused on analyzing approach of Kantō Prefectures towards regions from Visegrad Group countries.

III Methodology

For the purpose of this paper variety of research methods have been applied, both quantitative as well as qualitative. For the quantitative part of the study, research survey has been sent to 7 Japanese regional authorities from Kantō area. In the concise survey the following information has been obtained: if the region cooperates with regions from Visegrad Group countries, in what form, in which areas and for how long. 5 prefectures have filled in the questionnaire, for the remaining two information has been gathered based on studying the data published on official prefectural websites. Gathered data was used for mapping regional cooperation between V4 regions and Kantō prefectures. The qualitative part of the research has been based on in-depth interviews with representatives of analyzed Japanese regions. Those interviews helped to understand Kantō prefectures' approach towards regions from Visegrad Group countries. Further information has been also collected from the representatives of Polish authorities which provided additional insight into Japanese-Visegrad Group relations on subnational level.

In order to analyze relations between Kantō prefectures and regions from Visegrad Group countries, modified version of Kuznetsov's the explanatory framework of paradiplomacy based on a multiple response questionnaire (MRQ) technique has been used (Table 1).

Table 1 Modification of Kuznetsov's analytical framework

Kuznetsov's analytical framework	Modified analytical framework
1. What are the causes of blooming of paradiplomatic activities?	1. What are the causes of keeping paradiplomatic activities by Kantō prefectures with regions from Visegrad Group countries?
2. What are the legal grounds of paradiplomacy?	2. What are the legal grounds of the paradiplomatic relations between Kantō prefectures and regions from Visegrad Group countries?
3. What is the predominant motive of the regional government to be involved in international affairs?	3. What is the predominant motive of the Kantō prefectures to be involved in international affairs with regions from Visegrad Group countries?
4. How has paradiplomacy been institutionalized?	4. How have the region-to-region relations with regions from Visegrad Group countries been institutionalized by Kantō prefectures?
5. What is the attitude of central government towards the paradiplomacy of the region?	5. What is the attitude of central government in Tōkyō towards the paradiplomatic relations between Kantō prefectures and regions from Visegrad Group countries?
6. What are the consequences of paradiplomacy for the development of the whole nation?	6. What are the consequences of the Kantō prefectures paradiplomacy for the development of relations with Visegrad Group countries on national level?

Source: own compilations based on Kuznetsov (2015).

IV Japan's Subnational Government

According to the administrative and legal systems below the national government, there are various types of local governments, which include: prefectures, cities and municipalities (towns and villages). They vary considerably when we consider their size and functions. Local units in Japan were given constitutional recognition for the first time under the 1947 constitution (Purnendra 2011). Chapter VIII, which consists of 4 articles, recognizes “the principle of local autonomy” and provides a foundation for subnational governments’ operations. Article 94 states that subnational governments “shall have the right to manage their property, affairs and administration and to enact their own regulations within law”. Under the 1947 constitution Japanese SNGs were given much more freedom and authority than ever before although in some areas centralized relationship with national government has been maintained. Another law which set out the role and responsibilities of subnational governments in Japan was the 1947 Local Autonomy Law (LAL). However, those legal framework do not mention international functions which leaves SNGs legally unimpeded in pursuing their own interests overseas. In fact, the constitutional and legal status of SNGs gives them the opportunity to expand their jurisdictional territory into the international arena by failing to even mention this action as a possibility – or impossibility – for SNGs. They have been able to take on roles as international actors by regulatory default (Purnendra 2005).

Although subnational governments’ rights to undertake independent decisions and actions have been implemented in 1940s, it was not until 1980s when their international activities begun to intensify. SNGs have started to expand their international involvement beyond overseas cultural actions and moved to establishing international sections within their offices. National governments answered with mixed reactions to this new phenomena. Some of national government ministries have been active in supporting SNGs international activities, although there were also ministries which were against their actions, stating that SNGs act far beyond their competences. As a result of this increased international activities conducted by local autonomies, from the 1980s, steady institutionalization to maximize the ministries’ capacity for assistance, regulation and influence has been implemented by national government. This has enabled the concerned ministries to provide advice, guidance and coordination, through an accretion of government and quasi-government bodies that have come to recognize SNGs as valuable partners (Purnendra 2005). Bodies that support subnational governments’ international activities are: Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), Council of Local Activities for International Relations (CLAIR), and Japan Intercultural Academy of Municipalities (JIAM). Besides the establishment of above bodies, new regulations concerning SNGs international activities have followed. In March 1987 Ministry of Home Affairs issued *Guidelines on the Promotion of Local International Exchange*, which was followed in 1988 by *Guidelines for Creating*

Municipal International Exchange and Outlines for Planning for Local International Exchange Promotion in 1989. Moreover, in 1995 the Ministry published another institutional framework called *Guidelines on Developing Charters for Promoting Local Government International Cooperation*, while in 2000 the two following documents have been released: *Policy on the Status of Community Groups in Charters Promoting Local Government International Cooperation* and *Charters Promoting Local International Exchange*. All those initiatives have been aimed at providing SNGs with more detailed framework regarding their international activities as well as achieving a compressive approach to management and coordination of such activities. In addition to providing policy directions, Ministry of Home Affairs also moved to give legal footing to the SNGs international work. *Local Employees Overseas Dispatch Law* has been enacted in 1988 and it provided legal framework for sending SNGs employees abroad in order to perform work-related tasks. According to this law, local governments' employees can be sent abroad to offer specialized technical knowledge, engage with overseas government organizations and other bodies, collect information and data, promote local trade and tourism, assist in natural disasters and participate in international organizations such as the UN and bodies under the UN umbrella (Purnendra 2005). As Ebashi pointed out this law provided personnel with the ability to make decisions for their SNG independently of the national government (Ebashi, 1991). Second piece of legislation framework that was enacted by the Ministry was *Omnibus Decentralization Act* from 1999, which has given local authorities more administrative independence in managing their local affairs.

Implemented policy directives as well as legal framework further encouraged subnational governments to engage in activities which were spreading beyond country's border. Nowadays, local authorities are actively participating in various international activities, shaping their international relations with other units independently from national government, however the degree of participation varies greatly between SNGs. Participation in international environment of subnational governments include wide range of activities: from sister-city arrangements, through friendship programs, to more closer cooperation agreements, ex. participation in international working groups aimed at tackling common problems together with foreign partners or formation of bilateral or multilateral alliances to share ideas and information regarding technology and know-how; as well as engagement in international aid delivery. Moreover, SNGs are active players in pursuing more intensive international economic cooperation, through the usage of methods such as: high-level trade missions, overseas offices aimed at developing and maintaining economic connections, offering incentives for foreign businesses as well as other partner agreements.

Even though Japan follows unitary system, subnational governments were given some privileges and rights to pursue policies and strategies independent from national ones. SNGs took the initiatives and became an active players on international scene. Next section presents the results of study which shows how in practice Japanese SNGs cooperate with foreign partners.

V Overview of Japanese - Visegrad Group relations

Formally Visegrad Group has been established by leaders of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland on 15th February 1991, however, Japan started to show interest in this organization more than a decade later. In 2003 Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited Poland and Czech Republic, where he discussed strengthening the cooperation not only with visited countries but with Visegrad Group as a whole as well. It has to be emphasized that date of his visit to Europe was not random since it took place shortly before Visegrad Group member states have joined European Union.

In the following year – in 2004, Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany has gone with official delegation to Japan. After the meeting with Prime Minister Koizumi on 25th of October joint statement regarding future relations has been published. According to the statement, both parties that is Japan and Hungary, are very impressed by regional integration in Visegrad Group format. Besides, they hope that V4 + Japan initiative will continue as a successful form of mutual dialogue.

Presented above three meetings that took place as well as statements that were given have become foundation for developing relations between Visegrad Group and Japan. Establishing mutual relations was not a random move for both parties since Visegrad Group member states were about to access European Union thus their position on map of Europe was about to increase. Developing closer cooperation between Japan and countries from East-Central Europe was confirmation of great changes that have occurred in this region. Since 2005 regular meetings between Ministers of Foreign Affairs from five countries have been taking place.

During Foreign Ministers' meetings, the following issues have been discussed: deepening economic relations between involved countries- trade relations as well as increasing foreign direct investment, current issues in global politics, and enhancing security of 5 countries. Those meetings served as a platform to discuss together problems that tackled the world at the time

Table 2 List of V4 plus Japan Foreign Ministers' meetings

Year	Place
2005	Brussel
2007	Hamburg
2009	Hanoi
2011	Budapest
2013	Delhi
2015	Luxembourg

Source: own compilation based on: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan

of the meetings, as well as the methods of deepening economic relations were sought.

Besides Foreign Ministers' meetings, three "Visegrad Group plus Japan" Summit Meetings were held. Those meetings were attended by Prime Ministers from involved countries. The first one took place in 2013 in Warsaw, the second in 2018 in Belgium, while the third was held in Bratislava in 2019. During those meetings the leaders of countries were talking about outcomes and prospects for future cooperation, and global challenges.

Apart from Prime Ministers' and Foreign Ministers' meetings smaller initiatives are undertaken by all countries in order to deepen the cooperation between V4 and Japan. However, so far cooperation within V4 + Japan format was based mainly on meetings between Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Visegrad Group countries and Japan. Those meetings were mainly concentrated on mutual assurances concerning willingness to further enhance relations between partners. It seems that the aim of meetings on ministerial level was to acknowledge that both sides would like to deepen relations but in reality nothing much has been obtained. Distance between Japan and Visegrad Group countries is here to blame. Since there is a distance between partners they have different political aims to achieve. For Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary as well as Slovakia the main focus is put on East-Central European region. They are rivals in achieving the position of leader in this region whose voice will be heard in Western Europe. It can be said that in this aspect Visegrad Group is a tool which aim is to increase position of its members in Europe. On the other hand, Japanese is focused mostly on strengthening Japan - U.S. alliance and enhancing relations with neighboring countries. Given different political aims it is no wonder that the cooperation between Japan and Visegrad Group countries is only limited to occasional meetings and willingness to further cooperate and not on clear declarations.

Limited relations on political side had an influence on economic relations as well. Statistical data regarding trade relations between Japan and Visegrad Group countries shows that the trade turnover has been increasing steadily for the past 25 years (Figure 1). During analyzed period import as well as export increased rapidly which contributed to an overall increase in trade turnover. Increase was especially visible after Visegrad Group countries have joined European Union. Before accession trade turnover with Japan noted only small increase in value, however, after 2004 it skyrocketed. Though it has to be emphasized that world financial crisis from 2007 had a strong negative effect on trade turnover, since the value plummeted and remained on relatively lower level than peak value from 2006-2007. Recently trade turnover has almost rebounded.

Even though for the past 25 years there has been a visible increase in trade turnover between Japan and Visegrad Group countries, the relevance as trade partners did not change much during this period. From Japanese point of view, countries from analyzed area were always considered as a minor trading partner. Japanese exports to Visegrad Group countries remained at almost unchanged level, not exceeding 1%, whilst Japanese imports from this area was even lower and did not exceed 0.6%.

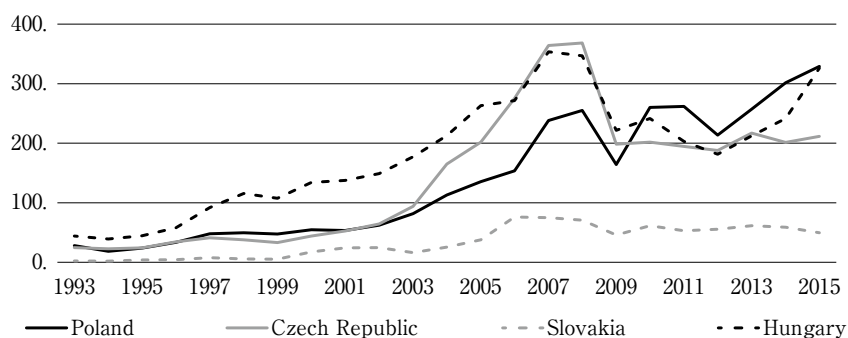


Figure 1 Trade turnover between Japan and Visegrad Group countries between 1993–2015 (in million yen)

Source: own compilations based on: Trade Statistics of Japan, Ministry of Finance, <http://www.customs.go.jp/toukei/srch/indexe.htm>

As it could be seen in this section, Japan does not keep very close relations with Visegrad Group member states on country level. However, this does not necessarily mean that relations on subnational level are also minimal. Next section provides results from research study regarding cooperation between Kantō prefectures and regions from Visegrad Group countries.

VI The Case Study of Kantō Prefectures

According to administrative system, Japan is subdivided into 47 prefectures, 43 of them are considered as regular prefectures, remaining are two urban prefectures (Ōsaka and Kyoto), one territory prefecture (Hokkaidō) and one metropolis (Tōkyō). The prefectures are often grouped into 8 regions, however, those regions are not legally specified, they do not have any corporate bodies nor elected officials. They are not official administrative units, though they have been traditionally used for various purposes. Traditional regions are: Hokkaidō, Tōhoku, Kantō, Chūbu, Kansai, Chūgoku, Shikoku, and Kyūshū. The focus of this study is put on Kantō region, which is geographical area of Honshu, the largest and most populous island of Japan. The region consists of seven prefectures: Gunma, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Saitama, Tōkyō, Chiba, and Kanagawa. Kantō area is regarded as the most highly developed, urbanized and industrialized part of Japan.

For the purpose of the study on subnational relations between Kantō prefectures and regions from Visegrad Group countries, in the first step, detailed questionnaire regarding existence of cooperation has been sent to the regional authorities from analyzed Japanese area. Questions in the survey concerned the following: if the prefecture cooperates with any region from V4, for how long are the relations kept, what are the legal grounds of the partnership, what institutions are involved in the cooperation, what are the main benefits of cooperating with foreign partner and what are main obstacles of the cooperation.

Responses to the questionnaire have been received from 5 prefectures (Gunma, Ibaraki, Saitama, Chiba, and Kanagawa), data regarding Tochigi and Tōkyō has been obtained through careful analysis of information provided on prefectural websites.

Research study shows that none of Kantō prefectures have been keeping any relations with regions from Visegrad Group countries. Analyzed 7 prefectures had no contacts in the past as well as they do not plan on forming any sort of partnership in the near future with regions from the said area.

This result should not come as a surprise when we consider that Japan as a whole keeps a very limited relations with Visegrad Group countries. Even though economies from East-Central Europe have been developing steadily, marking their presence on Europe's map as well as regions from this area have been very active in pursuing closer cooperation with partners from abroad, especially from China, Japan still remains as an area outside of mutual interests.

Information provided in Table 3 regarding foreign partners of Kantō prefectures gives another explanation for the lack of cooperation with Central-European regions. Analysis of data included in Table 3 shows that Kantō prefectures are very reluctant not only to working with partners from Visegrad Group area, but from Europe in general. As it can be seen from below Table, not every prefecture has even partner in Europe. Those who formed partnerships with European regions, mainly focused only on Germany and France. Since cooperation with West Europe is limited, it is no wonder that cooperation with East-Central Europe is almost non-existent.

In-depth interviews with representatives from Chiba and Gunma Prefectures as well as Łódź and Greater Poland Voivodeship from Poland provide additional information regarding approaches towards mutual cooperation. According to Gunma Prefecture, regions from Visegrad Group countries lie outside of interests of subnational government's foreign policy. Gunma Prefecture is focused on developing and strengthening cooperation with regions from Asia, es-

Table 3 Number of foreign partners of Kantō prefectures

Name of Kantō prefecture	Number of foreign partners	Number of European partners
Chiba	2	0
Gunma	1	0
Ibaraki	2	2
Kanagawa	8	3
Saitama	5	1
Tochigi	13	3
Tōkyō	12	5

Source: own compilations based on information provided on official websites of Kantō prefectures

pecially South Asia, and Australia, since there are possible benefits to be obtained through closer partnership. On the other hand, lack of knowledge regarding merits coming from cooperating with V4 prevents any sort of collaboration. Since there are no information regarding possible benefits, Gunma's subnational government does not seek any cooperation at the moment. However, according to the Gunma's representative, if there were real merits for the prefecture coming from partnership, Gunma prefecture would consider advancing into East-Central market, though they have no intention to do so at the moment. Similar opinion has been voiced by the representative of Chiba Prefecture. Though in general there is no necessity to establish relations with regions from Visegrad Group countries, they may consider doing it if there is a concrete project. In both cases existence of real benefits is the factor which decides whether to start developing relations with particular region or not. Since there are no information on Visegrad Group and what can be gained from cooperation, both prefectures do not seek any partners from that area.

Interviews with representatives of Polish subnational governments show similar results to the Japanese ones. Polish voivodeships also do not cooperate with any of Japanese prefectures. They are also not interested in establishing any form of partnerships in the near future. As the representative of Greater Poland Voivodeship has stated - the cost of cooperation may be too big. What is more, they follow pragmatic approach - first there has to be concrete project which will be followed by negotiations regarding establishing formal relations. Delegation from Greater Poland Voivodeship has participated before in trade missions to Japan, however, no cooperation has been started. On the other hand, Łódź Voivodeship did not undertake any steps towards cooperating with Japanese prefectures.

Research study shows that Kantō prefectures were not involved in any cooperation with regions from Visegrad Group countries. Lack of information regarding partner can be seen as the biggest obstacle for establishing mutual relations. Based on interviews, it can be concluded that both sides - Kantō prefectures and East-Central European regions are not interested at the moment in cooperating with each other, however, there is a possibility to collaborate in the future. Though both sides will have to put much effort in order to successfully form partnerships. Next section contains recommendations concerning what can be done in order to deepen mutual relations on subnational level.

VI Recommendations for future relations

Even though Japanese prefectures pursue independent strategies from national government regarding foreign cooperation, the lack of involvement on political side has an influence on subnational relations as well. Since cooperation between Japan and Visegrad Group countries is very limited, Japanese prefectures as well as regions from East-Central Europe do not feel the necessity to form any kind of partnerships. That is why, strengthening the relations on national level could possibly lead to deepening relations on subnational level as well. How-

ever, with current priorities of foreign policy strategies conducted by involved countries, this task may seem difficult to achieve. Japan as well as European partners put more focus on strengthening their relations with neighborhood countries rather than with far away partners. Though as Japanese strategy from 2007 (Arc of Freedom and Prosperity) has shown, it is possible to include further areas into national interests. However, in order to do that there should be visible benefits to be obtained throughout the cooperation.

Another factor which could improve mutual relations is better promotional campaign. Since both sides - Kantō prefectures and regions from Visegrad Group countries are unaware of possible benefits of such cooperation, thus they do not seek it. In order to change that both parties should be more active in participating in trade missions, showing foreign partners good sides of prefectures or regions, articulating benefits of future cooperation. Only by making effort on own side, it is possible to deepen the relations on subnational level.

Research study shows that Kantō prefectures and regions from Visegrad Group countries do not cooperate with each other at the moment. However, since both sides have a lot of potential, in the future some relations should be observed. Though regions from Japan and East-Central Europe will have to put a lot of effort.

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