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## Attractiveness of Leisure Activities in the German-Polish Border Area

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The primary aim of the article is to present the interest in spending leisure time on the German side by the inhabitants of the Polish part of the German-Polish border area. The article attempts to answer the questions of how often the inhabitants of Polish border communes spend their leisure time on the German side and whether spatial differentiation influences their interest in spending leisure time on the other side of the border.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The empirical part was based on a survey carried out using the CATI method in 2021. The survey was conducted on a representative group of 1,068 inhabitants of border communes of three voivodeships: Zachodniopomorskie, Lubuskie and Dolnośląskie, with a target-quota selection of respondents taking into account characteristics such as age, gender and place of residence. The theoretical part of the article is based on a literature review concerning the specificity of the Polish-German border area.

**Findings:** Almost 20% of the surveyed inhabitants of the German-Polish border municipalities travelled to German municipalities 6 times or more per year. The trips were made in order to go shopping or to take advantage of the recreational offer on the other side of the border. Those most interested in spending their leisure time are residents of the Lower Silesian (Dolnośląskie) Voivodeship and twin cities (with the exception of Słubice). Interest in spending leisure time in Germany on the voivodeship level is not the same as the results on the municipality level (in the case of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship).

**Practical Implications:** Border regions have undergone a huge metamorphosis over the years; the use of cohesion and cross-border funds has transformed villages and towns on the Polish side with good quality roads, cycle paths and walking routes. Compared to Poland's beginnings in the structures of the European Union, there are now only a few infrastructural barriers to visiting its western neighbour. To a large extent they will be eliminated thanks to, among others, funds from cross-border Interreg programmes and funds managed by the Marshals of Voivodeships. The research carried out allows the thesis to be put forward that the amount of changes in the habits of the inhabitants of border municipalities and the leisure time spent on the other side of the border will increase. As more and more local authorities implement soft partnership projects, further barriers in the way they think about their neighbour's country will be broken down. Thanks to foreign language lessons from an early age, the communication barrier will also become irrelevant.

**Originality/Value:** The research carried out so far is an extension of the research carried out in the German-Polish border area. The value of the research carried out is its territorial scope. It was carried out on the Polish side in all municipalities along the entire length of the Polish-German border and not just on a fragmentary piece.

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## 1. Introduction

Leisure time has an important influence on the daily functioning of every person. The choice of how to spend leisure time is a reflection of attitudes, interests and values important to the representatives taking part in the study. Man's leisure activities are characterised by the following features of activity: voluntariness of undertaking activity, voluntariness of performing activity, pursuit of one's own motives, pursuit of satisfaction. Leisure time can be used passively and actively, it should bring not only rest, but also adventure, fun, joy, variety and, above all, the realisation of one's own interests.

The aim of this article is to present the results of a study on recreational activities undertaken by the inhabitants of Polish municipalities bordering Germany. These municipalities are part of three provinces: Zachodniopomorskie, Lubuskie and Dolnośląskie. This article is based on a survey conducted using the CATI method on a representative group of 1,068 respondents. The research was conducted in 2021 and is part of a larger research project on the recreational activities of the residents of border municipalities.

This article assumes that the inhabitants of the Polish part of the German-Polish border area are keen to spend their leisure time on the German side. One important factor that may influence the interest in spending leisure time in border municipalities, apart from the possibilities offered by these municipalities, is the spatial diversity of the municipalities. In connection with that, research questions were posed, such as:

1. How often do the inhabitants of Polish border municipalities spend their leisure time on the German side?
2. Does spatial differentiation affect interest in leisure activities on the other side of the border?
3. What factors may influence leisure activities in border municipalities?

The layout of the article includes an introduction, which outlines the motivations for taking up the topic, the assumptions, the aim and the research questions. The next

part is the background to the considerations, which reviews the literature and refers to the specificities of border areas. The methodology and results of the research are then presented. The article closes with conclusions and a discussion arising from the research and literature studies carried out.

## **2. German-Polish Borderland - A Terminological Approach**

Areas located along national borders have long been the subject of research in many disciplines such as geography, history, law, ethnography, economics, spatial planning, regional policy or sociology. Among the areas along national borders, border areas can be distinguished. In the European Union, a border area is defined by the Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe of 20 December 2006.

This document defines a border area as an area of municipalities extending no more than 30 km from the border. If part of a municipality is located between 30 and 50 km from the border line, it is classified as a border area (EC Regulation No 1931, 2006). Border areas are situated along the border of only one country and are characterised by ethnic and cultural diversity (Malendowski, Ratajczak, 2000, p. 39).

One of the border areas is constituted by land belonging to Poland and Germany. The interstate border between Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany is (including its course on land as well as on bodies of water) 467 km long.

The border covers the western part of Poland (including the three Voivodeships that border Germany: West Pomerania, Lubuskie and Dolnośląskie) and the eastern part of Germany (including the three German neighbouring states of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg and Saxony). The area covers 127.9 thousand km<sup>2</sup>, of which the German side accounts for 55.6% and the Polish side 44.4% (Figure 1).

The three voivodeships that make up the Polish part cover a total area of 18.2% of Poland (Polish - German Borderland in Figures 2020). They vary considerably in terms of area; the largest is Zachodniopomorskie, while the smallest is Lubuskie.

Border areas are usually perceived as peripheral areas with lower levels of economic development. However, a border location can also bring tangible benefits, particularly in terms of leisure activities.

Leisure time is an issue dealt with by specialists in many scientific disciplines: pedagogy, psychology, sociology, economics, physical culture sciences, tourism and others. In the situation of constantly changing reality, it is difficult to give an unambiguous definition of leisure time, researchers are looking for new ways of understanding this sphere of human life, searching for new criteria of distinguishing leisure time from other activities of an individual and a collectivity.

**Figure 1.** Polish-German border area



**Source:** <https://www.kooperation-ohne-grenzen.de/pl/04.10.2023>

Understanding leisure time as specific behaviours undertaken in it means that it is transformed into activities of passive as well as active character giving pleasure to a human being, which are aimed at rest (both in the physiological, psychological and spiritual sense), as well as relaxation and satisfaction depending on one's subjective preferences and socially accepted norms and rituals of behaviour related to leisure time (Bombol, 2008).

Leisure time offers a multitude of forms and opportunities for spending it, based on a variety of motivations and attitudes. Their choice depends on, among other things: gender, age, education, occupation, place of residence or possessions. Geographical location, historical and cultural differences are also important. The way of spending leisure time is therefore strongly conditioned by the social, economic and civilisational environment of the individual (Niezgoda, 2014).

The attractiveness of spending leisure time on the neighbour's side in border regions can be linked to the desire to cross the border as a result of a change of environment - one of the primary motives for all tourist migration (Butler, 2002).

### **3. Data and Methods**

The article is based on a statistical analysis of a survey conducted in 2021 on a representative group of inhabitants of Polish municipalities bordering the Federal Republic of Germany. The research was conducted using the CATI method, based on a survey questionnaire consisting of closed questions with a Likert design. The sample size was 1068 respondents, and the structure of respondents by place of residence was as follows: Lower Silesian Voivodeship 224 persons, Lubuskie Voivodeship 226 persons, West Pomeranian Voivodeship 578 persons.

In the selection of respondents, a random and stratified selection was maintained, corresponding to the general population structure of municipalities.

Correspondence analysis (Beh and Lombardo, 2014) was used to investigate the relationship between the answer to the question "Are you interested in spending leisure time in neighbouring German municipalities?" and the municipality or district of residence of the respondents. It is used to detect latent relationships between variables. A contingency table is used for this purpose.

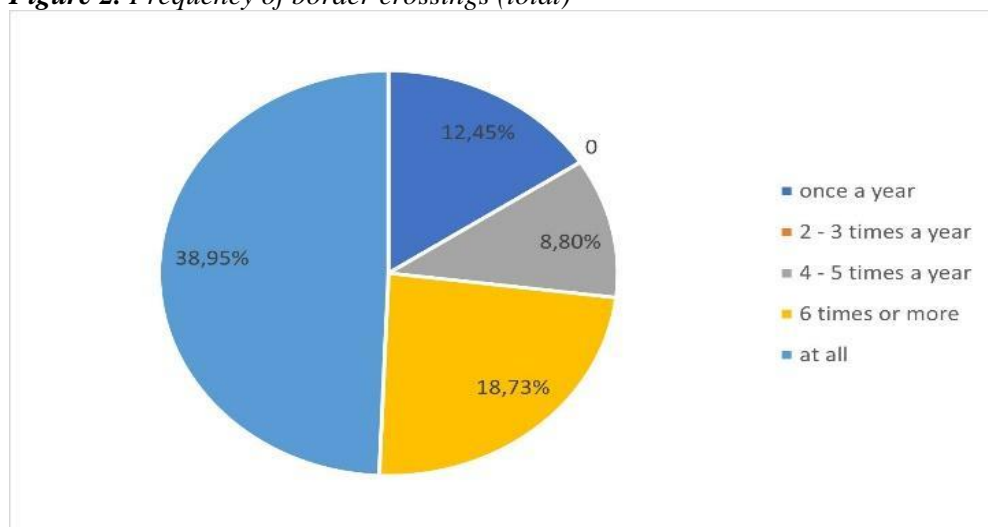
It is the equivalent of principal component analysis, except that principal component analysis is conducted for quantitative (numerical) variables and correspondence analysis is conducted for qualitative (non-numerical) data. Relationships between variables in correspondence analysis are plotted using biplots on which the values of both variables are projected (one variable is called a row variable and the other is called a column variable).

The research was conducted within the framework of a research project carried out by the Department of Spatial Economy and Tourism entitled "Changes in the functioning of border areas during the Covid-19 pandemic, with particular reference to cross-border relations, leisure time use and tourism and recreational activities of the population".

#### 4. Results

The frequency of border crossings to visit municipalities on the German side for purposes other than work is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Frequency of border crossings (total)



**Source:** Surveys.

As Figure 2 shows, the vast majority of respondents (around 40%) did not visit neighbouring municipalities on the German side at all in the year preceding the pandemic. Such a result seems surprising; it may be due to a lack of need to look for variety in leisure activities. Inhabitants of border municipalities are content with passive leisure activities or active forms offered only in their place of residence. Almost 20% of respondents went to German municipalities 6 times or more per year, which shows that for this group of respondents the border is not a problem to cross and the border area is treated as a single unit.

German municipalities (counties and federal states) bordering Poland have been trying for years to attract people living on the Polish side of the border to come to their area. Some of them offer tourist materials and information in Polish. Information campaigns are carried out on various channels (social media, traditional media). In addition, information tours are organised for tourist information staff and tourist guides.

This has a direct impact on tourist arrivals from Poland, especially from the border regions. In the city of Görlitz alone, overnight stays by tourists from Poland were still at 2,792 per year in 2018. In 2022, this figure is almost 6,000. In Upper Lusatia as a whole, there were 70 per cent more visitors from Poland in 2022 compared to 2021. This is mainly due to the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and more frequent trips by Poles to areas close to where they live. Surveys are being conducted among Polish visitors to investigate their needs.

On this basis, German municipalities are developing and implementing recommendations for the promotion of leisure and tourism in Poland and the offer of leisure activities for Poles.

The destinations of the inhabitants of the Polish part of the border region to Germany are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1. Main purpose of trips to neighbouring municipalities on the German side*

<b>Variants answers</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Recreation (relaxation, sightseeing, cycling)</b>	202	18,91
<b>Work</b>	52	4,87
<b>Shopping</b>	366	34,27
<b>Not applicable</b>	402	37,64
<b>Other**</b>	46	4,31
<b>Total</b>	1068	100

*Note:* \*\*e.g. visiting friends, relatives, acquaintances.

*Source:* Surveys.

Poles like to go shopping (approx. 35%) in German border towns. They visit shopping malls or choose well-known German food discount stores. Poles' shopping decisions are influenced by the better quality of German products (especially household chemicals), a wider choice of pet food and sweets. In German shops it is also possible to find products that are not found in Poland. The prices of products on the German side are comparable to Polish prices, it even happens that they are lower.

Recreation is also an important reason for going to neighbouring municipalities. Residents enjoy the various attractions found on the other side of the border, such as theatres, exhibitions, cross-border cycling routes, cross-border protected areas, environmental education centres, sports facilities.

The statistically high share of "not applicable" answers is related to the fact that for some border municipalities, going to the German side does not involve crossing the border. This is the case for borderscapes (Perrera, 2007) such as Słubice - Frankfurt/Oder, Gubin - Guben, Zgorzelec - Görlitz, Świnoujście - Ostseebad Heringsdorf. These are places located on the border of two (or more) countries, which are not only spatially but also culturally 'in-between'.

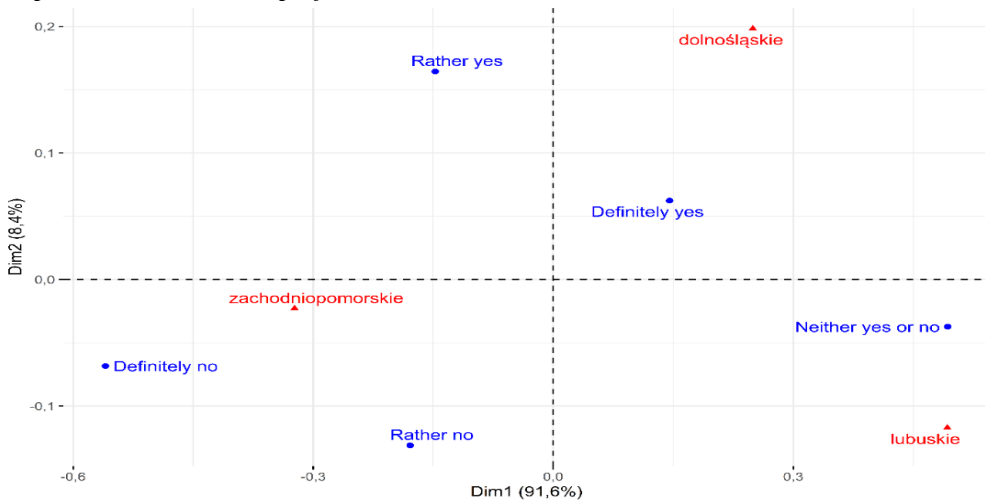
The inhabitants of Borderscapes regard the area as a territorial unity. There are joint theatre performances, cross-border leisure projects, trade fairs and business initiatives in the bi-city area. There are Polish-German kindergartens and universities (e.g. the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder)). In the last few years, many Poles, especially young families with children, have decided to buy property on the German side. Often, Poles live on the German side but work in Poland, or they live on the Polish side and work on the German side.

The results showing the distribution of respondents' answers depending on the place of residence (northern, central, southern part of the borderland) and the type of territorial unit (voivodeship, powiat, commune) seem interesting.

Although each of the studied voivodeships is located on the Polish-German border, the inhabitants of Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship are least interested in spending their free time on the German side, the inhabitants of Lubuskie Voivodeship do not have an opinion on this issue, while the inhabitants of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship show the greatest interest (Figure 3).

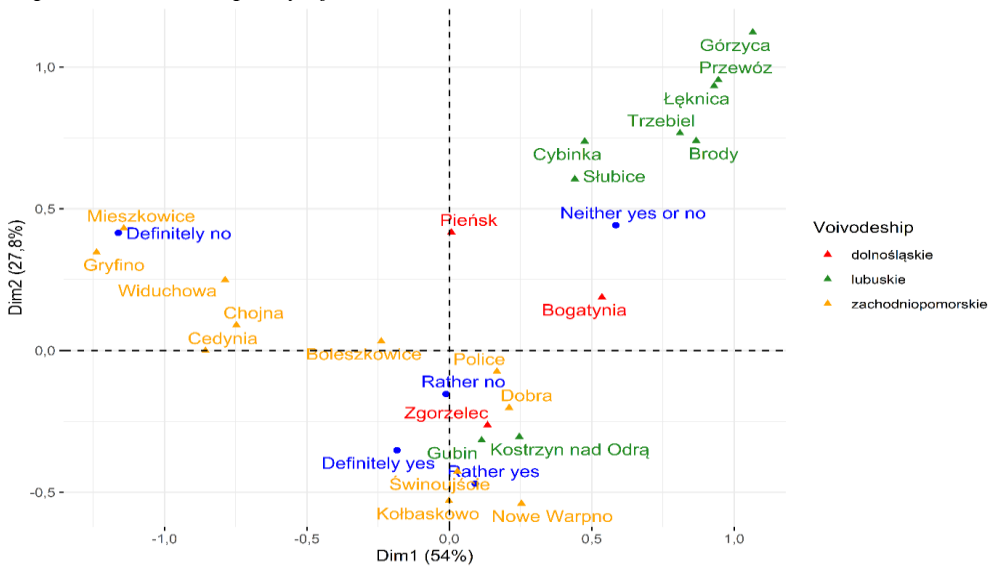
Analysing the results of the study from the point of view of the border municipalities, it can be observed that the inhabitants of border municipalities from each of the studied voivodeships are interested in spending their free time on the German side (Figure 4).

**Figure 3.** Relationship between the answer to the question "Are you interested in spending your leisure time in neighbouring German municipalities?" and the respondents' voivodeship of residence.



Source: Own elaboration.

**Figure 4.** Relationship between the answer to the question "Are you interested in spending your leisure time in neighbouring German municipalities?" and the respondents' municipality of residence.



Source: Own elaboration.

The municipalities of greatest interest are Świnoujście (Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship), Gubin (Lubuskie Voivodeship) and Zgorzelec (Dolnośląskie Voivodeship). These are municipalities that are also bi-cities. In the case of



Świnoujście, the inhabitants of this municipality like to travel to the neighbouring German municipality of Heringsdorf, referred to - due to its history - as the "Imperial Spa". It is made up of picturesque seaside towns: Ahlbeck, Heringsdorf and Bansin.

The inhabitants choose to travel by the Usedom Spa Railway, by car, by bicycle or on foot - choosing to walk along the cross-border promenade or on the beach. Excursion boats regularly call at the pier in Heringsdorf from Świnoujście. The numerous hills, cliffs and the varied landscape of the island of Usedom are a particular attraction for active holidaymakers, where you can enjoy activities such as Nordic walking, jogging or cycling.

The municipality of Słubice (Lubuskie Voivodeship) is worth mentioning. Although Słubice is also a bi-city with Frankfurt on the Oder, the surveyed inhabitants of this municipality are rather not interested in spending time on the German side. Residents of the municipalities of Mieszkowice, Gryfino, Widuchowa, Cedynia and Chojna most frequently indicated that they were definitely not interested in spending their free time in the neighbouring German municipalities. This may be due to the fact that residents of these municipalities generally travel to Germany for work and show no need to travel to neighbouring municipalities for recreational purposes.

## **5. Discussion and Summary**

Leisure activities on the German side of the border among Polish inhabitants of border municipalities vary. An important differentiating factor is the presence of bi-cities, the level of cross-border cooperation, the development of a recreational offer, as well as awareness and promotion of leisure time opportunities in German municipalities.

According to the survey, shopping trips are important. When considering interest in spending leisure time in Germany on a provincial level, it is not always the same as the results on a municipal level. This is the case in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, where the inhabitants of the communes are generally not interested in spending their leisure time on the German side, but nevertheless, from the point of view of the communes surveyed, areas with a strong correlation are observed.

Concordance occurs only in the case of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. Both the results for the voivodeship and its municipalities show a high interest on the part of residents in spending time on the German side.

One factor in the development of the German-Polish border region is the tightening of cross-border cooperation, which plays an important role in local development. An important role is played by a well-functioning, active local government which, under the guidance of the mayor, creates innovative projects to promote local attractions, develop common recreational and sports infrastructure, organise cultural events, and

further develop the twin cities. One possible solution could be the complementarity of offers from Polish and German entities on the basis of their most important assets, to the benefit of the development of the entire border area.

However, this requires the creation of a coherent cross-border tourism and recreation development policy, including joint marketing activities, planning of infrastructure development, and a common and complementary tourism product (Gardzińska, 2015).

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