Cross-Border Dynamics and Local Growth: The Polish-Ukrainian Border Region as a Case Study

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article presents selected results of research on the impact of border traffic on the development of peripheral areas on the example of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. The subject of the study was border traffic in the context of its importance as a development of peripheral areas.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research was conducted on the basis of data available from public statistics and analysis of available literature on the subject. The study covered the entire Polish-Ukrainian border area. The research period covers the years 2009-2022.

Findings: The increase in border traffic and increasing spending by foreigners in the border area indicate the potential for the development of various forms of economic activity in the Polish-Ukrainian border area.

Practical Implications: Studies have shown that border traffic and related shopping tourism is an important factor in regional development.

Originality/Value: The proposed solutions are expected to increase the quality of services offered to shopping tourists crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border.

Keywords: Border traffic, local border traffic, cross-border cooperation, border trade, shopping tourism, Polish-Ukrainian border.

JEL Codes: 012, 018, R11, R58.

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1. Introduction

Border areas have a special character resulting from the historical, political, legal and cultural conditions that caused them to be divided by a border. The functioning of borders and accompanying border regimes often shaped the development opportunities of these areas for decades (Epifani, 2000; Tsiotas and Tselios, 2023; Tuziak, 2024).

Rarely, however, becoming a stimulus for intensifying their growth. More often leading to peripheralization and accompanying adverse socioeconomic phenomena. The literature clearly emphasizes the adverse impact of the existence of national borders, which are seen as a factor leading to a reduction in the competitiveness of the border area, degradation of social potential (Hansen, 1976; Anderson and Wever, 2003; Johnson, 2009; Bahre, 2016).

Today, in the era of the conflict in Ukraine, migratory pressures on the borders of the entire EU, the dynamic situation on the border between Mexico and the United States, the functioning of borders and border areas is becoming a particularly important research area.

Borders, their course and nature are inextricably linked to issues of national as well as international security. Borders have a significant impact on the perception of a country's sovereignty. Especially in the context of their inviolability and maintenance of integrity, as well as national security. This is because the state's policies usually serve to ensure the security of its citizens, or the democratic order in the country.

The activities carried out by the state should serve to create stable conditions for civilizational and economic development, deepening the well-being of its citizens. State activity is also manifested in the protection of national identity, heritage and culture and many other aspects of the functioning of a sovereign state and nation. In the implementation of these fields of state activity, borders play an important role.

Observed today, completely new challenges to security in Europe and the European Union, are associated with turbulent geopolitical processes taking place in a globalized world. A world in which the division of spheres of influence between the US, Russia, China or the EU is increasingly contested.

The process of globalization and international integration has created new political and economic conditions leading to the replacement of the "iron border," the "golden border" separating the poor and the rich (Champernowne and Cowell, 1998; Anderson and Wever, 2003; Stiglitz, 2017a)

The widening development gap between rich and poor countries is causing growing dissatisfaction among excluded societies with the benefits of a globalized economy (Stiglitz, 2017a; 2017b).

This causes a number of problems to arise at the interface between countries, one manifestation of which is migration pressure at the borders. This promotes, on the one hand, a tightening of border regimes which usually leads to an escalation of the problem rather than a solution (Miller, 2013; Loftus, 2015; Scheel, 2019).

That is why the Polish experiences of the functioning of borders and the changes in the functions they performed after World War II are so valuable. They depict the complicated process of easing border regimes and the accompanying development of various forms of cross-border cooperation. This has fundamentally changed the perception of the border as a barrier separating societies living in a cross-border area. Cross-border cooperation based on trust, transfer of good practices, economic and cultural cooperation has become for many regions a factor that builds their competitiveness locally and globally (Malkowska, 2019).

The article focuses on one of the tools for creating cross-border cooperation, which significantly changes the formal and legal conditions for crossing the border. Local border traffic (LBT) is a formal solution, which is the subject of a bilateral interstate agreement introducing a special mode of crossing the border and staying in the border area.

It is used most often in situations where other conditions do not allow for further liberalization of border regulations. At the same time, its purpose is to alleviate the effects of the functioning border regime on the residents of the area covered by such an agreement.

2. The Scope and Methods of Research

The purpose of this article is to present border traffic including MRG as an important factor shaping cross-border cooperation. The article presents selected results of research, conducted in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland.

The presented research is part of a broader scientific project aimed at verifying the hypothesis: "Border traffic is an important factor in the development of peripheral areas." The research was conducted on the basis of data available from public statistics including the Central Statistical Office and the Border Guard, and analysis of available literature on the subject.

3. Border Traffic as a Tool for Cross-Border Cooperation and Local Development

Borders are planes that cut through space between neighboring states, delineating the territory in which a state can exercise its sovereign authority. For centuries they have served an isolating function, separating not only space but also people or ideas.

The isolationist nature of the borders meant that border areas were also subject to isolation which led to their peripheralization. The result of this isolation was that border areas lagged economically and were treated as buffer regions, often disputed (Perkmann and Sum, 2002; Johnson, 2009). This did not serve to create the conditions for accelerated multifunctional development of these areas.

In some border areas, recognizing their defensive functions, military potential was developed, deliberately limiting economic development in the area of potential future war struggles. As marginalized and often disputed areas, border areas were not seen as an attractive place to live. This led in many cases to the depopulation of entire regions which exacerbated economic backwardness and promoted the peripheralization of these areas (Gualini, 2003; Stoffelen and Vanneste, 2017).

The social sciences cite several definitions of peripheral areas. The periphery is defined as areas distant from economic centers and difficult to access in terms of communications. Other terms indicate a distinctly lower level of their socioeconomic development, determined by a number of selected indicators (Grosse, 2007; Tuziak, 2013). EU cohesion policy takes as a criterion of economic peripherality of regions a gross GDP per capita lower than 75% of the EU's (Copus, 1999; Luukkonen, 2010).

Studies conducted around the world indicate that border areas tend to have highly unfavorable socioeconomic characteristics. These primarily include:

- high employment in traditional sectors of the economy,
- low-value-added raw material specialization,
- low level of entrepreneurship,
- deformation of demographic structures,
- low quality of human and social capital,
- the negative slope of external migration,
- the low share of people employed in the R&D sector,
- remoteness from two-city centers and dependence on economic and political centers,
- low quality of education,
- poor population density and low urbanization rate.

It is emphasized that isolation is not conducive to the exploitation of the ednogenic potential of the areas divided by the border and exacerbates their priferousness.

On the other hand, the development of border traffic associated with changes in the functions of the border is causing itsignificant socio-economic transformations in the cross-border area (Schürmann and Talaat, 2002; Crescenzi, 2005; Tuziak, 2013).

The idea of cooperation between local and regional communities, transcending national borders, was born in the 1950s in Western Europe. Its precursors were the areas of neighboring Germany and France, and Germany and the Netherlands.

The Germans and the Dutch began cooperating in 1950. In 1958, they formed a Euroregional association of cities, counties and municipalities. This gave rise to today's EUREGIO, the first cross-border region in Europe. Today 130 cities, counties and municipalities belong to it.

In 1961, recognizing that the process of European integration carried the risk of unfavorable trends in regional development, the first conference on regional issues was organized. It was feared that the integration process would result in the deepening of interregional inequalities in development and the marginalization of peripheral regions. It was pointed out that without an active Community regional policy, it would be impossible to continue the rapid economic expansion of the entire grouping (Pieterse, 2010; Carter, 2018).

Regions in need of special support included border regions, pointing out their peripheral character and economic backwardness. Therefore, various measures were taken to overcome the adverse impact of borders on the development of border areas. The most common of these measures concerned:

- to change the nature of the borders and overcome embarrassing state regulations on impenetrable borders;
- strengthening economic and socio-cultural conditions;
- making decentralized regions a driving force for cooperation across borders;
- facilitate the implementation of the European land use policy;
- removing economic and infrastructure obstacles and inequalities;
- identifying methods of solving problems, manifestations of underdevelopment and nuisances characteristic of outlying areas;
- formulating principles for building a basis for mutual trust and cooperation between European institutions and their effectiveness;
- removing barriers to the labor market;
- building and consolidating mutual ties.

This was aimed at intensifying integration processes by enhancing social, economic, cultural and political cooperation. These measures are fully in line with the regional development policy of the European Union, one of whose tasks is to reduce economic and social disparities between the most developed regions of the Community and the peripheral regions.

Recognizing that the processes of polarization of European space are unfavorable, peripheral regions are consistently supported. Both those perceived geographically as well as economically and socially.

The creation of the European Union and, above all, the adoption of the Schengen Agreement introduced new conditions for the functioning of internal as well as external borders of the countries making up the EU. The agreement, concluded on June 14, 1985, provided for the gradual abolition of controls at common borders and introduced the possibility of abolishing border controls on people crossing between the treaty's member states.

In return, the states pledged to strengthen police, judicial and security cooperation and asylum policy. The signatory states agreed to strengthen controls at the zone's external border. In order to effectively implement this agreement, issues concerning visa policy, asylum applications and border controls are based on common rules and procedures (Popa, 2016; Alkopher and Blanc, 2017; Carrera *et al.*, 2018).

In practice, on the zone's internal land borders, previously functioning border crossings have been eliminated and officers no longer perform regular border checks at these locations. Technical means and officers have instead been redeployed to the zone's external borders to seal the border. For countries outside the zone, this means tightening controls and significantly reducing freedom of border movement.

In certain cases, this could prove extremely detrimental to the formation of cross-border relations. Tightening controls, restricting border movement through the introduction of visa requirements, could be a problem for the local labor market and more broadly for the entire economy of the cross-border area.

Therefore, European Union member states, with the approval of the European Commission, may conclude bilateral agreements on local border traffic with their non-EU neighbors. With such an agreement, residents of border areas gain the right to regularly cross the common border in order to stay in the border area of the other country for social, cultural, family, economic reasons.

In legal terms, local border traffic is an instrument for the implementation of the foreign policy of the European Union and the state that, on the part of the EU, concludes such an agreement with an external partner (Dudzinska, 2010; Anisiewicz and Palmowski, 2014; Ivan, Tatyana and Lidiya, 2016). Such a possibility was incorporated into European law in 2006 on the basis of Regulation No. 1931/2006 of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

According to its provisions, the LBT agreement is a bilateral agreement between an EU member state and a third country that has a land border with the EU. The LBT rules derogate from the general rules governing border control of persons crossing the external borders of EU member states [Regulation (EC) No. 1931/2006]. Experience from the operation of the LBTG indicates that the introduction of facilities for cross-border residents to cross the border is of significant value to the local community. With the introduction of this regulation, the border becomes a less annoving barrier.

The possibility of more frequent contacts usually influences the dynamic development of entrepreneurship of border residents. Serving the development of border trade, the tourism industry or the service sphere (Malkowski and Malkowska, 2011; Malkowska, 2019; Malkowski, 2019).

4. Border Traffic and Local Border Traffic as a Factor in the Development of the Polish-Ukrainian Cross-Border Area

Poland is currently bound by two agreements on local border traffic. The first was signed with Ukraine, which came into force on July 1, 2009. Another agreement was concluded with the Russian Federation in December 2011 (suspended in 2016). Despite years of efforts, the local border traffic agreement between Poland and Belarus never entered into force.

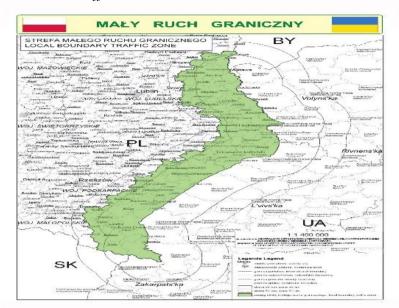
The preamble to the Polish-Ukrainian agreement indicates that the governments of the two countries, guided by the desire to develop relations of strategic partnership and deepen Polish-Ukrainian cooperation, aiming to introduce mutual facilitation of border crossing by border area residents, have concluded an agreement on the principles of local border traffic.

Local border traffic is defined in the Agreement as the regular crossing of the common border by border area residents in order to stay in the border area for social, cultural or family reasons, as well as for legitimate economic reasons, which, according to internal regulations, are not considered gainful activity, for a period not exceeding the time limits established in the Agreement.

Local border traffic zone delimited by the area of administrative subdivisions extending no further than 30 km from the common border; if part of such a subdivision is located between 30 and 50 km from the border line, it is considered part of the border area (area map below).

According to Article No. 3 of the agreement, residents of the border area may cross the common border of Poland and Ukraine, within the framework of local border traffic, after fulfilling the following conditions:

- will present a valid permit;
- are not persons for whom an alert for refusal of entry has been issued in the Schengen Information System (SIS);
- are not considered a threat to public order, internal security, public health or international relations of Poland or Ukraine, or any of the Member States of the European Union, and in particular, no entry refusal alert has been issued against them on the same grounds in the national databases of the Member States of the European Union.



Map 1. Local border traffic zone on the Polish-Ukrainian border

Source: Annex to the local border traffic agreement, https://www.gov.pl/web/ukraina/maly-ruch-graniczny-informacje-ogolne.

The permit entitles its holder to stay in the border area for up to 90 days each time from the date of crossing the border. Such a permit may be issued to residents of the border area who:

- have a valid travel document, authorizing them to cross the state border;
- will show documents confirming the fact of having a place of permanent residence in the border area for a period of not less than 3 years, and the existence of legitimate reasons for frequent crossing of the border of Poland and Ukraine under the local border traffic.

According to the provisions of the agreement, the first permit is issued to a resident of the border area for a period of validity of 2 years, but not longer than the validity period of the travel document. On the other hand, subsequent permits are issued for a validity period of 5 years, but no longer than the validity period of the travel document, provided that the applicant has used the previous permit in accordance with the provisions of the agreement.

The fee for accepting and processing the application is 20 euros. Disabled persons, pensioners and children under the age of 18 are exempt from the fee. This is a significant difference from the price of a national visa for which residents of Ukraine had to pay as much as 80 euros until 2017.

Small border traffic is one of the tools for shaping neighborly cooperation between border areas, i.e. regions, municipal authorities and other entities in border regions (Dius, 2012; Ivan, Tatyana and Lidiya, 2016; Kotovich, 2016). It is part of the policy of cross-border cooperation integrating communities divided by a border.

The key European documents that set the framework for cooperation across borders are the European Framework Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Communities and Territorial Authorities⁴ (the so-called Madrid Convention) and the European Charter for Border and Transfrontier Regions.

The Madrid Convention defines cross-border cooperation as any jointly undertaken activity aimed at strengthening and developing neighborly contacts between communities and territorial authorities of two or more parties, as well as the conclusion of agreements and adoption of arrangements necessary for the implementation of such intentions.

The preamble to the Madrid Convention indicates that signatory states should promote cross-border cooperation and thus contribute to the economic and social progress of border areas and strengthen the sense of community that unites the peoples and regions of Europe.

Local border traffic is a special mode of state border crossing especially important for people who frequently cross the border. It allows a relatively unhindered functioning of the cross-border labor market, daily contacts of communities living in the area covered by it. From an economic point of view, it allows the potential of the cross-border area to be exploited.

Numerous studies indicate that facilitation of daily cross-border contacts has the greatest impact on the development of the service sector (Qian *et al.*, 2009; Luczak and Kęprowska, 2013; Fedan, no date). The development of services inherently accompanies the process of socio-economic development, and is the result of reaching higher and higher levels in this development. The evolution of economies into service economies, is characteristic of areas with high local and global competitiveness.

In the case of the Polish-Ukrainian border, regulations to facilitate community contacts were introduced while the USSR was still in operation and after its collapse. Significant changes occurred with the admission of Ploska to the EU. This caused the Polish-Ukrainian border to become the eastern border of the EU at the same time and Ukrainian citizens were subject to visa requirements.

⁴Council of Europe Convention No. 106, Journal of Laws No. 61 item 287-288. It should be noted that the Convention applies to the activities not only of local government, but also of other institutions carrying out local and regional tasks.

This significantly affected the functioning of the cross-border labor market, which relied heavily on Ukrainian workers finding employment in Poland mainly in agriculture, processing and construction.

Since the introduction of the LBT in 2009, border traffic between Poland and Ukraine has been clearly increasing. A special period for the Polish-Ukrainian borderland was the period of 2020-2021, the time of pandemic border traffic restrictions. The number of border crossers in 2020 was just over 7 million people compared to 20 million in 2019.

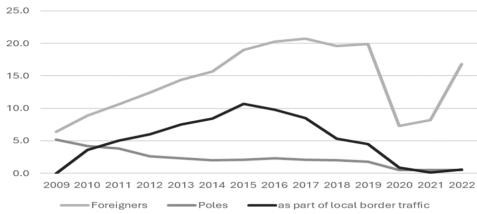


Chart 1. Crossings of the border in million.

Source: Own compilation based on Border Guard data.

More than 70 million Ukrainians have crossed the border with Poland under the local border traffic regime in the period since 2009. In the same period, more than 200 million foreigners and nearly 32 million Poles crossed the border. In the case of foreigners, long-term observations of border traffic indicate that more than 57% of them are residents living in the area up to 50 km from the border and as many as 36% of them live in the area up to 30 km from the border.

Thus, in the case of the Polish-Ukrainian border, these are residents of the MRG area. This means that at least 114 million residents of the Ukrainian part of the border area crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border during the analyzed period. The highest intensity of MRG border traffic is observed in the 3rd and 4th quarters of the year.

Local border traffic between Poland and Ukraine goes beyond facilitating the movement of residents of border regions. For both societies, it has become an opportunity to build new social and economic ties. The authors' research on the determinants of the development of border areas clearly indicates the importance of shopping tourism as an important factor in the development of the cross-border economy (Malkowski, 2016; 2019; Malkowska, 2019).

Therefore, an analysis of border traffic was made, taking into account the expenses incurred by border crossers.

The study showed that in the period 2009-2022, among those crossing the Polish section of the EU's external border, there was a clear majority of people whose stay abroad did not exceed 1 day. These were predominantly people declaring as the purpose of crossing the border - shopping.

Expenditures of those who went abroad for 1 day accounted for an average of 90% of total expenditures, both for foreigners and Poles, and were almost entirely (99%) spent on the purchase of goods.

Among those crossing the border, the highest percentages were those doing so several times a month 36% and several times a quarter 27%. Studies conducted in many cross-border areas clearly indicate that shopping tourism is an important factor in the development of the region's economy. This is particularly true for the region up to 50 km from the border, where border trade is developing (Getz, 1993; Timothy, 2017; Malkowski, 2019).

We face a similar situation on the Polish-Ukrainian border. Surveys conducted among residents of the Polish-Ukrainian border region prove that 68.1% of Ukrainians shop on the Polish side within 50 km of the border. More than 50% go within 30 km of the border for this purpose. In the case of Poles shopping on the Ukrainian side, more than 70% of them shop in the zone up to 50 km from the border and nearly 60% at a distance of no more than 30 km.

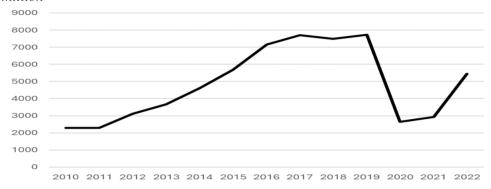
This means that shopping tourism, which is one of the main reasons for crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border, is eminently local in nature. The beneficiary of the economic benefits accompanying, the increase in border traffic is the local economy. Juxtaposing the number of border crossers with the percentage of people shopping in the area up to 50 km from the border, it can be estimated that in the period from 2009 to 2022 more than 77 million Ukrainians made purchases in the Polish border area. In the same period, more than 22 million Polish citizens made purchases on the Ukrainian side.

An analysis of the expenses incurred by those crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border reveals unequivocally that it is Ukrainians who spend many times more on purchases in Poland than Poles in Ukraine. The total value of expenditures by foreigners crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border is estimated at PLN 62729 million. The largest receipts from shopping tourism were recorded on the Polish side in 2017-2019.

In 2022, foreigners crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border will spend PLN 5439 million in Poland. This amount is higher than the sum of the budgets of the Lubelskie and Podkarpackie border provinces, which in 2022 were:PLN1317 million

and PLN1882 million, respectively. This value is the best indication of the role of border-related spending in the economy of the border region.

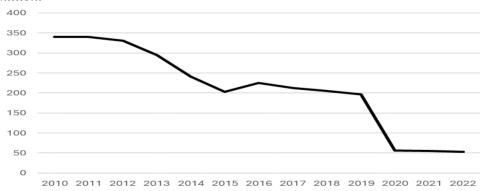
Chart 2. Expenditures of foreigners crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border in PLN million



Source: Own compilation based on Border Guard data.

In the case of the Ukrainian area, in the period 2010-2022, the value of goods and services purchased by Poles was PLN 2755 million. Thus, it was lower than the expenses of Ukrainians in Poland. In addition, an analysis of the expenses of Poles crossing the border shows a decreasing trend. While in 2010 these expenses amounted to 340 million zlotys, in 2020 they were only 57 million zlotys. Still, these are amounts that significantly affect the development of the Ukrainian border area.

Chart 3. Expenditures of Poles crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border in PLN million.



Source: Own compilation based on Border Guard data.

The survey showed that non-food products predominated among purchases made by foreigners crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border (80%), and services accounted for 13% of expenditures. For Poles making purchases in Ukraine, non-food products also predominated (60%) and services accounted for 14% of expenditures.

Price differences and the availability of an assortment of goods and services are the main drivers of local border traffic. Excise products such as cigarettes, alcohol, and fuel are purchased by Poles due to lower prices. Ukrainians, on the other hand, value Polish building materials, purchase consumer electronics, household appliances and furniture.

5. Recommendations

According to the authors, border traffic is an important factor influencing the development of border areas. Border traffic and the accompanying spending of border crossers stimulate the development of local entrepreneurship. They influence economic prosperity in the border area and the economic structure of the region. They are an important factor influencing the functioning of the cross-border labor market.

The specifics of the area require that this research be continued at the level of specific local government units. In particular, this concerns smaller local government units (municipalities), which should take care of high-quality technical infrastructure to serve foreigners crossing the border and facilitate shopping on both sides of the border. This will reduce the outflow of shopping tourists to large shopping centers located in major border cities.

6. Conclusions

Border traffic especially locally is one of the important factors affecting the functioning of the cross-border area. Changes in the functions of borders as a result of political changes in Europe, have a distinct local dimension. The Polish-Ukrainian border is an example of the opportunities provided by the introduction of facilitated border crossing for local communities.

Thanks to the involvement of the local community, it is possible to develop various forms of regional and cross-border cooperation that contribute to overcoming divisions in Europe. Small border traffic is an element that builds social and economic ties in the borderlands.

The article is only a slice of the broader research conducted on the impact of liberalizing border regulations on the development of areas divided by borders. The development of border trade, shopping tourism are among the first effects of the creation of a cross-border economic arrangement based on the freedom to cross the border. The situation on the Polish-Ukrainian border resembles that of the 1990s on the Polish-German border. There, too, local cross-border trade was one of the key factors in the development of cooperation between communities living in the cross-border area.

The development of border traffic and shopping tourism is seen as an enabler of socioeconomic development in areas that were previously considered peripheral. The development of the trade and service sector is becoming an important link in the tourism value chain as part of the global value chains (GVC). This chain is the sum of activities undertaken by entrepreneurs to deliver a product or service to the ultimate recipient. In the case of border areas, this ultimate recipient is often the border crosser/shopping tourist.

Unfortunately, the pandemic period and the war in Ukraine have significantly affected the dynamics of these processes taking place in the Polish-Ukrainian cross-border area.

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