

# Symmetry or asymmetry? Cross-border openness of service providers in Polish-Czech and Polish-German border towns

Sylvia DOŁZBŁASZ<sup>a</sup>

## Abstract

*The symmetry and/or asymmetry in terms of cross-border openness of service providers is examined in this article, for the cases of two border twin towns: Cieszyn/Český Těšín at the Polish-Czech border, and Gubin/Guben at the Polish-German border. To assess the level of openness of firms towards clients from the other side of the border, four trans-border categories were examined: neighbour's language visible at store location; business offers in the language of the neighbour; the possibilities of payment in the neighbour's currency; and the staff's knowledge of the language. This enabled a comparison of both parts of the particular twin towns in relation to the character of cross-border openness, as well as an assessment of their symmetry/asymmetry. Comparisons of Gubin/Guben and Cieszyn/Český Těšín with respect to the analysed features were also carried out. The analysis shows significant variation in the level of cross-border openness towards clients from neighbouring countries. Whereas in the Polish-Czech town a relative symmetry was observed, in the Polish-German case, significant asymmetry was noted.*

**Keywords:** *trans-border shopping trips, border twin towns, divided cities, cross-border relations, Polish-Czech border, Polish-German border*

## 1. Introduction

Location at a national border creates very specific conditions for the development of border twin towns. The existence of the border, due to formal or legal, psychological and economic barriers, could hamper their development. Their location at a border, however, could become one of the elements of the towns' territorial capital. Integration processes in the European Union create opportunities for the disappearance of internal borders and their separating impact. It seems, however, that the effects of vanishing political barriers will occur with varying degrees of intensity for different national borders.

Border cities can be considered as laboratories of integration. Due to the tangible presence of the border in the daily life of citizens and the closeness of the neighbouring countries, cross-border practices of different kinds seem to be more significant than in other parts of the borderlands. Moreover, the practical dimension of integration actions and/or the effects of the lack of such actions are much more noticeable in these cities. This is important, in both tangible fields, such as cross-border transport, spatial planning, rescue services and police actions, as well as in the intangible realm, such as the issue of national stereotypes, local identities and the promotion of cities.

This article discusses the issue of the cross-border openness of service companies operating in border twin towns. While overall cross-border relations consist of a great number of determinants – from political, historical, cultural or economic fields, and the different cross-border practices resulting from them – the question of a company's openness towards clients from the other side of the border is one of the dimensions regarding the integration of cities that are divided by a border. It is also an expression of the determinants and relations that are present in the cities.

The main objective of this study is to analyse the shaping of the cross-border openness of service providers in the border twin towns of Cieszyn/Český Těšín on the Polish-Czech border, and Gubin/Guben on the Polish-German border. The research focused mainly on an evaluation of the level of openness of firms towards clients from the neighbouring country, as well as an analysis of the spatial distribution of companies and their structural type. The more specific aim of the study was to determine whether cross-border openness is symmetrical or asymmetrical for the cases of Cieszyn/Český Těšín and Gubin/Guben, as well as to carry out a comparative analysis of the Polish-Czech and Polish-German border twin towns.

## 2. Theoretical background

When analysing the functioning of the companies in border cities, several issues seem to be particularly important: the issue of the border and its role; the specificity of border twin cities; and cross-border shopping mobility. The border is a complex phenomenon, a political construct, but also a social one (Newman, 2006; Newman, 2010; Paasi, 2011). It can not only be a political barrier, but also a spatial, communication, economic, cultural, historical, or, what is equally important, a mental border (Brunet-Jailly, 2011; Rippl et al., 2010; Van Houtum, 1999). When analysing determinants of the role of a state border, however, one must remember that although its obvious material implications are important, a borderland is shaped by a complex set of cultural, historical and political interactions and processes occurring within its space (Knippschild, 2011; Van Houtum, 1999).

The border of a country is always some kind of a barrier, even in strongly integrated areas such as the European Union (O'Dowd, 2010; Bygvrí and Westlund, 2004). With processes of globalisation and integration, the role of the

<sup>a</sup> Department of Spatial Management, Institute of Geography and Regional Development, University of Wrocław ; (corresponding author: S. Dołzblasz, e-mail: [sylvia.dolzblasz@uni.wroc.pl](mailto:sylvia.dolzblasz@uni.wroc.pl))

border as a barrier (e.g. a control barrier) is diminishing, and in the “right” conditions its negative effects are noticeable only in a small way, although they do not disappear completely (Ackleson, 2005). The characteristic feature of a border is that it can be a barrier, but that it can also provide certain opportunities: it can bring benefits, but also problems (Agnew, 2008; Sohn and Lara-Valencia, 2013; Van der Velde and Spierings, 2010). What is important, then, is that both positive and negative effects of a border can be felt at the same time. Seeing the border as a barrier is a common practice, but a border location may potentially be a development factor, as well as a resource for economic, cultural, and political development (Gerber, Lara, de la Parra, 2010; Reitel, 2006; Sohn, 2013).

There are a number of terms used to denote towns/cities situated at a state border, which results in terminological ambiguity. There is no single, generally accepted and used definition of towns directly neighbouring across a state border. Neither is there a uniform classification for this type of settlement unit. Terms in use point either to the origin of forming such settlement networks, or the way they function in present times, their size, cultural, or environmental context, etc. The names in use are inter alia: divided city, split town, twin towns, sister towns, city-pairs, double city, border town, trans-border cities, bi-national cities, cross-border urban spaces, and cross-border metropolises. Among the most frequently used, usually in a narrower sense, is the term “divided city”, referring to cities which used to form one settlement unit but were separated by a border, leading eventually to the formation of two separate cities (this term, however, has recently been used in the context of conflicts as well as divisions, e.g. language division, ethnic division within one city, etc.).

“Twin towns/cities” is a broader term, which implies the direct proximity of urban units, but does not have to result from the division of one former unit. It may be caused, for example, by the development of cities near a border on both sides, gradually getting nearer each other to finally become spatial neighbours across the border. This term, however, is also used to describe a pair of cities co-operating with each other, which are not necessarily neighbours or even in the same country. Border town (city) seems the most frequently used. Usually, it applies to cities located very close to a border, near another urban unit on the other side. But it is also used to describe cities (towns) at the border, not always neighbouring a city on the other side, but a one which is strongly affected by the border in its daily functioning<sup>1</sup> (Arreola, 1996; Jańczak, 2009; Jańczak, 2013; Joenniemi and Sergunin, 2011; Kulczyńska, 2010; Lundén, 2004; Lara-Valencia and Giner, 2013; Sohn and Lara-Valencia, 2013). Jańczak argues that the most suitable name seems to be border twin towns (cities), which emphasizes the direct neighbourhood of cities (towns) across a state border, regardless of the original formation of such a pair of cities (Jańczak, 2013).

The unique location at a national border affects nearly all of the aspects of border cities’ functioning (Buursink, 2001). These effects can, with regard to the role of the border and local determinants, be perceptible to a greater or lesser degree. But it seems that integration processes in Europe may contribute to a change in perceiving the border location

as a problematic place – to seeing it as providing certain advantages. Border twin cities have a chance of becoming places of intense cross-border cooperation, which may help change their unfavourable situation into a more favourable one. They can be a connector of some sort between neighbouring countries (especially between their border regions), and can encourage finding common solutions to problems, as well as achieving common development aims (Doźbłasz and Raczyk, 2012).

The processes of trans-border urban integration may be different (Reitel, 2013). The peripheral location of border cities generally has a negative effect on their development. In fact, it applies to entire border regions and contributes to their underdevelopment (Roper, 2007; Sohn and Lara-Valencia, 2013; Vaishar et al., 2013). In the situation of the reduction of formal barriers connected with the border and the occurrence of beneficial socio-economic determinants, however, the border location may be an impulse for the development of divided cities. It seems that the intensification of cross-border cooperation (both formal and informal) has a positive influence on counteracting peripherality (Knippschild, 2011; Krätke, 1999; Cappellin, 1993), and has a positive impact on border regions, including border cities. It has to be noted, however, that the dynamic development of cross-border cooperation does not usually translate directly into economic development, which is generated by a number of internal and external factors (Krätke and Borst, 2007). But it surely helps the integration of two parts of the city divided by the border, in terms of spatial, social, and economic dimensions. Economic activity is often the driving force for the dynamic development of border cities. In this context, it has to be pointed out that when talking about integration progress in borderland regions, the intensity of exchange between areas on both sides of the border does not have to be related to the increasing convergence of their structures; to the contrary, it may be closely related to larger socio-economic differences (Arreola, 1996; Topaloglou et al., 2005).

Trans-border shopping trips are an important element of cross-border relations that have a very practical dimension. Their direction, intensity, the range of services and products provided, etc. depend on current determinants present in the neighbouring countries. The roles of a border – as a barrier (the more difficult it is to cross, the less shopping trips will take place), its role with respect to political conditions (generally important for the development of cross-border cooperation), and for those elements closely related to shopping trips (such as, inter alia, prices on both sides of the border, the purchasing power of citizens, or their transport capabilities) – are, of course, all important. It should be noted that shopping trips can provide an economic basis for the functioning of border cities/regions by generating the majority of a company’s income and, through this, the income of citizens. On the one hand, shopping trips may be one of the elements generating co-operative behaviours in both local governments (by facilitating trans-border practices), and companies and citizens (cooperation of companies, citizens getting acquainted with each other, and conducting other cooperative activities, etc.). On the other hand, however, they can provoke negative attitudes of entrepreneurs: for example, in a situation when citizens go shopping and acquire services on the other side of the

<sup>1</sup> Some authors, however, define this term very narrowly, e. g. “border town as towns that are separated by a state boundary somewhere within an earlier centre, or at least somewhere between city centre and suburbs” (Lundén 2004, p. 126). Almost all of them were formed as a result of dividing a country, and consequently dividing cities.

border, thus lowering the income of local companies. The complementary structure of economic entities, not generating an increase in competition, seems to be more desirable in this context.

Two opposing tendencies can be observed in the phenomenon of consumer mobility, with the first increasing mobility and the second decreasing it. The first group of factors includes pull factors (pulling people to the neighbouring country, consumers consider shopping at home less appealing than in foreign places, etc.), and push factors (pushing people from their motherland, shopping abroad is perceived as more attractive, etc.). The factors which reduce cross-border mobility include “keep” factors (discouraging citizens from leaving their country) and “repel” factors (discouraging citizens from visiting the neighbouring country), and as a consequence the differences between the home and foreign country are too large to accept (Spierings, Van der Velde, 2008). Different elements are relevant in shaping consumer mobility, such as, inter alia, prices, quality, the diversity of goods and services, curiosity and the sense of strangeness, an understanding of regulations, the shopping environment, and the quality of public space. Rational and emotional differences are very important, as they influence the level of unfamiliarity. As concluded by Van der Velde and Spierings (2010), both differences that are too great and the lack of them, cause a reduction in consumer mobility. The most beneficial viewpoint from the point of its development is the position of “familiar unfamiliarity”, when the other side of the border is different than ours and this is what draws us there, but when these differences are not too big and do not repel us (Spierings and Van der Velde, 2008). It has to be pointed out that, due to different conditions on both sides of the border, cross-border shopping is generally asymmetrical, although this is not static and may change (Leimgruber, 2005).

These often contradictory results from previous literature have been incorporated into this research project, as much as possible.

### 3. Research design

An assessment of the cross-border openness of firms was conducted in the central areas of the studied towns in September 2011. The study included 752 companies from the service sector (432 located in Cieszyn/Český Těšín, and 320 in Gubin/Guben, that were marked and freely accessible<sup>2</sup>). This assessment engendered gathering data about any company’s specific location, character (down to the sub-class level: NACE Rev.2 (OJ L393/1 30.12.2006)), and trans-border characteristics: a banner in the neighbour’s language visible at the store’s location; marketing materials (fliers, a price list, handouts, business cards, etc.) in the neighbour’s language; payment methods that included the neighbour’s currency; and basic language skills among the staff (verified by personal interview). The above-mentioned four attributes of cross-border openness were chosen because they could be used to present the attitude of the service companies in border towns to clients from the other

side of the border. The analysis of these factors enabled an assessment of whether the companies from the service sector not only take into consideration satisfying local demands, but also the demands for products and services from the neighbouring city.

The results of this study demonstrate the analysis of the structure of service providers in terms of the four qualities indicating the cross-border openness, as well as the subject of their activity. Furthermore, information on the location of individual providers enabled the creation of a picture of the spatial distribution of companies with regard to the studied categories<sup>3</sup>. This created an opportunity to include not only statistical analysis in this research project, but also the spatial dimension of the phenomenon of cross-border openness of companies in towns divided by a border. In this study, the methodology that proved to be effective for the analysis of the twin city Zgorzelec/Görlitz (Dołzblasz and Raczyk, 2012), was applied to two border twin towns, one on the Polish-German border and the second on the Polish-Czech border. This design then also encompassed a comparative analysis, not only for two parts of a particular town but also between the Polish-Czech and the Polish-German cases. Furthermore, the analysed towns are relatively similar with respect to size and urban structure, which allowed for a more profound assessment of the role of other factors influencing cross-border openness of service providers. Finally, this study focused on symmetry/asymmetry in terms of conditions for the cross-border openness of firms, as well as the level of cross-border openness itself. It should be noted, however, that the phenomena examined were the same, but the approach was different and led to a broader analysis (especially in terms of the conditions for cross-border openness of firms).

### 4. Determinants of cross-border openness of service providers in the border twin towns of Cieszyn/Český Těšín and Gubin/Guben

When analysing the determinants of the functioning of border twin towns, a whole spectrum of factors has to be taken into consideration: some part of them results from the characteristics of the neighbouring countries; and others relate to the specificity of the cities themselves. The role of the border itself is surely a very important factor: the more formal it is, the greater the limitations for the development of the border cities generally are. Both Gubin/Guben and Cieszyn/Český Těšín, in the context of belonging to the European Union as well as to the Schengen Zone, have potentially favourable conditions for integration between the cities. It has to be said that international relations are friendly on the national level between Poland, Czech, and Germany, as well as at the regional level. In this context, one also has to consider the relatively intense formal cross-border cooperation conducted within the framework of EU programmes by local self-governments and other institutions (NGOs, cultural institutions, schools, etc.), from both towns. Border twin towns stand out with their great number of projects and are important, although not dominant, centres of cross-border cooperation (Dołzblasz, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> The study did not include an unknown number of units operating either in private flats or in difficult to access locations, because its main focus remained on the actual, visible signs of businesses’ openness to the citizens of the neighbouring country, deemed to be most evident in the town centres.

<sup>3</sup> The analysis did not include supermarkets as they were located outside the city centres, which were the areas chosen by design for the study.

Disparities in the level of socio-economic development on both sides of the border are among the most important factors shaping trans-border relations. It seems that the high level of disparity is an important factor which hinders cooperation. In this respect, the Polish-Czech border areas are regions with relatively low level of disparities, while the Polish-German border is characterised by a decreasing but still high level of economic disparities (see: First ESPON Synthesis Report, 2013; Knippschild, 2011). These differences, however, as well as the connected level of income and prices on the two sides of the border, may intensify the connections and mobility of citizens with regard to trans-border mobility (getting to work, buying goods and services on the other side of the border, etc.).

The similarity of problems and objectives regarding socio-economic development is another crucial determinant shaping cross-border relations. In this respect, some symmetry in the Polish-Czech border region can be observed in relation to encountered problems, such as joint mountainous regions, similar economic structures, processes of integration with the EU and tourism development (Pokluda, 2005; Vaishar et al., 2013). In the case of the Polish-German border region, historical, political and economic determinants result in dissimilarities to a much greater extent (Dołzbłasz, 2012).

In urban geographical research, historical conditions play a very important role. Cieszyn, since its formation in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, has changed its national affiliation a number of times, and the region of Teschen Silesia, with Cieszyn as its capital, has been a separate entity since 1920, in both cultural and administrative terms. Cieszyn was a typical national and cultural melting pot of Central Europe, first governed by Polish, then Czech and Austrian state organizations. The issue of national affiliation appeared in 1918, when Poland and Czechoslovakia regained independence and borders had to be drawn between them. Both countries claimed the right to this territory. The issue was settled in 1920 by international arbitration, which divided the urban complex of Cieszyn by a state border running along the Olza River. On its right bank, the main parts of the city became Polish, while the left-bank part of the city was allocated to Czechoslovakia (Zenderowski, 2002a; Zenderowski, 2002b; Fig. 1 – see cover p. 2).

The origin of Guben (Fig. 2 – see cover p. 2) dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and throughout most of its history it belonged to German state organisms (e.g. Lower Lusatia, Saxony, Prussia). Guben was divided in 1945, pursuant to the arrangements made at the Potsdam Conference, drawing the Polish-German border along the Lusatian Neisse and the Oder rivers. As a result, the left side of the city became German, and the right-bank part formed a Polish town called Gubin. One of the important consequences of this decision was the complete exchange of populations in the part that became Polish.

Taking into consideration these historical and cultural issues, the cultural barriers were greater at the western border of Poland with Germany than at the southern border with the Czech Republic, e.g. the persistence of stereotypes, attitudes towards neighbouring nations and historical experiences, etc. (Rippl et al., 2010). A specific situation can be observed in Teschen Silesia. On the one hand, the barriers are weaker due to similarities in language and culture.

Furthermore, the existence of national minorities and mixed families further favours the disappearance of barriers (about 16 per cent of the population of Český Těšín declared Polish nationality, although the Czech minority on the Polish side is smaller (Siwek, 2008)). On the other hand, however, the history of these lands, such as the battle for Teschen Silesia (Buttin, 2006), may still cause attitudes of antipathy for the citizens on the other side of the border.

Similar attitudes can be found in Polish-German relations. One should note, however, that with the passing of time these attitudes are diminishing. Moreover, it has to be stated that among local self-government authorities, cooperative attitudes prevail (Dołzbłasz, 2012).

Natural determinants may be an important factor in shaping trans-border relations (Więckowski, 2013). In both cities in this study, the border was established on the basis of environmental features (in Gubin/Guben – the Nysa Łużycka River, in Cieszyn/Český Těšín – the Olza River). This influenced the development of both cities after the division of the border. In addition, despite functioning within the Schengen region, the fact of dividing both parts of the city with a river hinders their spatial integration, as the connections are limited to bridges. From the point of view of potential integration of the cities, the fact that the bridges are located in the central points of the cities (connecting the central areas for services, history, etc.) is important. Both cities are characterised by a relevant symmetry in size. The area of Gubin is about 21.0 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 17,000, while the area of Guben is much larger – 44.0 km<sup>2</sup>, although the population is only slightly greater (about 20,000). The area of Cieszyn is 28.5 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of about 36,000, while Český Těšín is 34.0 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of about 25,000. Considering these determinants, it may be stated that there is a relative symmetry of structures for both Gubin/Guben and Cieszyn/Český Těšín. The direct closeness of the centres of both parts of a divided city and, what is very important, the existence of a bridge between them, has a positive influence on the relatively good availability of service providers (concentrated in the city centre) for citizens from the other side of the border river. Spatial proximity, in spite of minor infrastructural disproportions, are other elements shaping the symmetry of a divided city.

## 5. Specific determinants for trans-border shopping trips

In the context of analysing the cross-border openness of companies located in border twin towns, it is important to include factors connected to the cross-border mobility of the citizens (inter alia, purpose and frequency of crossing the border, prices of goods and services, etc.) and the structure of service providers. In both analysed cases, the majority of the citizens of the Polish town have visited the town on the other side of the border river<sup>4</sup>. In the case of Gubin/Guben about 80% of the citizens of Polish Gubin took part in cross-border practices of different kinds (Dolińska et al., 2013). The purpose for travelling to German Guben was diverse, but the dominating one was shopping (about 93% of the respondents). Citizens of Gubin go to Guben for walks (about 76%), to meet acquaintances (almost 40%), and for cultural reasons (about 33%). Other motives were less common, including acquiring services, partaking in religious celebrations, making joint

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, there are no data regarding the cross-border mobility of the citizens of Guben and Český Těšín.

projects, and joining in family holidays. Citizens of Polish Gubin perceive the neighbouring Germans mainly as tourists and customers (about 80 per cent of the responses), although it has to be pointed out that they also see them as friends and neighbours (about 60%). Taking into consideration the role of the joint cross-border activities given by the citizens of Gubin, it is clearly visible that economic cooperation is the most important (Dolińska et al., 2013).

In the case of the border twin towns of Cieszyn/Český Těšín, similarly to Gubin/Guben, the majority of citizens from the Polish part visit the Czech part of the city (Mosakowska, 2012). Considering the aims and frequency of crossing the border by the citizens of Polish Cieszyn, it may be concluded that they cross the bridge at least once a month, mainly in order to go shopping (75%), visit relatives (35%), or spend their free time in Český Těšín (80%). The shopping motive was the main factor in generating cross-border mobility in the citizens of Cieszyn (about 15 per cent went shopping everyday or several times a week on the other side). Almost 10% of the respondents crossed the border to reach their work, and about one per cent went to the Czech side several times a month for educational reasons.

Almost 50 per cent of the surveyed citizens of Cieszyn have family, friends, or acquaintances on the Czech side, which undoubtedly has an influence on the relatively large percentage of visiting family/friends among the motives for crossing the border (Mosakowska, 2012). The mutual attitude of the citizens of Cieszyn and Český Těšín towards their neighbours was generally friendly, as well as the opinions about each other. Prejudices and stereotypes played a relatively small role here (Zenderowski, 2002a).

While the citizens of Cieszyn are characterised by a moderate or weak ability to speak the Czech language, the citizens of Český Těšín can communicate in Polish easily – mainly due to the relatively large Polish minority living there. It has to be noticed here that the local dialect plays an important role in mutual communication – a peculiar mix of the Cieszyn dialect, Polish, Czech, and German words (Zenderowski, 2002a). In Gubin/Guben, however, the ability to speak the language is very asymmetrical, with a relatively good knowledge of the German language among Polish Gubin citizens, compared to a very weak knowledge of the Polish language in German Guben.

A very important factor from the point of view of cross-border openness of service providers is the level of prices in the neighbouring countries (note that the currency in Germany is the Euro, in Poland it is Złoty, and in the Czech Republic it is the Czech koruna). The prices of food in 2012 in Poland were about 60 per cent of the EU27 average, while in the Czech Republic the figure was 82 per cent (Kurkowiak, 2013). Non-alcoholic beverages in Poland cost about 79% of the EU27 average, while in the Czech Republic they cost 98 per cent. In comparison and as expected, prices in Germany were much higher: the average price of food was 106% of the EU average, while the price of non-alcoholic beverages was 104 per cent. When considering alcoholic beverages, the situation was slightly different. The prices in Poland were 93% of the average, in Czech Republic they were 96 per cent, while in Germany the prices of alcohol

were lower and were about 82% of the EU average. The prices of tobacco were the highest in Germany (102 per cent of the EU average) and much cheaper in Poland and the Czech Republic (respectively, 58% and 69% of the EU average).

It is worth mentioning that mutual contacts on a larger scale, shopping tourism among others, were made possible because of the political and socio-economic transformations of 1989. Former relationships of this type were practically non-existent, mainly due to the low permeability of the border and the centrally-planned economic system in the three countries under analysis. The permeability of the Polish-Czechoslovakia border was greater only for several years (in the 1960s and 1970s), and for the Polish-German border in the 1970s. For the inhabitants of the border cities (towns) under consideration, they did not get the chance to become used to shopping tourism (i.e. by legal means, although illegal practices of border trade were obviously commonplace).

Since the 1990s, as a result of the opening of the Polish-Czech border, the role of retail trade in the spatial-functional structure of Cieszyn/Český Těšín has started to increase, generating specific forms of trade focused on servicing customers from the other side of the border, as well as creating new large-format store forms. The difference in product prices favoured mutual shopping tourism (at the beginning of the 1990s, approximately 60,000 people on market days). As the difference in prices began to fall, the intensity of shopping tourism diminished. There is still an observable border movement, however, for shopping purposes (Kulczyńska and Matykowski, 2008). Currently, Poles mainly buy alcohol, tobacco, confectionary, and healthy food in the Czech Republic.

In Gubin/Guben, the political-economic transformation that started in 1989 also contributed to, among other things, changes in cross-border trade. In Polish Gubin there was an increase in trade units, marketplaces focused on German customers started to develop in great numbers, and at the turn of the century, supermarkets started to rise. In German Guben, supermarkets had already appeared in late 1980s and are still often visited by Poles. Currently, the lowering of the price difference has caused a great fall in the importance of marketplace trade compared to the 1990s (50–60% of consumers were German). Additionally, the development of supermarkets also hindered marketplace trade and negatively influenced retail trade. In the 1990s the traffic was one-sided – German customers went to Poland to buy goods. Currently, due to the equalisation of prices, this asymmetry is not as big as it was then, and the percentage of Polish customers on the German side of the border is constantly increasing (Polish customers mainly buy household chemicals and cosmetics, but also clothes, electronics, and household equipment) (Kulczyńska, 2010). German customers still benefit from the lower prices of food and services (mainly hairdressing and cosmetics) on the Polish side of the border.

## 6. Cross-border openness of service sector companies

The analysis of both border twin towns was conducted in their central areas<sup>5</sup>. The research areas are characterised by a large concentration of economic entities and good

<sup>5</sup> In Cieszyn/Český Těšín the assessment of economic entities took place in the area circumscribed by Zamkowa, Michejdy, Kochanowski, Limanowski, Schodowa and Łyska streets on the Polish side, and by Hlavní Třída, Nádražní, Střelníční, nábřeží Míru, Štefánikova and Božkova streets on the Czech side. In Gubin/Guben, the study area on the Polish side was located between Kołłątaja, Kunickiego, Żymińskiego, and Piastowska streets, and in German Guben between Alte Poststrasse, Lohmuhlenweg, Gasstrasse, Grünstrasse, and Uferstrasse.

accessibility for customers from the other side of the border, due to the closeness of the bridges. In Cieszyn/Český Těšín, the largest concentration of service providers on the Polish side is observed on the Main Square and streets connected with it, as well as between the Main Square and the border crossing. On the Czech side, the largest amount of economic entities was located on Hlavní Třída Street, the street leading from the border crossing to the city centre. A comparison of the Polish and Czech sides shows the difference in the number and location of service providers. In Cieszyn there are more of them and they are dispersed, while in Český Těšín there is a visible concentration of them on the main street.

In Gubin/Guben the study also included areas with the greatest concentration of service provider activity in the city centres. In Gubin, most economic entities were located in the city centre, while in Guben they were located near the border in the eastern part of the city. In Gubin, the entities within the studied area were characterised by large dispersion, with a concentration of areas along the main streets and on the Main Square. In Guben, however, economic entities were clearly concentrated along Frankfurter Strasse and Berliner Strasse, which lead from the border crossing to the city centre.

The spatial dispersion of companies in the studied areas is a result of historically determined processes of spatial development of the cities. Comparing the location of economic entities in both studied cities, one can notice that in both cases greater dispersion can be found on the Polish side, while on the Czech and German sides the companies are concentrated mainly along main streets. This generally originates from the urban structure (the market on the Polish side, the main street leading from the border crossing

to the centres of neighbouring cities), and also in the case of German Guben from the features of trade, characterised by a lower share of small retail shops.

Taking into consideration the generic structure of the studied companies, it is clearly visible that entities of retail trade were dominant, which is common in the generic structure of economic entities in cities. In Cieszyn/Český Těšín, on the Polish side, 70% of all studied companies belonged to the G section (trade), while on the Czech side of the border it was almost 75 per cent. Similarly in the Polish-German twin towns of Gubin/Guben, the majority of entities were connected to trade: on the Polish side they comprised 60 per cent of the studied institutions, on the German side it was about 52 per cent. The German Guben had a visibly larger share of service providers in the field of, inter alia, gastronomy, real-estate agencies, travel agencies, while the field of trade was smaller. This results mainly from the nature of the trade network (the domination of supermarkets, a lower share of small trade units) and from certain differences in demand, e.g. in the case of restaurants or real-estate agencies. Characteristic regularities can be seen when taking into consideration the percentage of the chosen kinds of service providers (Tab. 1).

The characteristic feature in Polish Gubin was the share of grocery shops (near the bridge connecting the cities), which is a result of both local demand, but also the demand of German customers for Polish food items, due to their quality, but mostly because of their price<sup>6</sup>. A similar feature can be found in alcohol shops in Český Těšín, where the products sold are particularly popular among Polish customers and are a common reason for cross-border shopping trips. The direct reason for such a large share of hairdressers' shops

Type of economic entity	Cieszyn	Český Těšín	Gubin	Guben
clothing shops	20%	7%	15%	10%
restaurants, bars, coffee shops	8%	15%	7%	16%
grocery shops	6%	13%	15%	5%
hairdressers' shops and beauty parlours	6%	2%	12%	4%
furniture shops	4%	–	4%	–
banks	4%	2%	4%	3%
shoe shops	4%	2%	3%	–
pharmacy	2%	2%	2%	2%
jewellery shops	2%	2%	3%	3%
currency exchange	2%	–	3%	–
children's accessories shops	2%	–	1%	–
travel agencies, tourist information	2%	2%	1%	6%
cosmetic, toiletry and fragrance shops	2%	2%	1%	4%
stationery and gifts shops	2%	2%	2%	5%
alcohol shops	1%	12%	2%	–
real-estate agencies	1%	–	–	0%
casino	–	2%	–	1%
Other	35%	36%	25%	37%

Tab. 1: Share of economic entities in selected categories in central areas of the border twin towns of Cieszyn/Český Těšín and Gubin/Guben in 2011. Source: author's elaboration

<sup>6</sup> The share of grocery shops would be larger if not for the fact that the majority of the local demand and the German demand for food products is satisfied by supermarkets located outside the range of the study, further away from the border bridge, and not included in the study.

and beauty parlours in Gubin (near the border bridge) is satisfying the demand of German customers (12%, the majority of which are hairdressing services). Lower prices than in German shops and a satisfying quality are common reasons for German Guben citizens to visit Polish Gubin. In Cieszyn such shops comprised only six per cent (three per cent being barber shops and three per cent beauty parlours). In Guben, however, there were many more restaurants, coffee shops, and travel agencies than on the Polish side (they were more often visited by Germans than Poles, mostly due to their higher income), as well as real-estate agencies (greater demand resulting from the depopulation of Guben and a large number of properties for sale or rent).

Despite not being shown by this study, it needs to be said that the citizens of Polish Gubin also go shopping in Guben. Polish customers commonly buy electronics and household equipment, chemicals, and clothes (because of the belief that these articles are of better quality or lower price), but such shopping trips are realised in shopping malls, which were not included in this study due to the chosen methodology.

It was visible that among the studied towns, Gubin had the least diversity among economic entities, with a dominating share of grocery shops, clothing shops, and hairdressers' shops. As it was stated before, this was largely a result of these entities being directed at the population of the other town, which originates in the demand of the German neighbours for these services. Analysis of the structure of service providers, however, shows that Gubin, to a greater degree than Cieszyn and Český Těšín (and definitely than Guben), is aimed at the foreign customer. This seems to be a result of the demand of German Guben customers for services such as hairdressers, as well as the prices of such services being lower on the Polish side. One can say that price difference is the main reason for the shopping trips. The quality and wide range of products is also important.

Considering the features of the cross-border openness of companies under analysis, there were considerable differences visible between the studied towns (Fig. 3). By

collectively analysing the companies from both parts of the city divided by the border regarding the four trans-border features, it can be seen that in Gubin/Guben the percentage of companies that possess these features is slightly higher than in Cieszyn/Český Těšín. This appears to be a result of the great cross-border openness of Polish companies in Gubin, whereas in German Guben the percentage of companies characterised by any of the features was very small. This means that there is a considerable asymmetry in this aspect. In Gubin/Guben, the presence of all four features was considerably higher among Polish companies. Thirty-seven per cent of the companies had a shop sign in German, 32% had information materials in this language, almost 80% allowed payment in Euros, and nearly every company could communicate in German. On the German side, however, the share of companies characterised by being open to clients from Poland was very low, with none of the studied features appearing among even 10 per cent of the services providers. The most common feature was the ability to speak Polish (mostly due to the fact that workers there are Polish).

In Cieszyn/Český Těšín, on the other hand, there is a relative symmetry in the openness to clients from the other side of the border. A basic knowledge of the language was common in both parts of the city, while the presence of other features was slightly more common in Czech services providers. There were generally low percentages of companies that had a shop sign (6% of Polish and 14% of Czech companies) and information materials (7% of Polish and 16% of Czech companies) in the neighbour's language. It seems that this is a result of the ability to speak the language: in a situation when direct communication is not a problem, there is no need to introduce such features.

In analysing the dependencies between the features of cross-border openness, some regularity can be observed. In the case of Cieszyn/Český Těšín, there was a visibly strong co-dependence between the studied attributes, both on the Polish and Czech side. If a given service provider had one of

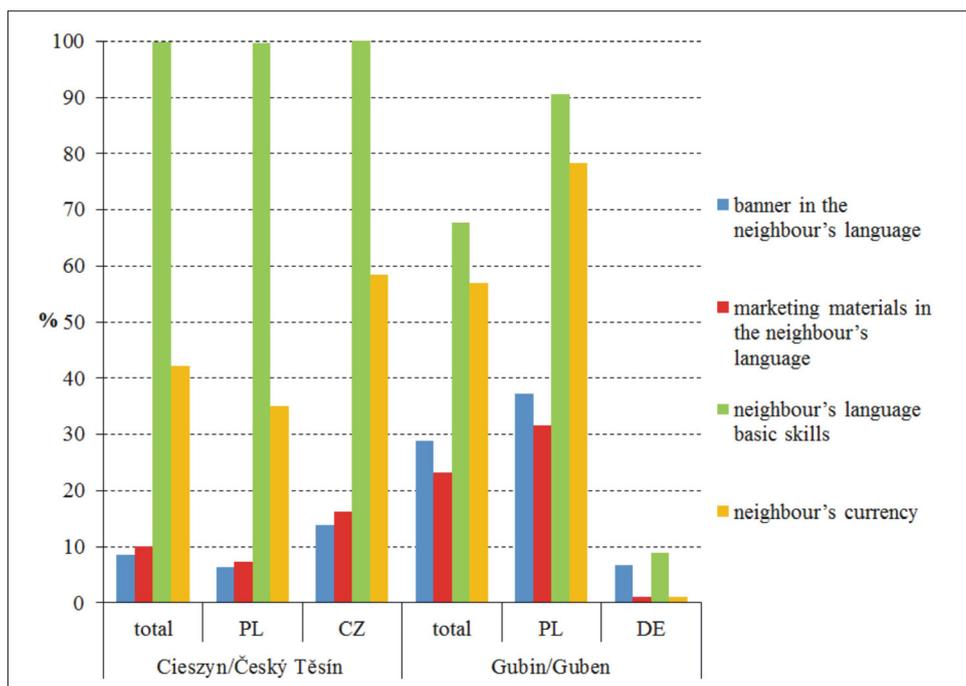


Fig. 3: Service providers of the border twin towns Cieszyn/Český Těšín and Gubin/Guben by the share of trans-border characteristics. Source: author's elaboration

the features, it usually possessed the remaining three: that is, providers that had a shop sign in 97% of the cases on the Polish side, and in 72 per cent on the Czech side, also had information materials, and almost all of them allowed payment in the neighbour's currency (the ability to speak the language, due to its common occurrence, was not analysed). In Gubin/Guben, such regularities were also strongly visible on the Polish side, while on the German side having one of the studied cross-border attributes did not guarantee the existence of the others. This observation mainly resulted from the fact that German providers were generally characterised by a very low level of cross-border openness.

The spatial distribution of economic entities according to the individual categories indicating cross-border openness was shaped differently in individual towns (Figs. 4 and 5). This was a direct result of a greater number and dispersion of companies on the Polish side, both in Cieszyn and in

Gubin, and a greater concentration of them in Czech Český Těšín and German Guben. Considering the issue of openness in both parts of twin towns, there were similarities between Cieszyn and Český Těšín, while Gubin and Guben showed large differences. In the town on the Polish/Czech border there were entities on both sides which had a shop sign in their neighbour's language, located mainly near the border crossing and along the main streets leading to the city centre (Fig. 4).

A similar situation could be observed in the spatial distribution of having information materials in the neighbour's language. When it comes to the ability to pay in the currency of the neighbouring country, it was common practice both in Cieszyn and Český Těšín. The spatial distribution of the ability to speak the neighbour's language was very interesting, as having this communicative ability, both on the Polish and Czech side, was very common and

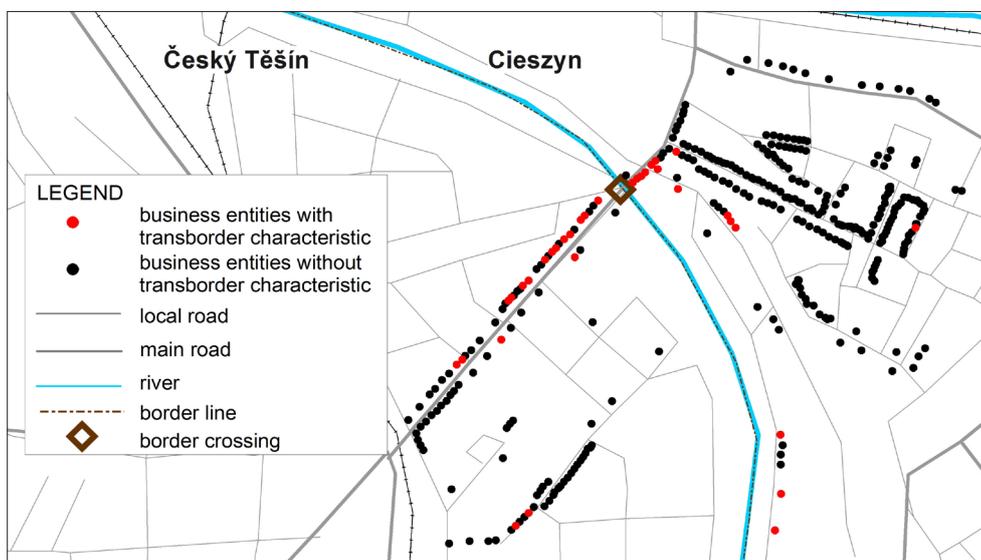


Fig. 4: Cross-border openness of service providers of the border twin towns Cieszyn/Český Těšín by trans-border category: Banner in neighbour's language. Source: author's elaboration

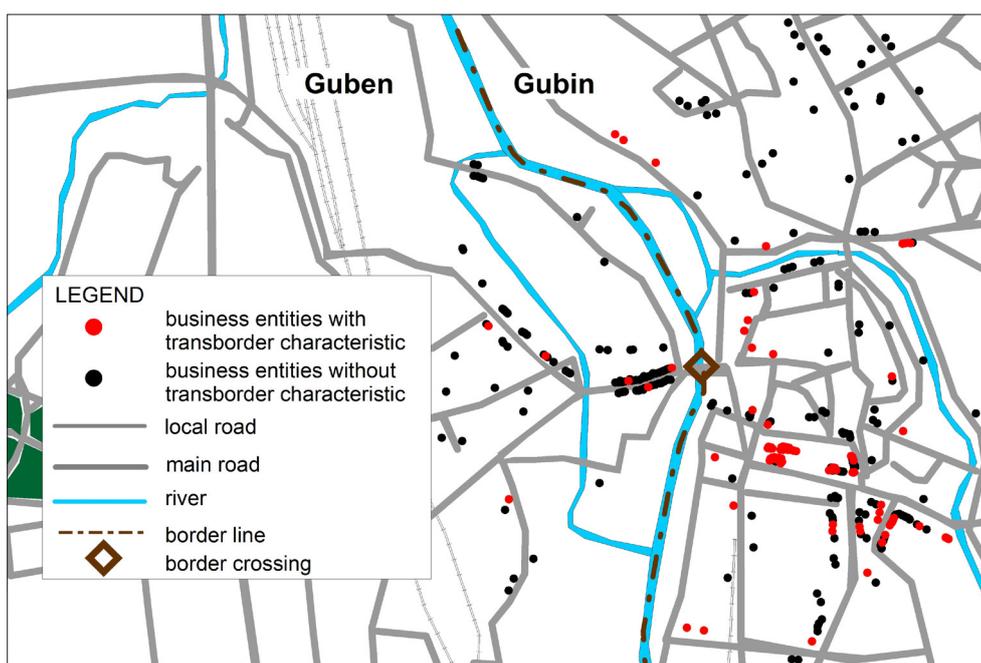


Fig. 5: Cross-border openness of service providers of the border twin towns Gubin/Guben by trans-border category: Banner in neighbour's language. Source: author's elaboration

could be observed in almost all of the studied companies. It can be safely said that cross-border openness in Cieszyn/Český Těšín was generally symmetrical.

A completely different picture was revealed after analysing the spatial distribution of companies regarding cross-border openness in Gubin/Guben (Fig. 5). On the Polish side, the share of companies having a shop sign or information materials in the German language was significant, especially in the centre and along the main street leading from the border crossing to the city centre. On the German side, however, such entities were rare and only occurred near the border bridge. The situation was similar with the ability to pay in the currency of the neighbour and to speak their language: it was common practice in Gubin, while in German Guben it was very rare (only a few providers near the border crossing). The spatial distribution of cross-border openness was very asymmetrical, with a noticeably large openness among Polish companies and very small openness among German ones.

The analysis of the spatial distribution of economic entities with the inclusion of the features of cross-border openness, allows one to identify a few regularities. It was clearly visible that closeness to the border crossing influenced cross-border openness. The providers that were located near the bridge on the border river were more often characterised by openness to customers from the other side of the border, than providers further away from it. This regularity could also be observed in German Guben, where these few providers having any feature of openness were located near the border crossing.

## 7. Conclusion

The cross-border openness of service providers was shaped differently in the border twin towns in this analysis. In the Polish-Czech Cieszyn/Český Těšín case, it was generally symmetrical in nature with a large observable openness in both parts of the city to customers from the other side of the border. For the Polish-German Gubin/Guben case, however, the nature of openness was definitely asymmetrical, with a visibly large openness of Polish companies to German customers and the lack of it among companies in German Guben. On the basis of this analysis, it may be assumed that the symmetry of cross-border openness was not influenced by the relative symmetry of the cities from the point of view of their size, number of citizens, or closeness of the city centres. These similarities exist both in Cieszyn/Český Těšín and in Gubin/Guben, but the nature of their openness is completely different. The broad availability and ease of moving between both parts of the town divided by the border, influenced the process of generating shopping trips; this process was not necessarily bilateral and it did not influence the cross-border openness of companies in both city centres. It seems that the level of openness was most influenced by price differences of selected products and services, as well as cultural differences.

The observed asymmetry in the openness of the Polish-German Gubin/Guben case confirms the results of previous analogous studies conducted in Zgorzelec/Gorlitz. It is worth noting that the great significance of cultural asymmetry and its influence on trans-border relationships (including the possibility of economic integration) was also observed

in other regions. For example, research concerning co-operation networks in the tri-national metropolitan region of Basel points to the significance of language differences (Walther and Reitel, 2012), similar to the city-pair Valga-Valka (Joenniemi and Sergunin, 2011). Even in cross-border metropolitan regions, where integration processes are advanced, the border effect is strongly felt (Dörry and Decoville, 2012). The significance of cultural differences, as well as large discrepancies in the level of socio-economic development, strongly affects the integration possibilities of border cities (Decoville et al., 2013; Lundén, 2004).

It may be said that cultural closeness (including knowledge of the language) may influence the processes of spatial and socio-economic integration in towns divided by a border in a far greater way than any price differences of goods and services. Although such differences generate shopping trips, they do not influence the citizens of border twin towns to become closer together, nor, more broadly, spatial integration. Their existence must be assessed positively, however, because they directly influence the ability to generate profit from trade and services<sup>7</sup>, and they also indirectly affect the acquisition of knowledge by the citizens of a border city, with the spaces of the neighbouring city. In turn, this may influence any future processes of spatial integration. It also seems that in the case of two neighbouring societies, being closer together due to their cultural and socio-economic determinants (e.g. because of the existence of national minorities and through this, mixed families, and the ability to speak the language), the chances for these processes to happen are greater. It must be said that in the context of the ability to shape mutual development processes for an entire town divided by a border, a symmetrical structure is definitely more advantageous in many ways, including the cross-border openness of service providers.

## References:

- ACKLESON, J. (2005): Constructing Security on the U.S.-Mexico border. *Political Geography*, 24: 165–184.
- AGNEW, J. (2008): Borders on the mind: reframing border thinking. *Ethics and Global Politics*, 1(4): 175–191.
- ARREOLA, D. (1996): Border-City Idee Fix. *Geographical Review*, 86(3): 356–369.
- BRUNET-JAILLY, E. (2011): Special Section: Borders, Borderlands and Theory: An Introduction. *Geopolitics*, 16: 1–6.
- BUTTIN, F. (2006): The Polish-Czechoslovak Conflict over Teschen Silesia (1918–1920): a case study. *Perspectives*, 25: 63–78.
- BUURSINK, J. (2001): The Binational Reality of Border-crossing Cities. *GeoJournal*, 54(1): 7–19.
- BYGVRA, S., WESTLUND, H. (2004): Shopping Behaviour in the Rresund Region Before and After the Establishment of the Fixed Link between Denmark and Sweden. *GeoJournal*, 61: 41–52.
- CAPPELLIN, R. (1993): Interregional cooperation in Europe: an introduction. In: Cappellin, R., Batey, P. W. J. [eds.] *Regional Networks, Border Regions and European Integration*. London, Pion.

<sup>7</sup> In order to determine the mutual influence of the economies of border twin towns in terms of financial aspects, one would require separate, large-scale studies (the availability of such data is limited, hence lack of such studies to date).

- CBOS (2011): Polacy o Niemcach, Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, BS/79/2011, Warszawa, CBOS.
- DOLIŃSKA, K. et al. (2013): Instrumentalność vs autoteliczność praktyk transgranicznych mieszkańców Zgorzelca i Gubina. *Opuscula Socjologica* 2 (forthcoming).
- DOŁŻBŁASZ, S. (2012): Transborder relations between territorial units in the Polish-German borderland. *Geographia Polonica*, 85(3): 23–36.
- DOŁŻBŁASZ, S. (2013): Cross-Border Co-Operation in the Euroregions at the Polish-Czech and Polish-Slovak Borders. *European Countryside*, 5(2): 102–114.
- DOŁŻBŁASZ, S., RACZYK, A. (2012): Transborder openness of companies in a divided city. Zgorzelec/Görlitz case study. *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, 103(3): 347–361.
- DÖRRY, S., DECOVILLE, A. (2012): Transportation policy networks in cross-border regions. First results from a social network analysis in Luxembourg and the Greater Region. CEPS/INSTEAD Working Paper No. 2012-22.
- DECOVILLE, A., DURAND, F., SOHN, C., WALTHER, O. (2013): Comparing cross-border metropolitan integration in Europe: towards a functional typology. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 28(2): 221–237.
- FIRST ESPON SYNTHESIS REPORT, 2013, New Evidence on Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Territories, European Union.
- GERBER, J., LARA, F., DE LA PARRA, C. (2010): Re-imagining the U.S.-Mexico Border: Policies towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Transborder Region. *Global Economy Journal* 10(4): 1–17.
- JAŃCZAK, J. [ed.] (2009): Conflict and Cooperation in Divided Cities. *Thematicon*, 14. Berlin, Logos Verlag.
- JAŃCZAK, J. (2013): Border Twin Towns in Europe. Cross-border Cooperation at a Local Level, Berlin: Logos Verlag.
- JOENNIEMI, P., SERGUNIN, A. (2011): When two aspire to become one: city-twinning in Northern Europe. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 26(2): 231–242.
- KNIPPSCHILD, R. (2011): Cross-Border Spatial Planning: Understanding, Designing and Managing Cooperation Processes in the German-Polish-Czech Borderland. *European Planning Studies*, 19(4): 629–645.
- KRÄTKE, S. (1999): Regional Integration or Fragmentation? The German-Polish Border Region in a New Europe. *Regional Studies*, 33(7): 631–641.
- KRÄTKE, S., BORST, R. (2007): EU Eastern Enlargement and the Configuration of German-Polish Inter-Firm Linkages. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 98: 621–640.
- KULCZYŃSKA, K. (2010): The Gubin-Guben transborder urban complex as an arena of consumer behaviour. *Bulletin of Geography Socio-economic Series*, 14: 79–89.
- KULCZYŃSKA, K., MATYKOWSKI, R. (2008): Struktura przestrzenno-handlowa przygranicznego zespołu miejskiego Český Těšín-Cieszyn. *Dokumentacja Geograficzna*, 36: 202–207.
- KULCZYŃSKA, K., MATYKOWSKI, R. (2011): Images of the urban spaces of Cieszyn. *Bulletin of Geography Socio-economic Series*, 15: 83–94.
- KURKOWIAK, B. (2013): Comparative price levels for food, beverages and tobacco, *Statistics in focus*, 15/2013, Eurostat.
- LEIMGRUBER, W. (2005): Boundaries and transborder relations, or the hole in the prison wall: On the necessity of superfluous limits and boundaries. *GeoJournal*, 64: 239–248.
- LUNDÉN, T. (2004): On the boundary. About humans at the end of territory. *Södertörns högskola*. Huddinge.
- MOSAKOWSKA, A. (2012): Relacje transgraniczne w mieście podzielonym Cieszyn/Český Těšín, Master's thesis, Uniwersytet Wrocławski, Wrocław.
- NACE (2008): Rev. 2. Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community. Eurostat. Methodologies and Working papers. European Communities.
- NELLES, J., DURAND, F. (2014): Political rescaling and metropolitan governance in cross-border regions: comparing the cross-border metropolitan areas of Lille and Luxembourg. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 21(1): 104–122.
- NEWMAN, D. (2006): The lines that continue to separate us: borders in our borderless' World. *Progress in Human Geography*, 30(2): 143–161.
- NEWMAN, D. (2010): Territory, Compartments and Borders: Avoiding the Trap of the Territorial Trap. *Geopolitics*, 15(4): 773–778.
- O'DOWD, L. (2010): From a 'borderless world' to a 'world of borders': bringing history back in. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28(6): 1031–1050.
- PAASI, A. (2011): Border theory: an unattainable dream or a realistic aim for border scholars? In: Wastl-Walter, D. [ed.]: *A Research Companion to Border Studies* (pp. 11–31). Aldershot, Ashgate.
- POKLUDA, F. (2005): Orlicko: a rural microregion on the Czech-Polish state border. In: Komornicki, T., Czapiewski, K.L.: *New spatial relations in new Europe*. (pp. 173–184). EUROPA XXI, 13. Warszawa, Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization.
- REITEL, B. (2006): Governance in Cross-border Agglomerations in Europe – The Examples of Basel and Strasbourg. *Europa Regional*, 14(1): 9–21.
- REITEL, B. (2013): Border Temporality and Space Integration in the European Transborder Agglomeration of Basel, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 28(2): 239–256.
- RIPPL, S. et al. (2010): Crossing the Frontier: Transnational Social Integration in the EU's Border Regions. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 51(1–2): 5–31.
- SIWEK, T. (2008): Nazwiska jako indyktor pochodzenia ludności miasta Český Těšín. *Dokumentacja Geograficzna*, 36: 196–201.
- SOHN, C. (2013): The Border as a Resource in the Global Urban Space: A Contribution to the Cross-Border Metropolis Hypothesis. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, DOI: 10.1111/1468-2427.12071.
- SOHN, C., LARA-VALENCIA, F. (2013): Borders and Cities: Perspectives from North America and Europe. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 28(2): 181–190.

- SPIERINGS, B., VAN DER VELDE, M. (2008): Shopping, Borders and Unfamiliarity: Consumer Mobility in Europe. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 99: 497–505.
- TOPALOGLOU, L. et al. (2005): A Border Regions Typology in the Enlarged European Union. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 20(2): 67–89.
- VAISHAR, A., DVOŘÁK, P., HUBAČÍKOVÁ, V., ZAPLETALOVÁ, J. (2013): Contemporary development of peripheral parts of the Czech-Polish borderland: case study of the Javorník area. *Geographia Polonica*, 86(3): 237–253.
- VAN DER VELDE, M., SPERINGS, B. (2010): Consumer mobility and the Communication of Difference: Reflecting on Cross-border Shopping Practices and Experience in the Dutch-German Borderland. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 25: 191–205.
- VAN HOUTUM, H. (1999): Internationalisation and mental borders. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 90: 329–335.
- WALTHER, O., REITEL, B. (2012): Cross-border policy networks in the trinational region of Basel. CEPS/INSTEAD Working Papers No. 2012-26.
- WIĘCKOWSKI, M. (2013): Eco-frontier in the mountainous borderlands of Central Europe. The case of Polish border parks. *Journal of Alpine Research*, 101(2), DOI: 10.4000/rga.2107.
- ZENDEROWSKI, R. (2002a): Stosunki między mieszkańcami miast podzielonych granicą państwową na przykładzie Cieszyna i Czeskiego Cieszyna (Český Těšín). *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne*, 1(8): 49–78.
- ZENDEROWSKI, R. (2002b): Cieszyn jako miasto podzielone granicą państwową. Przyczyny i konsekwencje podziału z 1920 r. *Sacculum Christianum*, 9(1): 107–126.

**Initial submission** 6 October 2014, **final acceptance** 5 February 2015

**Please cite this article as:**

DOŁŻBŁASZ, S. (2015): Symmetry or asymmetry? Cross-border openness of service providers in Polish-Czech and Polish-German border towns. *Moravian Geographical Reports*, 23(1): 2–12. DOI: 10.1515/mgr-2015-0001.