

### **Arkadiusz Malkowski**

West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin

e-mail: amalkowski@zut.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-2769-245X

### **Rafał Mazur**

West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin

e-mail: rmazur@zut.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0001-8828-5925

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## **THE IMPACT OF BORDER CLOSURE ON THE ECONOMY OF A BORDER REGION – AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE POLISH-GERMAN BORDERLAND**

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**Abstract:** A change in the functions fulfilled by borders creates new circumstances affecting the development of border areas. The Polish-German borderland area is an example of a peripheral region which, due to the liberalization of border regulations, has undergone a clear socio-economic transformation. Shopping tourism has been one of the factors leading to the emergence of the region's new economic model. The border's closure to free traffic in March 2020 made it impossible for foreign nationals to visit Poland for shopping purposes. The article presents selected results of research into shopping tourism as a factor in the development of peripheral areas in the context of the ongoing pandemic. The paper uses data made available by GUS (Statistics Poland) and the Border Guard (Straż Graniczna), as well as the author's own research based on the CATI methodology. The study indicates the importance of cross-border trade in the development of the Polish-German border areas. As a result of the closure of the borders, tourists stopped shopping in the region, which affected both the local and regional economy.

**Keywords:** border trade, peripheral area, eastern borderland.

## 1. Introduction

The development of consumer lifestyles has led to an increased interest in shopping tourism. This type of tourism allows consumers to purchase products and services abroad at more favourable prices than in their home market. Due to their location, border areas are particularly attractive places for this type of tourism to develop. Shopping tourists can do their shopping within a short distance from home without incurring high travel expenses or the costs of accommodation in a foreign country.

Shopping tourism is developing vigorously in many areas of the world. It helps to improve the quality of life of the borderland populations and stimulates the development of entrepreneurship and competitiveness on a local, regional and international scale.

The Polish-German borderland is an example of an area which, thanks to the development of cross-border trade, has restored its economic potential and overcome social and economic problems. The temporary closure of the Polish-German border to passenger traffic necessitated by the new health regulations resulted in the complete suspension of cross-border traffic and adversely affected the economy of the region.

## 2. Purpose of the paper and research methods

The purpose of the article was to describe the impact of the closure of the borders to traffic in connection with the outbreak of the pandemic. The pilot study presented here covered the area of two border counties in the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship and was part of a broader scientific project aimed at verifying the following hypothesis: "Shopping tourism is an important factor in the development of peripheral areas". The author used desk research method. The research was based on the CATI methodology, and thus the study made use of 60 interviews with entrepreneurs from the Police and Gryfino counties conducted in May 2020.

## 3. Shopping tourism as a factor in the development of peripheral areas

International research shows that border areas are usually characterized by highly adverse socio-economic circumstances and that any change in how the borders function becomes a factor stimulating the socio-economic processes in peripheral areas (Bański and Janicki, 2013; Flynn, 1997; Havlíček, 2007; Malkowski, Mickiewicz, and Malkowska, 2020; Pelc, 2010). Changes in border functions are often accompanied by the development of border traffic and the related shopping tourism (Bahre, 2016; Ramsey, Thimm, and Hehn, 2019; Stors and Kagermeier, 2013). The development of cross-border trade is seen as the first effect of increasing cross-border cooperation between areas divided by borders (Nshimbi and Moyo,

2017; Malkowska, 2013; Peberdy, 2000). It drives change across the entire economy of the border region and makes many border areas lose their peripheral character as they experience accelerated socio-economic development (Malkowska, 2017; Krätke, 2002; Turnock, 2002).

Cross-border trade develops along with the growth of shopping tourism. The increasing volume of shopping generated by the increasing number of shopping tourists becomes an important link in the tourism value chain, while being part of the global value chain (GVC) (UNWTO, 2014). This chain is defined as the sum of activities undertaken by traders aiming to deliver a product or a service to the final recipient. In the case of border areas, this final recipient is often a shopping tourist.

Shopping tourism, although broadly discussed in the subject literature, has not yet been given one definition recognized by all. Most attempts to define the phenomenon have focused on analyzing the specific conditions for the development of shopping tourism found in airports or the shopping districts of major cities (Alhosani and Zaidan, 2014; Getz, 1993; Tömöri, 2010; Rogerson, 2011). Research on a local scale, considering the motives behind shopping trips, is far less common (Moscardo, 2004; Tosun, Temizkan, Timothy, and Fyall, 2007). This applies in particular to the border areas in Poland. So far, research into shopping tourism has usually been part of wider projects covering the multifunctional development of rural areas, as well as tourism and social potential (Cheba, Hołub-Iwan, 2014; Hernik, 2013; Karmowska, 2011; Mazur, 2004; Zbaraszewski, Pieńkowski, and Steingrube, 2014).

Shopping tourism in Polish border regions is concentrated within up to 50 km from the border. This means that it is the local community that is the beneficiary of most of the advantages of business development and infrastructure modernization, as well as commercial and service network development. With few exceptions, the development of border marketplaces or shopping centers is limited to small towns, or even villages. 'Bazaar' i.e. trading in the open-air markets at the western border of Poland is primarily local in character and complements other forms of retail trade (Wojdacki, 2011). This phenomenon is exemplified by Osinów Dolny, Krajnik, Lubieszyn, Łęknica, Zgorzelec and Kostrzyn. As recently as a few years ago, it appeared that cross-border trade would not be able to withstand the strong competition from the new large shopping malls set up in Szczecin, Wrocław, Zielona Góra and Schwedt. However the next few years showed that, although it is difficult to speak about any development of cross-border market trade as such, the markets themselves and the entrepreneurs working in them have survived. In some locations, this form of trade has been reinvigorated. One example is the marketplace in Osinów Dolny, which is becoming the shopping and services centre for the entire Cedynia municipality.

This trend is linked with the unwavering interest in the market product offer on the part of German customers, as well as Poles. We are witnessing a renaissance of the popularity of shopping at marketplaces and tiny local 'bazaars'. Poles are increasingly looking there for high quality local food. The survey conducted in

2009 by IPSOS on behalf of the European Commission indicated that Poles were the biggest supporters of shopping at such places. Almost half of the respondents declared they mostly shopped there for fruit and vegetables, while at that time the EU average was 33%. Among the respondents, 29% declared they also shopped there for meat, compared with the EU average of less than 11%. One in five Poles shopped there for clothing or footwear (with the EU average of 16%). The estimated value of products sold on bazaars and marketplaces in Poland amounted to approximately 2% of the total value of trade, i.e. several million zlotys a year, although these figures seem to be highly underestimated.

At the national level, open-air market trade – although increasingly popular – does not pose a clear threat to the traditional distribution networks. However in the case of border areas, the situation is changing. Border marketplaces are becoming trade and services centres with a local and regional impact. Shopping tourism is an important factor in their development. In this article, such tourism is understood in line with the definition by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Accordingly, shopping tourism should be seen as a modern form of tourism chosen by people for whom shopping outside their usual environment is a determinant factor affecting their choice of destination. For the shopping tourist, their motivation for travel is to purchase goods and services. The directions for the development of shopping tourism are therefore determined by the natural calculation of favourable price ratios. This is a significant difference compared to the classic tourism, where shopping for goods and services is often a present but not a determinant factor affecting destination choice. Research into this subject shows that shopping tourism is developing successfully in cross-border areas where border regulations allow unhindered passage and carriage of goods. Shopping tourism is found in all continents (except Antarctica), becoming an important driver of economic development (Timothy, 2005).

A lack of freedom to cross the border, or the existence of strict rules on the exports of purchased goods, are important obstacles to the development of shopping tourism. The EU border regions have seen a consistent removal of barriers to the movement of people and to the development of a common European market over recent decades. This has made shopping by customers from neighbouring EU countries an important factor in the development of border areas.

The author's studies on the Polish-Czech and Polish-Ukrainian frontiers revealed that the shopping is mostly done in the immediate vicinity of the border (up to 50 km from it). This means that the tourists mostly shop close to their homes, often perceiving the borderland as a natural place to shop for their basic needs. Shopping tourism is part of a symbiotic partnership where the advantages are simultaneously derived by the tourists, the region and the city (UNWTO 2014, p. 7).

#### 4. Shopping tourism and the development of the Polish-German borderlands in the face of the pandemic

Shopping tourism is an important factor affecting the socio-economic situation of peripheral regions. Every year more than 66% of foreign visitors to Poland specify shopping as the motivation for their travel. In 2019, the number of border crossings in Poland amounted to **305.8 million**. According to the border authorities, the Polish border was crossed by over **180.2 million** foreigners and **125.7 million** Poles. In 2019, border traffic (from Poland and to Poland) increased by more than **3.2%** compared to 2018 and by more than 6% compared to 2017.

In 2019, 73.3% of total crossings were by land between Poland and EU countries, 14.3% by air, 11.9% across the EU's external land border, and 0.6% by sea.

The largest share in the land border traffic was generated by movement across the Polish-German border. The vast majority (68%) of foreigners crossing this border declared shopping as the factor driving their destination choice. Only around 15% indicated that the purpose of their travel was to visit relatives, while 7% went to Poland on business. Long-term studies have shown that foreigners crossing the Polish-German land border live within up to 50 km from the border, and in 2018 they accounted for 72% of all foreigners crossing the border. Most of them, i.e. as many as 56.7%, resided less than 30 km away from the border, thus they were mostly residents of the borderland. An analysis of the places where they shopped in Poland indicated that in most cases they did so within 50 km from the border (79% of the respondents). As many as 76% of the respondents declared they shopped within 30 km from the border. This means that the revenue related to shopping tourism flowed to entrepreneurs selling their goods and services in the border areas.

The study carried out by the author in 2018 indicated a close link between the size of foreigner border traffic and the socio-economic situation of border areas<sup>1</sup>. Entrepreneurs established in the county adjacent to the border claimed that an increase in border traffic had an advantageous effect on the region's economic situation. Entrepreneurs from the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship were the ones who mostly claimed that border traffic had an impact on the economic situation of the Polish-German border region (95% of the respondents). In the case of entrepreneurs from the Lubuskie and Dolnośląskie Voivodeships, the value of this measure was 94%.

The coronavirus epidemic led Poland to close its borders to passenger traffic on Sunday, 15 March 2020. From then on, passenger cars were only able to enter the country in 31 places. Only Poles returning from abroad and foreigners with business or family connections with Poland were allowed in. All other foreigners, including shopping tourists, were denied access to Poland. The border regulations were amended to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2. The restrictions were to apply from 15 to 24 March 2020. However, the Polish authorities decided to extend this deadline

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<sup>1</sup> More in: (Malkowski et al., 2020, pp. 238-248).

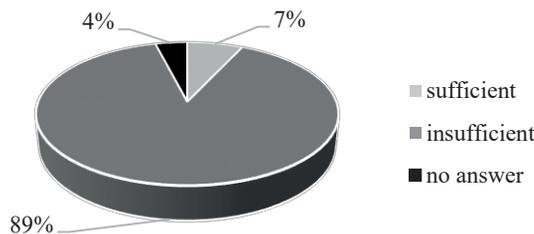
until 13 April, then 3 May, then again by another 10 days – until 13 May, followed by another month – 12 June 2020. On 8 May 2020 the European Commission called on the Member States and the Schengen-zone countries to extend the temporary border closure until 15 June.

Consequently, the border marketplaces, shopping centres and numerous service points became inaccessible to shopping tourists. This had a negative impact on the local and regional economy.

The survey, which due to the epidemiological restrictions was carried out over the phone, included a random group of 60 entrepreneurs from the Police and Gryfino counties in the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship. The results indicated that the closure of the borders to foreign nationals had a substantial impact on their economic situation. Most respondents indicated that their turnover fell by up to 80% (74% respondents) between 15 March and 15 May 2020, while 9% of the respondents admitted to suffering a decline in turnover of over 80%. The lack of shopping tourists from beyond the western border could not be compensated by purchases by Polish customers, who also stayed at home.

The uncertainty concerning how much longer the borders would remain closed was among the most important problems identified by the respondents.

The entrepreneurs established in the Polish-German borderland were left to face the need to bear the fixed costs of their business, without the possibility of obtaining revenue. This study showed that the most frequent measures taken by entrepreneurs in order to survive this difficult period were cost reductions (93% of the respondents) and consumption of savings (67%), 64% of the respondents said they were considering suspending or closing their businesses because of the restrictions. More than 54% of the entrepreneurs surveyed specified they were thinking about staff reductions.



**Fig. 1.** Assessment of support under the Covid-19 anti-crisis shield received by entrepreneurs

Source: own research.

The respondents admitted that the measures aimed at assisting entrepreneurs undertaken by the state were welcome. At the same time, 89% of the respondents said the aid offered to date was insufficient, whereas only 7% considered state support as satisfactory, see Figure 1.

The results of the pilot study carried out in the Polish-German borderland correspond to the results of the nationwide business surveys conducted by the Polish Confederation of Private Employers – Lewiatan<sup>2</sup>. In a survey conducted on a sample of 800 entrepreneurs, 95% of the respondents claimed their businesses had been affected by the pandemic. The problems in running their businesses translated into difficulties with retaining employees. Among the surveyed entrepreneurs, 69% declared that they were planning job cuts. The worst situation was found in small (71% planning for reductions) and medium-sized (80% planning for reductions) enterprises. Overall, 54% of the responding companies were planning to lay off 20% to 50% of their staff over the next two months. The vast majority of the respondents believed that ‘thawing’ the economy was today one of the key tasks for the government.

It is difficult to assess the economic impact of border closures on the economy of the borderland, given the dynamic nature of the situation and the lack of quantitative data showing the extent of the phenomenon.

In order to illustrate the potential losses associated with the establishment of the ‘cordon sanitaire’ along the border, data on border traffic in the corresponding (2nd) quarter of 2019 were used. The analysis of the quantitative data on border traffic and foreigners’ spending in Poland showed that border traffic had been increasing since 2014 – see Table 1.

**Table 1.** Border traffic of persons (from Poland and to Poland)

Specification	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
	crossings of the border in mln					
Foreigners	152.00	159.00	165.20	171.60	175.40	180.20
Poles	106.00	109.00	110.80	115.50	121.00	125.70
Total	258.00	268.00	276.00	287.10	296.40	305.90

Source: developed by the author based on GUS data.

**Table 2.** Border traffic on the Polish-German border in the second quarter of the year in millions of persons

Specification	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Foreigners	20.50	19.70	20.10	20.40	20.60	21.00
Polens	10.60	9.70	9.90	10.50	10.70	11.10

Source: developed by the author based on GUS data.

<sup>2</sup> The Lewiatan Confederation carried out its online study between 23 and 25 March 2020 on a sample of 800 entrepreneurs.

The research shows that the border traffic differs in particular quarters of the year. Therefore, the analysis used historical data on the characteristics of border traffic on the Polish-German border in Q2 2019, see Table 2.

In Q2 2019, the number of crossings of the Polish-German border amounted to 32.1 million, of which 21 million (65%) were by foreigners and 11.1 million (35%) were by Poles. In the whole of 2019, the number of crossings of all Polish borders was 3.2% higher than in the whole of 2018.

The economic impact of border traffic is based on the expenditure of shopping tourists.

On the Polish-German border in the second quarter of 2019, the expenditure made by persons crossing the borders amounted to over PLN 6.5 billion, 3.2% higher than that in 2018 and 22% higher than in 2014, see Table 3.

**Table 3.** Expenditure by persons crossing the Polish-German border in the second quarter of the year

Specification	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*
	in billion PLN						
Foreigners	3.50	4.10	4.30	4.50	4.70	4.80	5.00
Poles	1.80	1.50	1.50	1.60	1.60	1.70	1.70
Total	5.30	5.60	5.80	6.10	6.30	6.50	6.70

\* Forecast.

Source: developed by the author based on GUS data.

Assuming a 3% growth rate of expenditure, the forecast of spending in the second quarter of 2020 by shopping tourists crossing the border should have amounted to approximately PLN 6.7 billion.

The closure of the borders completely halted the flow of shopping tourists from Germany. The money that the shopping tourists had so far spent in the border region stopped arriving to the local entrepreneurs, which negatively affected their incomes.

In the case of the western border, the value of revenue lost because of the cessation of shopping tourism was at least PLN 6.7 billion. This relates to approximately PLN 5.0 billion in lost revenues on the Polish side of the border and to approximately PLN 1.7 billion on the German side. This calculation was based on the volume of expenditure made by foreigners crossing the Polish-German border in Q2 2019.

The popularity of shopping tourism among Germans residing in the borderland is evidenced by the fact that 26.7% of them declare that they come to Poland several times a week. Almost 8% of them do their shopping in Poland every day, and over 36% do so several times a month. The analysis of the German shopping tourists' expenditure showed that in Q2 2019 they spent on the Polish side of the border an average of PLN 465 per person per trip, which unfortunately stopped during the pandemic.

## 5. Conclusion

This study shows that the closed border has had a significant impact on the economy of the Polish-German border region. So far, shopping tourism and the accompanying cross-border trade have been seen as an important driver of the development of the Polish-German frontier areas. This particularly applies to the zone within 30 km from the border in which German shopping tourists concentrate their shopping activity.

The closure of the Polish-German border to free passenger traffic meant that every month the usual 32 million of shopping tourists did not visit the shops and service providers in the border area, nor spent the expected amount of PLN 6.7 billion there.

The conducted research has shown that as a result of the border closure, Polish entrepreneurs from the Polish-German border did not receive PLN 5.0 billion from the purchases made by German tourists.

The economic impact of this situation will certainly be felt in the coming months, or even years. The study also points to the particularly difficult situation of entrepreneurs based along the Polish-German frontier. The uncertainty regarding the length of the borders' closure to free passenger traffic only exacerbated the entrepreneurs' concerns.

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## SKUTKI ZAMKNIĘCIA GRANIC DLA GOSPODARKI OBSZARU PRZYGRANICZNEGO NA PRZYKŁADZIE POGRANICZA POLSKO-NIEMIECKIEGO

**Streszczenie:** Zmiana funkcji granic wpływa na tworzenie nowych warunków rozwoju obszarów przygranicznych. Obszar pogranicza polsko-niemieckiego jest przykładem peryferyjnego regionu, który wraz z liberalizacją przepisów granicznych przeszedł wyraźną transformację społeczno-gospodarczą. Turystyka zakupowa była jednym z czynników, które wpłynęły na ukształtowanie się nowego modelu gospodarki regionu. Zamknięcie granicy dla swobodnego ruchu granicznego w marcu 2020 r. spowodowało, iż przyjazdy cudzoziemców w celach zakupowych do Polski stały się niemożliwe. Artykuł przedstawia wyniki badań dotyczących turystyki zakupowej jako czynnika rozwoju obszarów peryferyjnych w kontekście pandemii. Wykorzystano w nim dane GUS i Straży Granicznej oraz wyniki badań własnych autora opartych na metodologii CATI. Przeprowadzone badania wskazują na istotne znaczenie handlu przygranicznego dla rozwoju obszarów pogranicza polsko-niemieckiego. W wyniku zamknięcia granic turyści zakupowi przestali dokonywać zakupów w obszarze przygranicznym, co wpłynęło na gospodarkę w skali lokalnej jak i regionalnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** handel przygraniczny, obszar peryferyjny, pogranicze zachodnie.