

CHANGE OF THE ROLE AND CHARACTER OF THE POLISH-RUSSIAN BORDER AND DETERMINANTS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLISH BORDER ZONE

The PhD thesis adds to the approach of everyday border experience and influence local societies exert on the process of border construction. Therefore, the thesis directly relates to a new research concept called bordering which allows to interpret borders as multidimensional phenomena. The main objectives of the thesis are as follows:

- identification and evaluation of factors changing the role and permeability of the border;
- evaluation of the everyday crossborder activities of local communities in a legal, economic, social and symbolic dimension;
- identification of local conditions of border areas development;
- evaluation of a role that the border plays in everyday life of people living in border areas.

The spatial scope of the thesis is the local border traffic zone delimited on the basis of the agreement of 14th December 2011, including the Kaliningrad Oblast as well as parts of warmińsko-mazurskie and pomorskie voivodeships. The analyses were carried out for the period of 1945-2016, focusing especially on the four-year period during which the local border traffic zone was opened (2012-2016).

Three research hypotheses were formulated in the thesis. The first one assumes that border is an institution which functions and permeability are constantly changing under different circumstances. The analysis of historical changes of the Polish-Russian border confirmed that the borderline dividing Poland and the Kaliningrad Oblast has been one of the most dynamically changing Polish border. Its uncommonness results from the fact that it was delimited arbitrarily and it has affected the current socio-economic situation of this border area. During the analysed period both the function and permeability of the border was not stable. It was not only because the Kaliningrad Oblast is a military area, but also the fact that in 2004 this border became an external border of the European Union. Complexity of this border results from several different factors. The most important one is political decisions made at a central level. Therefore, it can be stated that the role of local actors in constructing the Polish-Russian border is limited and secondary.

The second hypothesis assumes that the most important factor affecting development of the crossborder regions is the border permeability level. The higher permeability, the more

impulses for local development are triggered. The analysis has shown that a closed border plays a key role in the process of socio-economic peripheralization of borderlands. This four-year period when the local border traffic agreement (LBT) was in force has shown how important it is for the borderland to increase the permeability. Introducing this border regime was a significant factor changing a basic function of the border and activating the local economy. A large number of Russians visiting the Polish border area as well as the number of Poles regularly crossing the border in order to buy cheaper petrol in the Kaliningrad Oblast contributed to a decrease in the relatively high unemployment rate in the region and allowed the Poles to earn some additional money. Altogether it brought about the synergy effect as the residents used resources located on both Polish and Russian sides. Differences in prices, lack of some products in the Kaliningrad Oblast as well as the opportunity to buy products of better quality were foundation for development of the cross-border soft spaces.

However, the increased level of permeability did not change the demographic situation in the region. The four-year period was simply too short to do so. It is worth mentioning that demographic changes are characterised by large inertia and the results are usually visible with a significant time delay. Usually, positive socio-demographic changes take place when people have a stable and satisfying financial situation.

The example of the Polish-Russian border area proves that not only the high level of permeability is important, but also certainty that the situation is stable. In such circumstances a chance for economic recovery may emerge resulting in a better demographic situation and stable economy of a given region.

The third hypothesis relates to the LBT as a tool used for managing development of border areas. It assumes that the local border traffic agreement is an effective tool of crossborder integration and development of peripheral border areas as long as the LBT zone is delimited according to local needs and specificity of a given region. The LBT is a tool with a large development potential, exceeding its compensatory and humanitarian significance, which is not used by the European Union.

The results of fieldwork research confirmed that the LBT is an effective tool for creating functional and social regions. However, a crucial thing is to delimit the zone in a proper way. A LBT zone shall include social and economic potential existing on both sides of a border. Sticking to the EU regulation arbitrarily delimiting the zone within 30-50 km from a border makes development of functional areas impossible.

Including large cities and regions of high tourist values into a LBT zone may constitute a foundation for crossborder integration in regions divided by an external EU

border. The four-year period of the LBT zone operation in the Polish-Russian border area confirmed that taking proper actions when developing bilateral relations between the EU states and tailoring the EU regulations to local needs and unique characteristics of border regions may play a key role not only in development of strong economies, but also creating friendly neighbour relations at local and regional level. Such relations may also affect central authorities and their perception.

This new understanding of the LBT zones functions has not been confirmed by any changes in the EU legal provisions regarding their delimitation. The analysis of the experimental local border traffic agreement between Poland and the Kaliningrad Oblast has proved that the legal provisions regarding delimiting the LBT zones on external borders of the European Union shall be amended. Undoubtedly, the same positive mechanisms as those observed in the Polish-Russian case will be observed in other border areas.

