

Katarzyna Kulczyńska

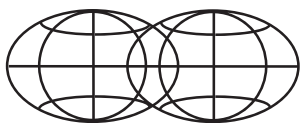
Factors controlling consumer behaviour in frontier towns

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Factors controlling consumer behaviour in frontier towns

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Abstract. This article focuses on the most important factors shaping the spatial behaviour of transborder consumers in Słubice and Frankfurt on the Oder, towns split by a state border. The factors are highly diversified and differ in the spatial range of influence. They can be divided into seven groups, viz. geographical, political-administrative, legal-normative, economic, demographic, psycho-social and cultural, and the foreign-language information layout of a town. But it is economic factors, like the level of prices in the given country or the currency exchange rate, that have the strongest effect on the movement of inhabitants and the intensity of transborder contacts between the two frontier towns.

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Contents:

1. Introduction	46
2. Movements of the inhabitants of the split towns	46
3. Factors shaping the behaviour of transborder consumers	49
3.1. Geographical factors	49
3.2. Political-administrative factors	49
3.3. Legal-normative factors	50
3.4. Economic factors	50
3.5. Demographic factors	52
3.6. Psycho-social and cultural factors	55
3.7. The role of information in moulding buyer behaviour	55
4. Conclusion	55
Notes	56
References	56

1. Introduction

Frontier towns are specific 'integration laboratories' resulting from the transformation of European borders in the 1990s. In localities neighbouring across a state border, the increase in border permeability has brought differences between their socio-economic systems to prominence. Those differences are especially readily visible in the split towns of Central and Eastern Europe, e.g., Frankfurt on the Oder – Słubice in the Polish-German borderland.

There was an upsurge of interest in split towns at the start of the 1990s when new economic mechanisms had been introduced in Poland while Central-Eastern Europe was going through political changes (Matykowski et al., 1998). Several works were published at that time which addressed the split-towns problem in a multi-aspect approach, e.g., Rutowska (1996), Krätke (1996), Matykowski and Schaefer (1996), Jajeśniak-Quast and Stokłosa (2000), Waack (2000), Rusek and Werpachowski (2007), Jańczak (2009b), or Kulczyńska et al. (2011). Those publications can be treated as registers of changes taking place in selected split towns, especially of their historical, demographic, socio-cultural, infrastructural, and spatial aspects.

Split towns and their operation have also been a subject of many analyses focusing on general mechanisms of cooperation and competition, or cooperation and conflict. It is a large group of publications including, e.g., Łoboda and Ciok (1995), Kaczmarek (1999), Brol (2004), Lundén (2007, 2009), Ciok et al. (2008), Ładysz (2008), Brańka (2009), Jańczak (2009a), Lundén et al. (2009), Musiał-Karg (2009b, 2010), and Osiewicz (2009). Those works mostly discuss cooperation issues, either in one or several split towns, and only a few treat cooperation of such towns as one of the elements of a broader analysis of the borderland.

Among detailed studies of split towns one can distinguish works focusing on only one of the many possible aspects of analysis, e.g.: (a) higher education (Weiler, 1995; Dolata, 2004; Kulczyńska, 2004; Wojciechowski, 2007; Bielawska, 2009); (b) the European town (Garand, Kowala-Stamm, 2003; Leśniak, 2004; Dreszer, 2006; Kurzwelly, 2007, 2008; Makaro, 2009; Musiał-Karg, 2009a; Kulczyńska, 2011b); (c) retailing and other services

(Konecka, Weltrowska, 1997; Kłosowski, Runge, 1999; Kłosowski, 2001; Borusiak et al., 2003; Graff, 2006; Kulczyńska, 2008, 2010b; Kulczyńska, Matykowski, 2008); (d) the spatial behaviour of transborder consumers (Kulczyńska, 2010a); (e) the development of urban space (Kulczyńska, 2006, 2011a); (f) socio-cultural changes (Pfeiffer, Opilowska, 2005; Kurcz, 2006; Opilowska, 2006; Bierwiaczonek, 2008; Matykowski, Kulczyńska, 2008; Kulczyńska, Matykowski, 2011; Lisiecki, 2009; Kaczmarek, 2011); and (g) political changes and systems (Grykień, Waack, 1998; Siwek et al., 2009).

The aim of this article is to characterise factors determining consumer behaviour in the frontier urban complex of Słubice-Frankfurt on the Oder. The characterisation rests on statistical data on border traffic supplied by the Border Guard Headquarters in Warsaw as well as the statistical information on the population number obtained in the town and statistical offices. The remaining data come from a survey research conducted in the two frontier towns.

2. Movements of the inhabitants of the split towns

The analysis of border traffic covers the years 1994–2007. However, the 2007 statistics are not complete due to Poland's inclusion into the Schengen Area (21 December 2007) and the resultant elimination of internal border controls in accordance with Regulation (EC) No. 562/2006 of the European Parliament and Council of 15 March 2006 (Official Gazette L 105 of 13 April 2006), setting up a Community code regulating the flow of people across borders (the Schengen Border Code).

At the Słubice-Frankfurt border crossing one can observe a marked disproportion in border traffic intensity: there are decidedly many more foreigners crossing the state border into Poland than Poles going to Germany. The number is double, both in pedestrian and wheeled traffic (passenger cars) (cf. Table 1).

The analysis of the intensity of pedestrian and wheeled border traffic also leads to the conclusion that it dwindled substantially over the study period, which is especially readily visible in pedestrian

Table 1. Movement across the Stubice-Frankfurt/O. state border

	Year													
	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 ^a
Pedestrian traffic														
B	5,950,337	2,235,014	1,970,565	1,793,028	1,867,876	1,495,991	1,136,069	1,391,841	1,105,668	1,144,364	914,114	788,672	916,617	1,216,397
in%	100	38	33	30	31	25	19	23	19	19	15	13	15	20
C	1,831,791	5,962,583	4,337,852	3,777,573	363,3641	3,489,976	1,625,662	2,162,743	1,749,748	1,800,616	2,118,539	2,457,646	2,637,551	1,453,436
in%	100	326	237	206	198	191	89	118	96	98	116	134	144	79
Wheeled traffic														
B	562,229	755,788	672,190	536,911	574,044	477,684	477,495	357,688	286,116	282,252	261,226	265,654	700,753	469,784
in%	100	134	120	96	102	85	85	64	51	50	47	47	125	84
C	1,560,729	1,671,803	1,357,553	1,235,853	1,230,629	1,221,890	957,951	603,203	447,226	432,885	531,157	657,307	436,100	988,962
in%	100	107	87	79	79	78	61	39	29	28	34	42	28	63

Explanation: ^a incomplete data due to Poland joining the Schengen Area; A – directions of crossing; B – Poles to Germany; C – foreigners to Poland

Source: Own compilation on the basis of statistical data of the Border Guard Headquarters in Warsaw

traffic. The number of foreigners crossing the border to Poland decreased from 5,962,583 in 1995 to 1,453,436 in 2007, i.e. by 75.62%. The drop proceeded steadily throughout the entire period, although in the years 2004–2006 a slight increase was recorded. The pedestrian traffic of Poles to Germany declined too, from 2,235,014 to 1,216,3971, i.e. by 45.57%, although in 2001 and 2007 there was a slight increase in the number of crossings (cf. Table 1). An analysis of border traffic intensity can also be made with reference to the year and the week. During the twelve months of the year, the greatest number of consumers was recorded from April to August and in December, and during the seven days of the week, definitely at weekends.

The chief purpose of consumer traffic across the state border is the satisfaction of needs concerning broadly understood services in the neighbouring town (country). The German buyer in Słubice

makes use primarily of retailing services, which he seeks at the local bazaars, supermarkets, and petrol stations; he is also ready to seek food, cosmetic, dental, and entertainment services (night clubs). Thus, the German buyer tends to penetrate those parts of the town in which such services are concentrated, viz. Wojska Polskiego, Kościuszki, Młodzieży Polskiej Avenue, and Sportowa streets (cf. Kulczyńska, 2008). In turn, the Polish customer in Frankfurt on the Oder is only interested in what German supermarkets and shopping centres have to offer. Hence the mainstream of consumers from Poland tends to concentrate in Karl-Marx-Strasse with its Der Oderturm and Lenné Passagen shopping centres. Another shopping mall which the Polish consumers visit in great numbers is Spitzkrug-Multi-Center situated in Spitzkrugring Street. and the Real hypermarket in Messering Str. (cf. Fig. 1).

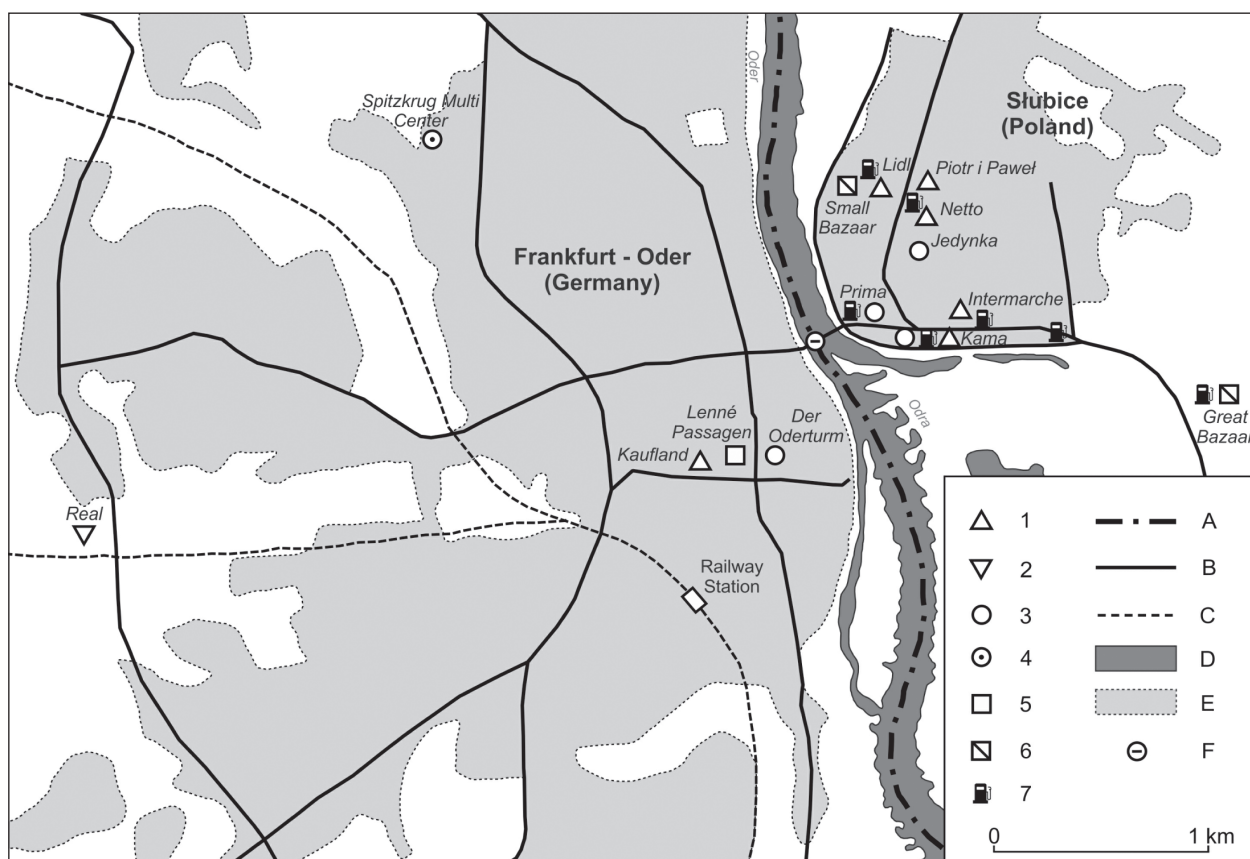


Fig. 1. Major shopping places chosen by consumers from across the border

Explanation: 1 – supermarket; 2 – hypermarket; 3 – shopping gallery; 4 – shopping centre; 5 – shopping arcade; 6 – bazaar; 7 – petrol station; A – state border; B – basic road system; C – railway; D – river; E – built-up area; F – border crossing

Source: Own compilation

3. Factors shaping the behaviour of transborder consumers

The behaviour of transborder consumers is determined by several factors differing in their spatial range of influence. A necessary condition for border traffic to occur is the existence of transborder infrastructure, or border crossings (a geographical factor), while the intensity of cross-border traffic depends on the permeability of the state border (a political-administrative factor), differences in wages and prices in the two countries, and currency exchange rates (economic factors). Of no less importance are demographic, legal-normative, psycho-social, and cultural factors, as well as a town's foreign-language information layout facilitating everyday movement of transborder consumers in its space, especially public space.

3.1. Geographical factors

Until the end of the 1980s, Słubice and Frankfurt on the Oder were peripheral areas in the settlement systems of the respective states. It was only after the change in international orientation and in the geopolitical situation in Europe (Chojnicki, 1999) that the geographical location of those towns has become an asset. They are separated by a natural barrier, viz. the Oder river, along which runs the state border established in 1945. Although the river is second in length in Poland, the physical distance dividing the two towns is a mere 300 m. This short distance has a beneficial effect on the intensity of transborder contacts, the more so as the towns are not connected by a common municipal transport system.

The most important element is the transborder infrastructure making transborder contacts possible, and its presence is the first and necessary condition of spatial movements of the inhabitants of frontier towns (Szul, 2001). Słubice and Frankfurt on the Oder are linked by two types of border crossing: a road and a railway one. Road traffic of transborder customers moves across a border bridge, which only carries pedestrians and passenger cars up to 3.5 t in weight. Cars exceeding the permitted tonnage cross the border at Świecko (some 8 km from the Słubice-Frankfurt crossing).

3.2. Political-administrative factors

The border is ascribed an especially significant role in shaping buyer behaviour because its character and functions determine mutual links between areas situated along its two sides. The basic function of the border in the contemporary political-territorial system is that of a spatial barrier of a varying degree of formality and permeability, which we can observe in Europe today (cf. Rykiel, 1990). The permeability of a state border has two aspects: (a) physical-technical, and (b) legal-political (Chojnicki, 1998). The physical-technical aspect involves the number and location of border crossings, the range of border controls, and the layout and quality of the transport network. The legal-political aspect concerns legal regulations defining the character and volume of transborder traffic and exchange (e.g. customs tariffs or rules of currency exchange and circulation).

The state border changes its permeability and can transform from a filtering border to an open one facilitating a wide range of social and economic contacts. The weakening role of the state border as a spatial barrier is a result of limitations on the sovereignty of states and an evolution due to post-modern changes that can mostly be found in West European countries (Chojnicki, 1998).

Also the character of the Polish state borders changed in the early 1990s as a result of the country's systemic transformation, new bilateral regulations, accession to the EU, and joining the Schengen Area. One can say, therefore, that the transformation of the borders in the 1990s created a situation facilitating (re) integration of frontier towns (including split towns), and their geographical location has become their greatest asset (Jańczak, 2009a).

Once those towns were uniform organisms which were then divided by a new state border. The division of towns on the western border was a consequence of decisions made at the Potsdam Conference in 1945. They involved a westward shift not only of the border of Poland, but also of the centuries-old Polish-German ethnic border.

Thus, towns so far functionally interdependent were cut by a state border and became units independent in legal-administrative terms because lying in different states. Hence the necessity of making the new urban organisms self-reliant

(in the organisation of urban life through, e.g. expanding physical infrastructure, constructing industrial plants like bakeries, setting up service establishments, etc.), because the old socio-economic links had been severed (Jańczak, 2009a). It should be noted that this problem did not affect all the towns to a similar extent. The situation was much worse for those towns that used to be one of the districts of the original city before the split, e.g. Słubice, a right-bank quarter of Frankfurt on the Oder, known at that time as Dammvorstadt. In Słubice there were only two schools coming from the start of the 20th century (Huttenschule and Marienschule), small industrial plants, and two denominational cemeteries (Evangelical and Jewish) in the south-western part, dating back to the 19th century. The only investment of any importance was a stadium built in the years 1919–1926 together with the accompanying infrastructure, viz. a swimming pool and a recreational/park area (cf. Rutowska, 1996).

In the postwar years, one can distinguish several periods in the coexistence of the two parts of frontier towns in which the border changed its character, although until the end of the 1980s it was mostly a barrier of low permeability (cf. Ciok, 1992). It was only the late 1980s and early '90s that saw the start of significant changes following from several favourable legal regulations as well as the signing of new treaties laying the foundations for good neighbourhood which influenced the nature of contacts and the intensity of transborder cooperation. The next stage on the road to the integration of the two towns was Poland's accession to the European Union (1 May 2004), but even more importantly, its joining the Schengen Area (21 December 2007), which involved a marked weakening of the border in its role of a spatial barrier by the elimination of passport control and a great reduction of tariff barriers.

3.3. Legal-normative factors

What affect the spatial behaviour of inhabitants of frontier towns are customs regulations that are a consequence of political changes and the altered conditions of operation of the economy. Today Germany and Poland, as EU members, are in a customs union with other EU states (within

the Community, goods imported to and exported from Poland are duty-free). EU citizens travelling in the European Union may cross borders carrying 800 cigarettes, 10 l of spirits, 20 l of wine of higher alcoholic content, 90 l of regular wine, and 110 l of fuel (1).

This liberalisation of customs rules brought about the demise of the profession known popularly as a 'cross-border ant', which involved multiple crossings of the border during the day to carry goods, e.g., cigarettes to Germany or alcohol to Poland, without exceeding the statutory limits on the quantity of articles transported on a single occasion. Routine controls by the border service showed that people engaged in this sort of trade could transport to Germany up to 15 cartons of cigarettes a day, and to Poland, up to 15 half-litre bottles of brand-name alcohol in demand there, while the law provided that one could cross the border with only 1 carton of cigarettes and 0.5 l of alcohol at a time.

Poland's accession to the European Union also put an end to the sale of German products to Germans. The profitability of this transaction consisted in Polish citizens buying household appliances or radio or TV sets in Germany, obtaining a VAT refund for them, and selling the goods to Germans at lower prices than in German shops. This was a legal transfer, because neither the German nor the Polish law forbade it.

With time, the changing conditions of operation of the economy eliminated some forms of trade in the Polish-German borderland. This was due to a change in customs regulations which allow European Union citizens to carry much more goods (within the Community) than in the 1990s.

3.4. Economic factors

Of particular importance seem to be transborder differences in wages and prices, especially if reinforced by currency exchange rates, since this generates streams of people, goods and money, and stimulates the formation of a local transborder market. Its characteristic is that labour force and cheap goods travel from the town of the poorer country to that of the richer one, while money goes in the opposite direction (Szul, 2001). In the frontier towns under study, the traffic of people, goods

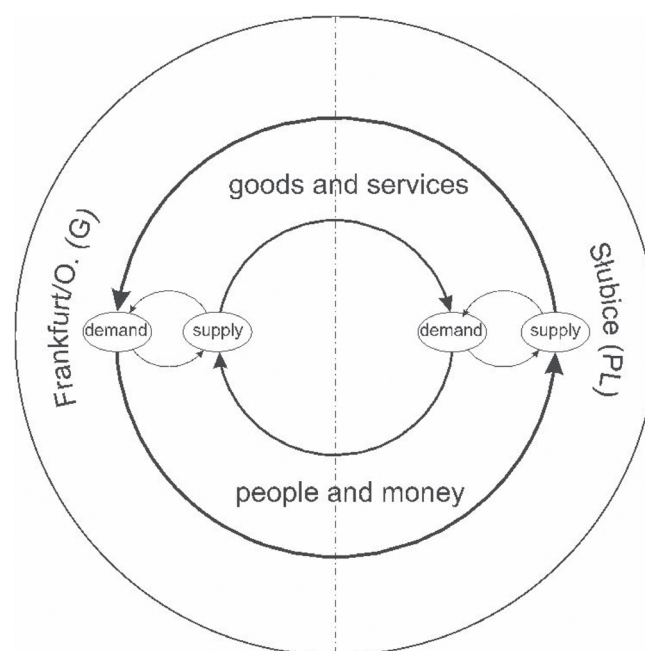


Fig. 2. The exchange process in the Polish-German borderland

Source: Own compilation on the basis of a 2010 Słubice-Frankfurt survey research

and money goes in both directions, although with varying intensity (cf. Fig. 2).

There is a decided predominance of the flow of people and money to Słubice, and of goods and services to Frankfurt on the Oder. Especially significant is the level of prices in the given country, since it makes the money flow what it is. While prices tend

to gradually level out on the two sides of the border, one can still observe some shopping-motivated cross-border traffic (cf. Table 2). It is still profitable for Germans to buy tobacco products in Słubice (Poland). As follows from a research conducted in June 2011, a packet of 20 Marlboro Light cigarettes cost 11.80 zlotys in Poland. In Germany, the same

Table 2. A comparison of prices of some goods in Słubice and Frankfurt on the Oder.

A	B	C		D	
		b	a	a	b
sugar	1 kg	3.49	0.65		2.69
petrol	1 l	5.18	1.55		6.42
diesel oil	1 l	5.09	1.42		5.88
cigarettes, Marlboro Light	20 pieces	11.80	4.90		20.30
cigarettes, L&M light	20 pieces	10.50	4.50		18.60
pork loin, boneless	1,000 g	20.81	7.49		31.02
minced pork	1,000 g	9.98	3.98		16.48
Bayer aspirin plus C	10 tablets	16.30	5.53		22.90
Dove body balm	400 ml	20.99	2.95		12.22
Lenor fabric softener	1 l	8.99	1.55		6.42

Explanation: ^a 1 euro = 4.1417 zlotys (average NBP exchange rate of 18 Aug. 2011); A – article/good; B – weight/amount; C – Słubice (Poland) price in zlotys; D – Frankfurt on the Oder (Germany); a – price in euros^a; b – price in zlotys

Source: Own compilation on the basis of a Słubice-Frankfurt/O. survey research, June-August 2011

packet of cigarettes cost €4.90, which, converted at an average NBP exchange rate of 18 August 2011 (€1 = 4.417 zlotys) gives the amount of 20.30 zlotys. Such a big difference in the price of cigarettes explains the presence of the German customer in Słubice.

Until recently, one of the goods mass-purchased by Polish customers in the frontier town of Frankfurt on the Oder was sugar. While at the end of 2010 its prices were comparable on the two sides of the border, at the start of 2011 the price in Poland soared to a record high of 6.00 zlotys per kg (March 2011) and held throughout the first quarter of the year. In April it began to drift down, to reach 4.63 zlotys in May, which was still 82% higher than in May the previous year (2). At that time in the neighbouring Frankfurt sugar cost – and still does – €0.65 (2.70 zlotys). This swelled the cross-border traffic of Polish consumers wanting to get this basic staple. The mass buy-out of sugar by Poles resulted in a limit being imposed on a purchase of this product – up to 5 kg at a time. Generally, limits are being imposed on those goods which are much in demand.

German consumers are attracted not only by Polish bazaars or supermarkets, but also by the Travel Free Shop located next to the border crossing (in the neighbourhood of Collegium Polonicum, a local branch of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), which is one of the two such shops established on the Polish-German border (the other is 30 km north of Słubice, in Kostrzyn on the Oder). This shop is mostly geared to the German customer, as shown by the fact that all the banners advertising it and encouraging shopping, as well as monthly newsletters listing current bargains, are offered exclusively in German.

Another factor controlling consumer behaviour, apart from prices, is the exchange rate of the euro. It was assumed that there was a dependence between the intensity of cross-border traffic and the exchange rate of the euro, viz. the higher the exchange rate, the more German customers do shopping in Słubice, while a lower exchange rate makes Poles more frequent customers in Frankfurt on the Oder. It should be kept in mind that Poland has kept its domestic currency, the zloty, whereas Germany has converted to the EU currency, or the euro (as

of 1 January 2002). In order to verify this assumption, an analysis was made at two levels of detail: (a) on the basis of annual data, and (b) on the basis of monthly data. When comparing the intensity of border traffic and the exchange rate of the euro at yearly intervals, no clear-cut dependence was observed, but the analysis of monthly data revealed there to be a relation. It turned out that it was only the Polish customer who responded to fluctuations in the euro, viz. the higher its exchange rate, the fewer Poles crossed the border to Germany, and vice versa. The German buyer, however, was indifferent to changes in the exchange rate because the service he bought on the Polish side was cheaper for him than at home anyway.

3.5. Demographic factors

When speaking of demographic factors, it is worth looking at such indices as the number of the urban population and the population's age structure, because they substantially affect the number and kinds of services offered in the borderland, and those in turn shape consumer behaviour in the split towns.

In the analysed years 1990–2009, one can note a significant drop in the population number in Frankfurt on the Oder, which is connected directly with the unification of Germany in 1990 (Table 3).

The phenomenon of urban shrinkage – known for more than a century as *Ostflucht* ('escape from the East') – is not new, but it has accelerated considerably after the unification of Germany. It largely concerns young and better educated people, who have moved to West Germany. At the same time, the total fertility rate has slumped since the mid-1980s and the society can be observed to be ageing. Forecasts predict a further drop in the population (in 2020 Frankfurt on the Oder is supposed to be inhabited by about 50,604 people). The decline in numbers will be accompanied by a shrinkage of the 0–26 age group, which in 2020 will account for 21% of the total number of residents, and an increase in the proportion of the oldest inhabitants (over 65 years) to 30% (3). Thus, the yearly dwindling of the population as well as a change in its age structure is going to affect the spatial behaviour of the inhabitants of the frontier towns.

Table 3. Changes in the population number in the split towns between 1990 and 2009

Year	Słubice-Frankfurt/O. frontier urban complex			
	A		B	
	a	b	a	b
1990	16,069	100.0	86,131	100.0
1991	16,222	101.0	85,357	99.1
1992	16,592	103.3	84,937	98.6
1993	16,832	104.7	83,850	97.4
1994	17,063	106.2	82,323	95.6
1995	17,285	107.6	80,807	93.8
1996	17,273	107.5	79,784	92.6
1997	17,476	108.8	77,891	90.4
1998	17,637	109.8	75,710	87.9
1999	17,268	107.5	73,832	85.7
2000	17,252	107.4	72,131	83.7
2001	17,308	107.7	70,308	81.6
2002	17,375	108.1	68,351	79.4
2003	17,571	109.3	67,014	77.8
2004	17,314	107.7	65,242	75.7
2005	17,265	107.4	63,748	74.0
2006	17,032	106.0	62,594	72.7
2007	16,818	104.7	61,969	71.9
2008	16,668	103.7	60,588	70.3
2009	16,497	102.7	60,625	70.4

Explanation: A – Słubice^a; B – Frankfurt on the Oder; ^a by actual place of residence; a – in absolute numbers; b – in% (1990 = 100)

Source: Own compilation on the basis of www.stat.gov.pl (accessed 8 Nov. 2010), www.statistik-berlin-brandenburg.de (15 Oct. 2010), Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, and http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Einwohnerentwicklung_von_Frankfurt_%28Oder%29 (15 Oct. 2011)

It was hypothesised that the oldest inhabitants would show little spatial mobility because of their age. However, the research demonstrated that both, older and younger people were ready to satisfy their demand for some services in Słubice (Table 4). It seems that what makes older people seek goods

and services on the Polish side is primarily a lot of free time on their hands as well as rather modest old-age or disability pensions. In turn, young people, often poorly educated or even unemployed, want to economise by availing themselves of the cheaper service offer on the Polish side.

Table 4. The age structure of buyers

A	B		C	
	a	b	a	b
17–19	25	8.5	21	7.7
20–29	76	25.8	53	19.6
30–39	87	29.5	51	18.8
40–49	74	25.1	71	26.2
50–59	20	6.8	37	13.7
60 and over	13	4.4	38	14.0

Explanation: A – age; B – Polish buyer in Frankfurt/O. (n = 295); C – German buyer in Słubice (n = 271); a – in absolute numbers; b – in%

Source: Own compilation on the basis of a Słubice-Frankfurt/O. survey research, November 2010



Fig. 3. The German-language information layout in Słubice

(a) at the crossing of Kościuszki Str. and Młodzieży Polskiej Avenue, Słubice

(b) near the border bridge on the Frankfurt side; the banner says in German and (in much smaller letters) in Polish: 'You are just crossing the price border'

Source: Kulczyńska (2011)

3.6. Psycho-social and cultural factors

Their source is national, language or cultural distinctness (Chojnicki, 1999) which not long ago used to be a significant barrier to establishing transborder contacts. Today, as demonstrated by a research conducted by Jańczak in Słubice and Frankfurt on the Oder (2009c: 166), cultural differences and prejudices play a very small role in transborder contacts, which shows, he claims, that 'on the one hand the two towns operate as separate urban, national and cultural systems, but on the other there is a great readiness for non-instrumental cooperation of specific milieux in which the troubled past is not perceived as a problem, and the opportunities offered by the integration are a direct motivating factor'.

Jańczak (2009a: 223; 2009c: 166) also draws attention to the scope of integration as measured by the quality and number of interpersonal contacts in the borderland. He believes that Frankfurt on the Oder and Słubice are two communities living independently of each other and only connected by interactions of a commercial nature, which is also corroborated by the present author's many observations. Non-commercial contacts are sporadic and limited to social or cultural ones.

The nature of transborder contacts also depends on the knowledge of the neighbour's language. As early as 1998 (cf. Kaczmarek, 1999), a good knowledge of German was declared by 22% of Słubice inhabitants, and a poor one (basic communicative skills) by as many as 69%. Today 25% Słubice residents polled declare a very good knowledge of German, and 50% – 'an ability to communicate' in this language (Jańczak, 2009a). This is certainly an asset facilitating communication between the two communities. Regrettably, the present author has no comparative information for Frankfurt on the Oder. Drawing only on a research by Kaczmarek (1999), one can state that the knowledge of Polish among its citizens is much poorer than of German among Słubice residents: a mere 1% of the inhabitants of Frankfurt on the Oder declared their knowledge of Polish to be good, and 24%, to be basic enough to communicate. The remaining 75% of those polled had no knowledge of the language of their neighbours. It might seem that the knowledge of the neighbour's language is an unquestioned

advantage facilitating communication between the two communities. Still, as the research shows, Frankfurt citizens see no need to learn Polish.

3.7. The role of information in moulding buyer behaviour

The town sends its recipients pieces of information using many forms and means, and in various codes. In order for it to operate, it must communicate with its users and convey messages to them that assist them in their daily movements in its space, especially public (Matykowski, Kulczyńska, 2008). Both in Słubice and Frankfurt on the Oder urban information is given a foreign-language layout which helps the neighbour from across the Oder to move around the town.

The perception of visual stimuli sent by the urban environment is made easier for foreigners when information is offered in their native tongue. There is an especially high saturation with German-language information in Słubice: it can be found in advertisements, posters or shop signs and notices, usually alongside names in Polish. However, there are also cases when, e.g., a shop sign displays information only in German and there is no name in Polish at all (cf. Fig. 3a and b).

The highest frequency of German-language names can be found in the area penetrated by Germans. Those are primarily the streets: Jedności Robotniczej, Kościuszki, Młodzieży Polskiej Avenue, and Wojska Polskiego. They offer all the major services, like petrol stations, marketplaces, eating places as well as groceries and industrial goods shops that are the chief destinations of the German cross-border traffic. However, Frankfurt on the Oder does not supply significant examples of an information layout in Polish.

4. Conclusion

A survey of factors shaping consumer behaviour in the frontier towns of Słubice and Frankfurt on the Oder reveals that they display a great diversity and have different spatial ranges of influence. It also helps to identify tendencies and regularities governing movements of the inhabitants. While there

Table 5. The influence of factors shaping the spatial behaviour of the inhabitants of the split towns

A	B	
	a	b
geographical location	++	++
border crossings	++	++
population number/age structure	+	+
prices of goods and services	++	+
number of service establishments	+	+
exchange rate of euro	-	++
function of border	++	++
customs regulations	++	++
German-language/Polish-language information layout of town	++	-
possibility to pay in euro/zlotys in neighbouring town	++	-
possibility to use German/Polish in neighbouring town	++	-
cultural distinctness	-	-

Explanation: A – Behaviour-shaping factors; B – strength of influence; a – Germans in Słubice (PL); b – Poles in Frankfurt on the Oder (G) '++' – great, '+' – little, '-' – none

Source: Own compilation

is a group of factors that control movements of the inhabitants of both towns, there are also some that shape the spatial behaviour of residents of only one of them (cf. Table 5).

A strong influence is certainly exerted by the price of goods and the exchange rate of the euro, which are decisive for the intensity of cross-border traffic. What seems to be a significant factor determining consumer behaviour in the borderland is also the foreign-language information layout readily visible in Słubice, which helps its neighbours from across the Oder to move around in urban space. Other factors facilitating communication when German consumers buy a service in Poland is the possibility of paying in euro and using their native tongue, because every Słubice merchant or dealer has mastered German in a degree allowing them to communicate with the buyer. Regrettably, it does not work the other way round. Thus, the German customer moving around in Słubice can avail himself of a reduced price offer for most products and services and may count on many advantages in purchasing services, while the Polish consumer is practically denied any help when buying services on the German side.

Notes

- (1) The Excise Duty Act of 6 December 2008 (Official Gazette No. 3/2009, position 11).
- (2) http://finanse.wp.pl/kat,9231,title,Cukier-wciaz-drogi,wid,13589843,wiadomosc_firma.html (accessed 21 August 2011).
- (3) A forecast of the Frankfurt/O. City Office.

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