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POLISH-GERMAN BOUNDARY ON THE EVE OF THE SCHENGEN AGREEMENT

Polish accession to the Schengen Agreement and abolition of border control within EU countries on 21st December 2007, is a good occasion to summarize the role of boundaries in the period directly preceding the revolutionary changes that took place on EU internal borders of Poland. In the paper author analyses one out of four land borders encompassed by the Schengen Agreement, namely the western border with Germany. Remaining sections of land borders, where abolition of border control took place at the same time, are: south-western border (with the Czech Republic), south-eastern border (with Slovakia) and north-eastern border (with Lithuania). Also, however to some extent only, the sea and airports border control was cancelled (only for cruises and flights to signatory countries of the Schengen Agreement).

The Polish border with Germany is 467 km long which represents 24,5% of land borders encompassed by the Schengen Agreement (1908 km).

Analysed borders begins at the junction of Polish, Czech and German borders in the Zittau Valley in the middle of the Lusatian Neisse River (Nysa Łużycka). From this point it runs northward almost entirely (89% of its length) along waters; at the beginning along the Nysa Łużycka River, and then along the Odra up to Gryfino. Only from this point towards north it runs on the left bank of the river and for 47 km it is a land border. Further it becomes again a water border while cutting the Stettiner Haff. The last fragment of this border (8 km) before reaching the Baltic Sea cuts the Isle of Usedom, whereas about half of its length runs along a drainage channel.

The Polish-German border is one of the least stable borders of Poland. It was created only in 1945 as a result of the Potsdam Agreement and it divided the historical regions of Pomerania, Brandenburg, Silesia and Saxony. Only

a short fragment (the Oder River near Cedynia) was the border of the Polish state between the 10th and 12th centuries (Labuda, 1974, p. 41–47).

The Polish border with the GDR was tightly controlled. As it runs along rivers it was simultaneously controlled by border guards on both river banks. Border crossings were few and there were no tourist border crossings. Just after its establishment in 1945 it was a border between Poland and the Soviet sector of occupied Germany. The post-border zone on Polish side remained under military administration for quite long time and it was meant for military colonization. As distinct from southern border with Czechoslovakia, on western border there was no cases of farms divided by the border border, therefore there was no small border movement.

The beginnings of transborder co-operation are connected with the establishment of the GDR and signing the border treaty with Poland together with border demarcation in 1951. However the anticommunist rises in the GDR in 1953 and Poznań in 1956 have broken this period of liberalization of the border regime.

In 1971 there were 17 border crossings on Poland-GDR border (5 road, 7 railway and 5 river) (Ptasiński, 1974, p. 268–269).

The fundamental breakthrough took place in 1972 when the visa and subsequently passport duty between Poland and the GDR was abolished. One could cross borders on the basis of national identification document. It resulted in 48-fold increase in entries from Poland to the GDR and 12-fold increase in entries from the GDR to Poland. On both sides of the border work offers for nationals from the neighbouring country have appeared (mainly however for Poles in the GDR). It resulted in numerous marriages between the citizens of both states. As Stanisław Ciok writes (2003, p. 138–139) the function of this border has evolved from “impenetrable”, strongly formalized and separating, to almost entirely “penetrable”, weakly formalized, and practically unnoticeable after 1972. However, after establishment of the “Solidarity”, the GDR have unitarily suspended all conveniences in the border regime.

Only the German unification in 1990, and border treaty concluded with Poland resulted in normalization of the border function (Ciok, 2004, p. 111). The new border checkpoints were open, including tourist and small border traffic checkpoints. However the substantial barrier in the form of border rivers without bridges on rather long sections, did not allow to obtain such a density of border passages as in the case of southern border.

On Polish-German border in 2007 there were only 40 border checkpoints, including 27 road, 8 railway and 5 river checkpoints. According to Andrzej

Stasiak (1996, p. 11), the most important border checkpoints on Polish-German border are: Kołbaskowo, Kostrzyn (the shortest connection with Berlin), Świecko (on the highway A-2 under construction, it concentrated 20% of the whole truck traffic from Poland), Zgorzelec (on the highway A-4 under construction) and Olszyna.

For the purpose of the analysis of transborder traffic the most important checkpoints have been chosen located on all fragments. The aim of the paper is to present a peculiar balance, which is the state from before the abolishing of border control, however author decided to analyse the border traffic for the year 2006, because the data for 2007 were incomplete. The reason for it was the acceleration of border control abolishment on the 21st December 2007, therefore the data did not cover the whole year¹.

On the Polish-German border there were in total 12 analysed border checkpoints including road passages (7): Zgorzelec, Jędrzychowice, Olszyna, Świecko, Kostrzyn, Kołbaskowo and Świnoujście and railway passages (5): Zgorzelec, Zasieki, Kunowice, Kostrzyn, Szczecin-Gumieńce.

The border traffic on different checkpoints varies greatly. The border road traffic on Polish-German border does not concentrate on one section only (Fig. 1). On the contrary, the growth of the border traffic is noticeable in central parts of three sections in the south (Jędrzychowice 11.27 million people) in the middle part (Świecko 12.50 million) and in the northern part (Kołbaskowo 6.40 million people), what is partly convergent with the Pan-European transport corridors: No. 1 Via Hanseatica Lübeck-St. Petersburg, no 2 East-West Berlin-Nizhny Novgorod and no 3 Brussels-Kiev. On the remaining analysed border checkpoints the border traffic was not significantly smaller (Olszyna 7.53 million, Kostrzyn 4.81 million, Świnoujście 4.16). The least intensive border road traffic on Polish-German border among analysed border crossing points was noted in Zgorzelec – 3.37 million.

The road cargo transport through the Polish-German border is concentrated most of all on the border crossing in Świecko, and to smaller extent in Kołbaskowo, Olszyna and Zgorzelec.

As to the passenger bus transport, the highest traffic volume is recorded in Jędrzychowice, Olszyna, Świecko and Kołbaskowo (Fig. 2).

¹ All statistic data used in the paper come from unpublished reports of National Border Service and were obtain through the Main Statistical Office in Warsaw.

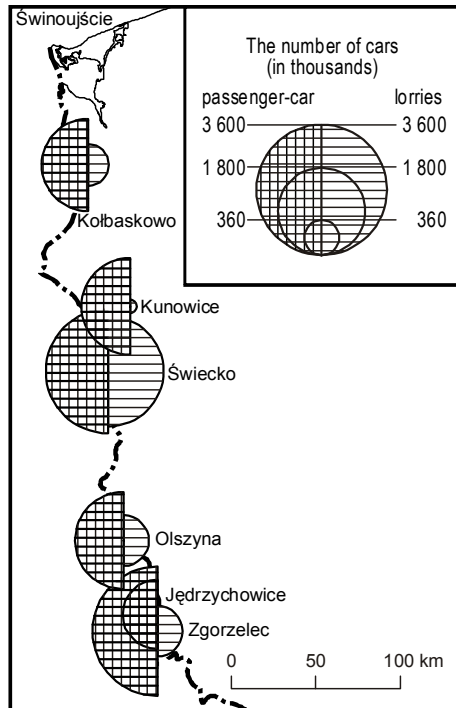


Fig. 1. The distribution of road border crossing points on the Polish-German border and the volume of passenger and goods border traffic
Source: Author's own elaboration

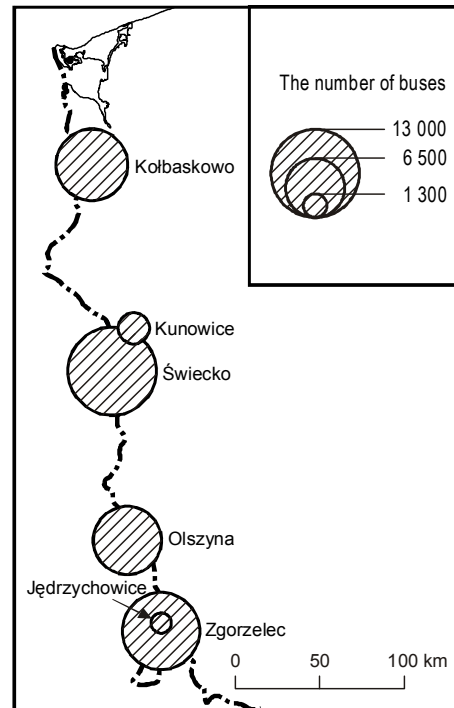


Fig. 2. The bus border traffic through road border crossing points on Polish-German border
Source: Author's own elaboration

Railway passenger traffic is concentrated at the border crossings in Kunowice (996 thousand people) and Kostrzyn (204 thousand), in Szczecin-Gumieńce in the north (258 thousand) and, much less, in Zgorzelec in the south (23 thousand) (Fig. 3).

As to the origin of people crossing the border, Poles usually choose four border checkpoints: Jędrzychowice, Olszyna, Świecko and Kołbaskowo (Fig. 4). Foreigners also mostly uses these four border crossings. The only difference was the large significance of border crossing point in Świnoujście, which is related with large tourist traffic of Germans visiting neighbouring health resorts on the Isle of Usedom (Fig. 5).

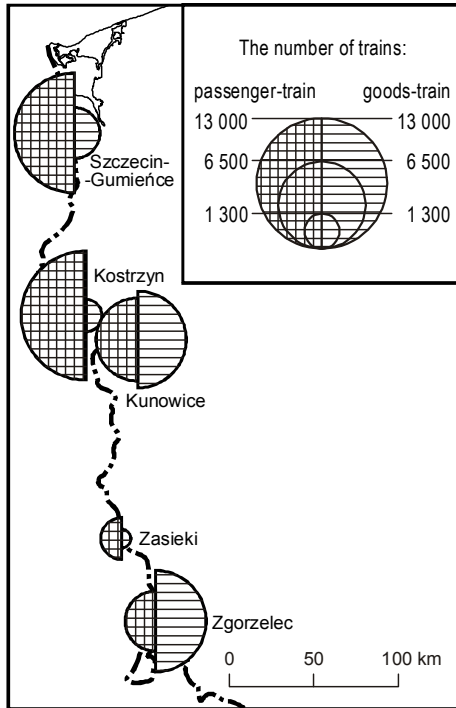


Fig. 3. Distribution of railway border crossing points on Polish-German border and the volume of the border passenger and goods traffic

Source: Author's own elaboration

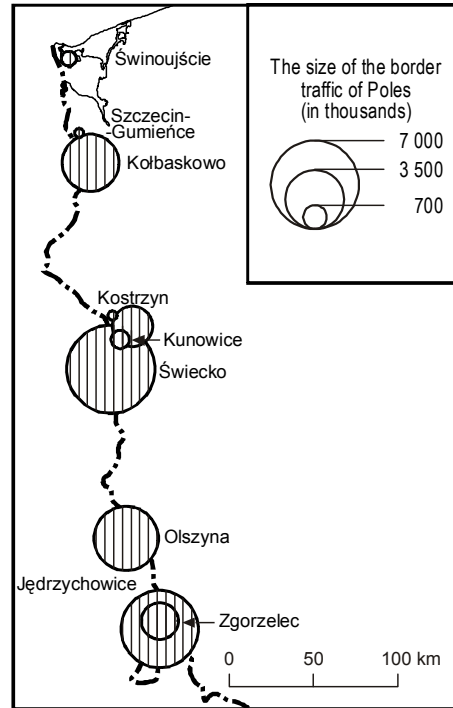


Fig. 4. The volume of the border traffic of citizens of Poland on the road and railway border crossing points on Polish-German border

Source: Author's own elaboration

Many Swedes and Danes use the border crossing in Kołbaskowo, whereas in Świnoujście the citizens of the two states represent approx. 25% foreigners. Citizens of Russia and Belarus choose almost exclusively the border crossing points in the central part of the border: in Świecko and Kostrzyn they represent approx. 60% of foreigners.

The smaller border traffic of citizens of these states is recorded in two southern border crossings: Jędrzychowice and Zgorzelec, while in the northern section it is not recorded at all. Ukrainians mostly cross the border in the southern section in Olszyna and Zgorzelec where they represent more than a half of foreigners, but they also use the many different border crossings in the north, including the railway passage in Szczecin-Gumieńce. Czechs usually use two southern border crossings in Olszyna and Jędrzychowice but their number there is not significant.

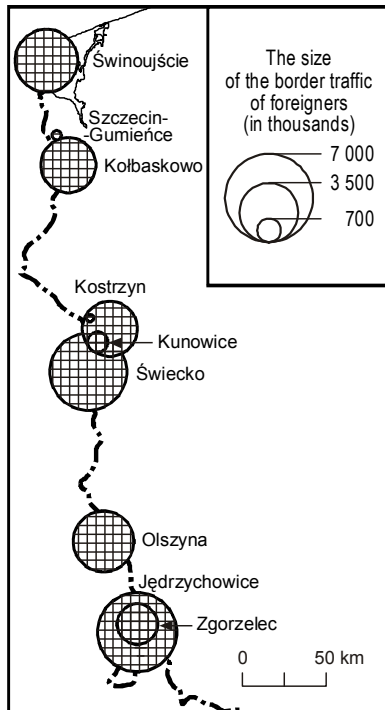


Fig. 5. The volume of the border traffic of foreigners on the road and railway border crossing points on Polish-German border
Source: Author's own elaboration

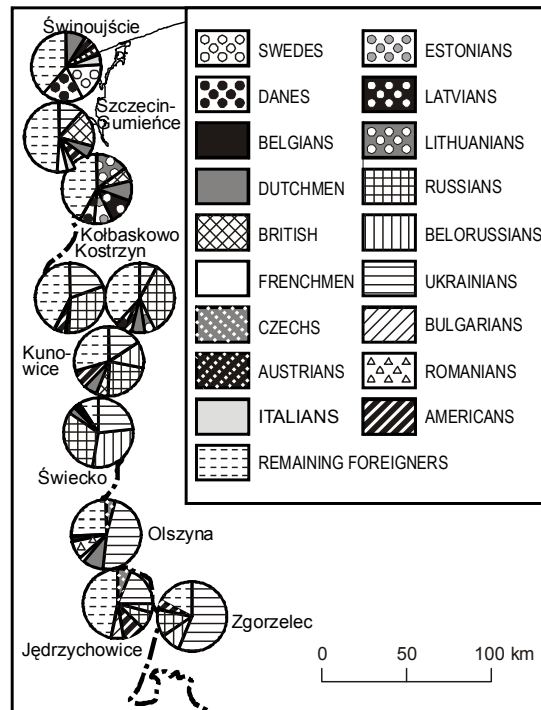


Fig. 6. Nationality of foreigners crossing the Polish-German border on the road and railway border crossing points
Source: Author's own elaboration

On the border with Germany Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians concentrate exclusively on the passage in Kołbaskowo, where together with British, Dutch and Danes they represent over a half of foreigners. Dutch use most of the border crossing points on the Polish-German border, however their intensive traffic can be clearly noticed at the passages in Świnoujście and Kołbaskowo in the north, Kostrzyn in the middle part of the border and Olszyna in the south, but also through all railway passages. Belgians and Romanians concentrate on the border crossing points in Olszyna, while Bulgarians and Moldavians in Jędrzychowice. Quite unexpectedly the largest traffic of Italians was noted in the north in Świnoujście and Szczecin-Gumieńce (railway). Possibly they use this route on the way to Scandinavia. Americans are noticed in the group of first 6 nations on almost all analysed border crossing points of the Polish-German border (except Kołbaskowo) most of all in Zgorzelec, Kostrzyn, Świnoujście and on all railway passages.

Whereas the presence of French-men was noted only on the railway border crossing points in Szczecin-Gumieńce (Fig. 6).

To analyse the nationality of people who cross both borders the typogram method (weight) was applied. The values on the right typogram's axes sum up to 100% of Poles using analysed border crossing points. Remaining axes include such elements as the volume of the border movement on the border crossing points (measured by the share in the total number of people crossing the border through analysed passages), the participation of the border crossing point in the total number of citizens of bordering state, and also the participation of the border crossing point in the total number of remaining foreigners who cross the border through the analysed border crossing points (Fig. 7). General conclusion following this analysis is a considerable diversity of traffic intensification on border crossing points and strong concentration of it in only few places. On Polish-German border the traffic is rather regularly distributed (Zgorzelec, Świecko). The second principal conclusion is a clear domination of citizens of both states divided by this border in almost all border crossing points. The only exception is the border crossing point in Świnoujście, where the number of Poles was insignificant.

The second typogram was used for means of transport analysis that cross the border (the proportional usage of buses, trains, cars and trucks was analysed) (Fig. 8). For this aim the railway border crossing points were analysed together with, usually accompanying them, road crossing points. Only one border crossing point are characterized by the substantial domination of the car and truck movement on the border with Germany – Świecko. The balance in the types of individual means of transport was noticed in the north of the border with Germany (Szczecin-Gumieńce and Kołbaskowo border passages) and in the south of this border in Zgorzelec.

Abolishment of the border control resulted in closure of border facilities. After the abolition of the border control and the extension of the customs control rights on the area of the whole country, there is no sense to keep border crossing points, especially while border crossing is possible at any point of the border.

On the other hand, in case of expected restoration, even temporary, of border control on Schengen borders (e.g. in the time of Euro 2012) border facilities may turn out useful again. On former border crossing points there are still some tourists services (sale of insurances and vignettes, money exchange points, petrol stations, car parks, restaurants). On some border crossings larger customs buildings are still in use.

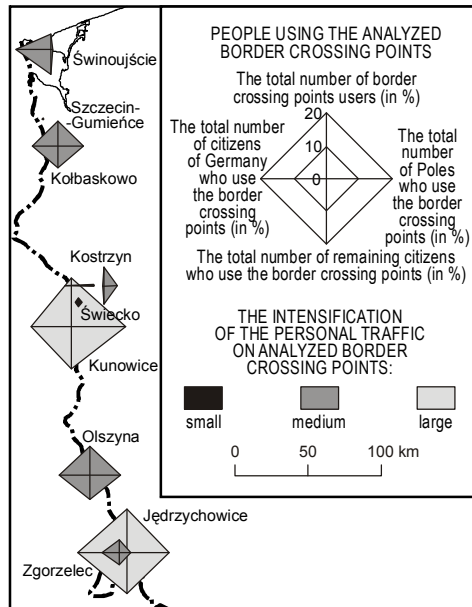


Fig. 7. Typogram of nationality of people crossing the border and its intensification on road and railway border crossing points on Polish-German border

Source: Author's own elaboration

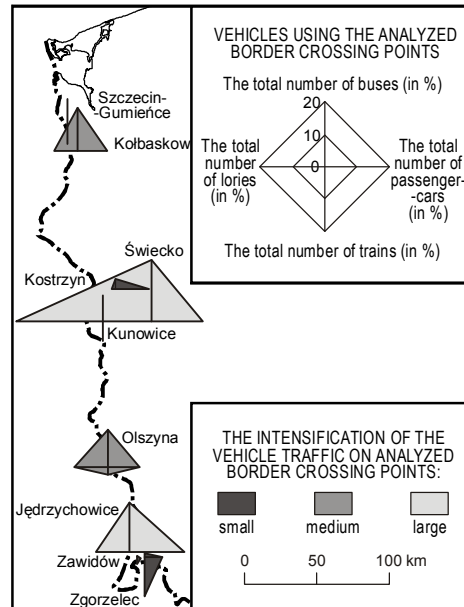


Fig. 8. Typograms of the structure of means of transport used in the border traffic on the border crossing points on Polish-German border

Source: Author's own elaboration

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