Exploring Subbordia – the impact of trans-border suburbanization on migration flows and connectivity at the Polish–German border. Szczecin and its German hinterland.

Authors: Martin Barthel (University of Eastern Finland) and Ewelina Barthel (Comparative Research Network Berlin)

PLEASE NOTE: WORKING DRAFT ONLY. PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE OR CIRCULATE

Introduction

When in 2015 the 25th anniversary of the creation of the EU’s Interreg program was celebrated, the “Öresund Metro” project was highlighted as a success story for “Connectivity” in a cross-border metropolitan area. The clean, fast and reliable link for transnational commuters between Copenhagen and Malmö represented the programme aims: bringing people and territories together by facilitating cross-border regional cooperation. (European Commission “25 Years of Interreg, retrieved 16th of April 2017)

The Örseund region is often referred to as role model for trans-national metropolitan areas with a bi-national and cross-border suburbanization. (Smas, Schmitt 2015:158, Schmidt 2005). The border faded in the everyday life and the number of daily commuters increased.

In January 2016, the Swedish government reintroduced border controls due to the raising numbers of refugees. The metro line was cut at the Copenhagen airport. Passengers are required to leave the train, cross the station building, passing the passport control to continue from another platform. Suddenly the commuting time increased by 30-60 minutes. The cross-border suburbia faced sudden dysconnectivity. While the Örseund Bridge was crossed by 12 Million rail passengers in 2014 (Öresundsbro Konsortiet 2015) and the border was perceived as an open gateway, the number of 168,000 refugees entering Sweden in 2015 caused a reply reminding, that borders are a symbol for national sovereignty.

1
The political Geographer Liam O’Dowd noted that borders have the function of symbols, containing different relevance and values for regional and national identity. (O’Dowd 2002:14)

In the Öresund region the narrative of securization of the border and dis-connectivity was emphasized from the national level, while the regional and European level favoured connectivity.

In the Öresund region the suburbanization processes increased in the last 15 years. Language, culture and socio-economic conditions are similar and the Scandinavian cooperation is well established. The European Union is striving with their cohesion policy for such integration of regions. Border regions, traditionally set in the periphery of the nation state, are encouraged to cooperate with their trans-national neighbors to facilitate their internal development potential. Creating connectivity across the border is perceived by the nation state as a softening of the border. A strive towards dis-connecting regions can be perceived from a regional perspective as hardening the border.

Parag Khanna recognize a strive towards a global renaissance based on connections, creating a kind of “Connectography” (Khanna 2016:xvi). Connectivity has replaced for Khanna spatial division as the new paradigm of global organization, where interactions replace national borders. It is for him a driver of a more complex world, challenging researchers to read beyond space. (Khanna 2016: xvii). Although connectivity set globalization as a new baseline it implies the importance of the local. (Khanna: 375)

The German-Polish border is often described as the “hardest” language, cultural and economic border in Europe. Nevertheless, in the metropolitan region of Szczecin specific suburbanization patterns appear. Polish citizens are pursuing houses in Germany due to lower real estate prices and commute daily to Poland to work. Those short daily migration processes provide a challenge and an opportunity for the borderscape.
This paper focuses on the less examined phenomena of high skilled workers moving abroad and commute back across the border to work in their home country. The paper will examine the impact of those processes on the border region in general and on the localities, specifically. The paper discusses the impact on the identity of the ‘subborderians’ and on the border communities. It will investigate the consequences for local narratives and the cohesive development of the Euroregion. The case studies of Löcknitz and Gartz are based on fieldwork combined with expert interviews and literature reviews, they are accompanied by interviews with local policy makers from Szczecin.

**Borderlanders perception of the border**

Since the dawn of political geography scholars underline the special role and functions border have for a state. In the 1920ies and 30ies the political geographers Haushofer and Ratzel identified borders as ‘organs’ which have to be kept ‘strong’ or ‘healthy’ in order to have a strong and healthy state. (Scott 2011:125)

Hence, borderlanders had to be kept loyal to the state, as influences of a neighboring state might question their loyalty, leading to challenging its borders. Those notions influenced scholars like Mackinder and are echoing in the works of Huntington, who replaced nations by cultures.

The approach favored the ethnic homogenisation of states, as it was prominently executed after the end of the 2nd World War, creating new challenges for the current border regions. (Eberhardt 2011:16)

The notion of the state as an organ, fighting its natural cause lost relevance in the time of increasing globalisation. Borders are nowadays understood as negotiated by social entities and result in a space of relations between two states. (van Houtum, Eker 2015: 46)

Reflecting on Castells spaces of flows, scholars like Martinez started to remap border regions. For Martinez, the functionality of border regions is depending on the openness and interaction
(connections) across the line. In his study on the US-Mexican border he detected that borderlanders have other experiences and different expectations of the status of the border and its openness than citizens in central regions. This might lead to a feeling of otherness and ‘left-behind’ encouraging the formation of a regional identity. The more the border is influencing the everyday reality, the feeling of otherness might turn into a sense of separateness – tipping the regional identity in the direction of a separate identity. (Martinez 1994: 12)

The solidity of the regional identity depends on the function of the border. Liam O’Dowd described borders as obstacles, bridges, filter, symbols and resources. The later two have significant impact on the connectivity of a border region – resulting in a higher or lower endogen regional development potential. Borders as symbols can prevent connectivity. Conflicts occur when the national symbolism is in competition with altering regional discourse. The border as a resource supports the connectivity across the divide. Locals are motivated to cross and interact – exploiting legal and illegal activities to make a living. The everyday interaction is lowering the symbolic value of the nation state, and raising the role of the border as a symbol for local identity. (O’Dowd 2002:27)

Scholars like Scott (2016) and van Houtum (van Houtum, Eker 2015) underlined the potential of borders for the development of border regions, accentuating the importance of examining local perspectives on the everyday practices of bordering and ordering.

Following this argumentation, border regions which have a high degree of connectivity benefit from positive border effects regarding their socio-economic development, while those having a tendency towards dis-connectivity suffer from negative border effects. Yet, the border and its function for both the national and local level determine cohesive regional development.

The German-Polish border – a hard case for connectivity?
“We’ share the same fate, grow rich together or get destitute together, while ‘they’ prey on our calamities and are hurt by our success. ‘We’ are supposed to assist each other, while ‘they’ lie in wait for our lapse. ‘we’ understand each other, feel the same feelings and think the same thoughts, while ‘they’ remain impenetrable, incomprehensible, sinister aliens. The frontiers of the ‘we-group’ (...) delineate the border of our intellectual security and provide the frame on which to hinge our loyalties, rights and duties.“ (Bauman 1999: 102)

German and Poles are more than thousand years’ neighbors, still the German–Polish border is usually referred to as the “Hardest” one in Europe. Thomas Lunden argued that factors, influencing boundary behavior are time, space, nature, technology, regulation, economy, language and culture. The factors determine the hard- or softness of a border. (Lunden 2004)

The rivers Oder and Neisse form a natural borderline between both states. The nowadays border is separating Germanic languages from Slavic. The Roman-Catholic Poland is bordering the Protestant/Atheistic part of Germany. The biggest EU economy is meeting an aspiring transition state, struggling to adapt. Time might have the most significant impact on the borderland.

First, the Second World War and the aftermath make Poles skeptical and carful towards its bigger neighbor. The Oder-Neiße line was not accepted by West Germany at all. In the re-unified Germany, it took until 1991 to guarantee the border. (Hinrichsen 2015: 498pp)

This skepticism had a big impact on local borderlanders and on the Polish national identity. Second the border region witnessed forceful population exchange. While the German population was send westward, across the border, the eastern side was repopulated with “re-settlers” from the former eastern territories, which Poland lost to the Soviet Union. The War lead to a literal breakdown of relations. The border region was alienated, since no personal or institutional relation across the border existed. (Besier 2012: 203)
Scholars like Neuwahl note that the reality at the EU borders is not itself a black-and-white description. There are various key dichotomies of borders in Europe: soft and hard borders as one prominent, but as well insiders and outsiders, internal and external policies, territorial confines and systemic openness. There are diverse opportunities and impacts on the border regions – especially on those in transformation due to the eastward enlargement of the EU. (Neuwahl 2005: 23pp)

Neuwahls dichotomies underline that bordering even at the German-Polish border is connected to inclusion and exclusion processes. The border might be perceived as “hard” – in her reading “hard” or “soft” is not a physical attribute as Lunden understand it. For her the process is based on interaction and identity building. They have impact on the borderlanders and influence their everyday life. Scholars like Parera (2007) or Brambilla (2015) coined the expression borderscape.

Brambilla summaries: “...the term borderscapes is linked to the urgency to find a new concept that can express the spatial and conceptual complexity of the border as a space that is not static but fluid and shifting; established and at the same time continuously traversed by a number of bodies, discourses, practices, and relationships that highlight endless definitions and shifts in definition between inside and outside, citizens and foreigners, hosts and guests across state, regional, racial, and other symbolic boundaries.” (Brambilla 2015: 19)

Borders become negotiable by those who use them. James Scott noted: “With everyday ‘bordering and ordering’ practices we create and recreate new social-cultural and economic divisions between states, nationally and in urban contexts. As such, it is the process of border-making which brings diverse types of borders within a single frame of analysis.” (Scott 2016:1).

Thus, the local perspective on everyday interactions across borders are more relevant than pure categories like culture, nature or language.

In context of the German-Polish border region the pure factor of the river as a natural border does not determine interaction, but how the river is used and perceived by the local
borderlanders. The linguistic border is not a line, Germans and Poles use the other language individually creating a specific linguistic landscape (Gorker 2006).

Even the narratives of history are differential negotiated on different parts of the border. Recalling the factors Lunden introduced, it would be easy to claim that the border region is dis-connected and the border is understood as a national Symbol, posing an obstacle for a cohesive development. As argued by Scott (2016), Khanna (2016) and Brambilla (2015) the local became more relevant since here the border is negotiated on an everyday basis. The negotiation result in othering and inclusion narratives, determining the connectivity and openness of the border and the mobility of the borderlanders.

**A metropolitan area on the rise – the area of the case study**

The research area encloses parts of East Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Northeast Brandenburg in Germany and the South-Western part of the Voivodship (province) Zachodniopomorskie in Poland. The core of the region is the city of Szczecin with 490,000 inhabitants (MIR 2014:69). The metropolitan area contains the functional interconnected area of Szczecin and the closest communities with around 617,000 inhabitants. The metropole subregion, as defined by the Ministry for Infrastructure, consist additionally of the Polish hinterland of the city up to Świnoujście at the mouth of the Oder river. The cross-border metropolitan region contains areas in Germany- the Landkreise (counties) Uckermark and Uecker-Randow with the towns Heringsdorf, Wolgast, Anklam, Pasewalk, Schwedt, Gartz and Löcknitz. The whole transborder metropolitan region is inhabited by more than 1,2 million people. (MIR 2914:69).

There is a clear economic gap on the border. Regarding EUROSTAT the GDP/head reached in Mecklenburg 2016 24.000€ and in Brandenburg 26.500€, while the GDP in
Zachodniopomorskie is with 9.500€ per head significant lower. (EUROSTAT, accessed April 16th 2017).

All border regions are nonetheless far below the average national GDPs – situating them in the economic periphery of their country.

Specifically the German regions suffer due to demographic changes and brain drain a population loss (2016: Uckermark -4,1%, Ueker-Randow -2,1%), while the Polish region because of demographic change and brain drain. The Polish area is experiencing due to the economic dynamics of Szczecin a population growth of +0,8 (in 2016). (EUROSTAT Statistical Yearbook 2016, accessed April 16th 2017)

The severe history of both nations has a straight impact on the border region. The interlinkage between regional and national discourses on the border will help to understand the attitudes towards the neighbors and toward the own state. As Martinez argued, gaps in the attitudes could be read as signs for a border identity, expressing a feeling of otherness or even separateness (Martinez 1994), or in the understanding of O’Dowd that the border is used as a national or regional symbol for identity building. The existing narratives can be understood as an indicator for cohesive or isolating tendencies across the border, favoring connectivity or disconnetivity.

The Oder-Neisse-Line – a German-Polish lieu de mémoire? National Discourses on the border.

The Oder-Neisse line is the current state border between Germany and Poland, which had been finally drawn during the Potsdam conference in August 1945. The new established western border of Poland put the former German territories under ‘Polish administration’ and resulted in the allocation of the German Population until 1946. (Hinrichsen 2015:497)
While Poland won new territories in the west, it lost huge parts of its former territory to the Soviet Union. As a result, Poles were expelled and resettled into the so called “new gained territories” (Stoklosa 2012:246).

The Polish national discourses in the 50ies to 70ies had been under the influence of the Soviet Union and therefore tabooed the lost territories in the east. The new border areas had been perceived as land of opportunity and a return to the Piast Polish tradition. Grezchnik (2017: 6) states: “...by promoting the idea of a nationally homogenous state within the ‘Piast’ or ‘ethnically Polish’ borders, it provided justification not only for the incorporation of the western and northern territories and resettlement of Germans and Poles, but also for the annexation of the Kresy by the USSR.”

Grezchnik summaries that the national discourses were focused to increase the German-Polish antagonism, while reducing the Russian-Polish. The resulting ethnical homogenization is the source for the nowadays perceived hard divide. (Grezchnik 2017: 7p)

West- and East Germany did not recognize the border and assumed the territories as temporary under Polish administration. However, the GDR signed in July 1950 the Görlitz Treatment with Poland, where the Oder-Neiße Line was declared as ‘untouchable Peace and Friendship border’ between both states. (Hinrichsen 2015:499). The border remained closed with a strong visa regime and a tabooed past. Poland declared the GDR as anti-fascistic, concentrating the German-Polish antagonism towards the Federal Republic. (Grzechnik 2017: 16)

In West Germany, the border soon became associated with defection and repulsion. Consequently, the Federal Republic did not recognize the border and continued to claim the pre-1937 territories – which was backed by the popular opinion. In 1965 still 28% of the West Germans believed, that the Eastern Territories would eventually return to Germany. (Hinrichsen 2015:499)

The relations started to unwind in the 1970s, after the West German discourse changed and the majority of the population started to accept the Oder-Neiße as final border. Willy Brandt de-
facto accepted the border by signing the Warsaw contracts and after signing the ‘Ost-Verträge’ in 1972, the border slowly vanished from the West German discourses. (Hinrichsen 2015:503)

Poland and the GDR agreed in the same year on visa-free travel between both states, opening the border wide. For the first time people, could freely cross the rivers – exploiting either the variety of goods in the GDR or the access to western media and music in Poland. The discourses on the neighbors did change with the rise of the Solidarność movement in the beginning of the 1980s. When the war state was declared in Poland in 1980, the border became sealed again. The East German media declared the closed border as a protection of ‘socialist achievements’, while Jaruselski started to re-heat the Polish-West-German antagonism, seeing Poland’s border and territorial integrity under the threat of Bonn. (Hinrichsen 2015: 504pp)

The Oder-Neisse-Border became for Poland a crucial national symbol, connected to fear of the Western neighbor. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the German reunification the Polish government urged internationally the recognition of the border. In Germany’s political discourses, the border was already accepted as final and had low priority on the political agenda – creating a gap of narratives, which further worried the Polish public. When in November 1990 the border agreement was signed, the border was not just recognized but stopped to be legitimizing the lost territories to the Soviet Union – freeing it from taboos and political supercharging. (Hinrichsen 2015:511)

The border became a ‘normal border’, despite forming the EU’s outer border with a serious socio-economic gap. (Hinrichsen 2015:514)

The national discourses focused on cooperation and partnership. Germany included Poland with the Weimar triangle into their special relation with France, declaring the close cooperation as motor for European Integration. The interaction across the border increased, especially after Poland joined the European Union in 2004 and Schengen in 2007. (Stoklosa 2012: 26)

Nowadays the border has no specific role in national discourses in both countries, yet the border is a memorial place in the understanding of Pierre Nora (1997:14) for both nations, constituting
a part of the collective memory and identity. Thus, the national discourses on the border point rather towards openness and connectivity, than a hard division. However, as stated by Martinez, the border can have a different symbolism for the nation state and the border region and the border landers. Yet, it is important to analyse the construction of the local discourses in the research area.

**From ‘Straz nad Odra’ to ‘Szczettinstan’ – local discourses on the border**

In the first weeks after the second world war the city of Szczecin witnessed a dualism. The German city administration was in charge for organizing the daily life and German refugees where send back to the city, while at the same time the first Polish institutions were established. (Aischmann 2012: 11) The status of the city remained unclear until the beginning of 1946, when the city and its close suburbs had been incorporated into Poland, resulting in the expulsion of the remaining Germans. Polish discourses narrated the border as the first line of defense against a potentially aggressive Germany. The propaganda coined the term “Straz nad Odra” (Guard at the Oder) – while local Polish newspapers pictured the areas west of the border as threatening, violent and lawless places, dangerous for polish citizens (Aischmann 2012: 19)

The image of the ‘Won new territories’ were in contrast connected to opportunity and adventure, while the first settlers perceived themselves as pioneers. (Musekamp 2013:97pp)

Although the Polish population perceived the border as justified and deserved, there was a connotation of fear, insecurity and provisionalism connected to the anticipated anxiety of the return of the Germans. (Hinrichsen 2015:510) This notion hindered any kind of regional identity building. It was not until the 1970s before the local population felt stability and started to settle as well mentally. (Kinder, Roos 2013:4)

The atmosphere was accompanied by the Polish government, which despite of the propaganda, securized the region. In 1946 up to 12% of the population consisted out of military personnel
and their families (Hinrichsen 2015:511). Combined with few investments by the central planners and the repatriation of infrastructure and whole building in order to rebuild Warsaw and Central Poland, the government unintentionally supported the atmosphere of temporariness and a feeling of being left-behind (Balogh 2014:29, Musekamp XXXX:XX).

The feeling of temporariness dominated also the German side of the border. Most re-settlers from Szczecin stayed in close proximity to the border, waiting for their return. For the local population, just like for the official administration and local media, it was clear that Szczecin is and will remain a part of Germany. (Aischmann 2012: 26)

The Görlitz Treatement, in which the GDR official recognized the border, changed the perceptions on the border just slightly. The border remained closed and no local interaction across the border took place. While in the GDR re-settlers hoped for a revision, the local media narrated the Oder as an untouchable border between two socialist brother states, securing peace and prosperity for both. (Aischmann 2012: 50)

The coverage was mirrored by the Polish media, declaring the GDR as the anti-fascist Germany. With the agreement, the border became temporarily opened for common peace and friendship festivals, enabling organized cross-border encounters and a limited amount of communal cooperation (for example in gas and water supply). (Hinrichsen 2015: 511)

The abolishing of the visa regime for trips between Poland and the GDR in 1972 was recognized on both sides as a breeze of fresh air, which enabled for the first time visits at the neighbor. The official media concentrated on the symbolic gesture – talking about the spirit of Peace and Friendship between two socialist societies.

On the personal level the Poles used the new freedom for shopping. They purchased in the GDR border regions goods which had been not or seldom available in Poland. Consequently, the Germans started to perceive the Poles as competitor on the limited number of products, available in a command economy system. The situation lead to interventions from Erich
Honecker at his Polish counterpart to discuss measures to prevent shopping tourism. (Aischmann 2012: 129)

However, the amount of cooperation agreements between companies, party sections, cultural and educational institutions increased, resulting in a more pragmatic view on each other. While the Poles perceived the economic situation in the GDR as positive, the Germans appreciated the relative freedom in Poland. The local German authorities observed this attraction rather suspicious and after the border was closed in 1980, worked openly with anti-Polish resentments, condemning Solidarnosc as paid agent of the capitalistic West. The interactions came to a hold and the alienation continued until 1989. In the wake of the German reunification, the respond in the border area was two folded – while the Poles felt that the status of the border became insecure, local authorities realized the chances, neighboring a strong economy in the European Community. (Hinrichsen 2015: 511p)

The Germans where rather aware of the wealth gap and became afraid of border related crime and corruption – which has in their perception of the Eastern neighbor until today an exaggerated impact on local level. (Beurskens, Creutziger, Miggelbrink 2016:182)

The regime change in both countries brought a period of renegotiating the neighborhood. Poles started to work in Germany, while Germans went to Poland buying cigarettes, petrol and alcohol. The open border enabled further on the elimination of taboos. The citizens of Szczecin started to discover the German heritage of the city, enabling a stream of novels and literature on the topic contributing to a new regional identity where the memory of the German grandparents’ generation started to be preserved by a Polish grandchildren generation. (Musekamp 2013: 357pp).

The German population used the border in the frame of the so called ‘Heimwehtourismus’, a sentimental form of tourism towards the personal family heritage places, to discover their roots and reflecting the shared experience of re-placement with the Polish counter parts. (Marszolek 2014: 71)
Although negative resentment and attacks of German Nazis on Poles regularly fired heat in the local media, the broad discourse went in favor of cooperation. In this period Szczecin was striving towards defining its orientation. Balogh wrote that the city started at the beginning of the Nineties to concentrate on the Baltic space, before it turned more recently towards the traditional connections towards Berlin. (Balogh 2015: 183)

The 1995 established Euroregion Pomerania, consisting out of the border region of Germany, Poland and Sweden, provided a superb ground for institutionalized cooperation. With the accession of Poland to the EU in 2004 and the Schengen acquis in 2007, the border started to fade in the everyday life. For Szczecin, the question of its own development became crucial. In Szczecin’s traditional western hinterland, the communities in Germany started to realize the positive metropolitan effects coming from the neighboring city.

Due to the raising housing prices in Szczecin and the good connection towards the town, a new transnational cohabitation area occurred on the German side. Poles moved in empty houses and apartments in German towns like Löcknitz, Pasewalk or Gartz, commuting daily towards work in Poland. The new dwellers had been positive received by the communes, who had been faced in an economic backward area with scenarios of shrinking and decline, providing the German part of the border region with a thrive of dynamic and development. (Lis 2013: 144; Barthel 2010)

Bürkner describes the Löcknitz/Szczecin region as an example of a surprising turn in regional socio-economic imbalances after 2005. From the mid-1990s until the eve of Poland’s accession in 2004, the German and Polish parts of the border region experienced a diverging economic and social development. On the German side, hopes for economic upswing were kept up for a long time. This rural area had hardly any perspective because of massive de-economisation, poor investment and lacking entrepreneurial initiative. While political and everyday feelings of superiority over Poland prevailed until the beginning of the millennium, by 2004, a feeling of helplessness and fatalism spread among locals. On the other side of the border, the Polish way
of transformation, initiated by small-scale privatization and the expansion of micro-economic activities, experienced a subsequent population growth, which resulted in housing shortage and infrastructural deficiencies. Political and everyday attitudes displayed pragmatism and optimism. The reverse development manifest by the respective structure of the housing market. On the German side rising housing vacancies, on the Polish side a massive demand, resulting in cross-border commuter settlements bringing new neighbours representing a different everyday culture: agile, optimistic, curious, communicative, self-assured, expecting further social advancement and having more purchasing power than their German neighbours. For Bürkner this development represents an unplanned, almost clandestine type of bottom-up Europeanisation. (Bürkner 2015:30pp)

This process is increased by cross-border investments. While at the beginning German companies invested in Poland, the proximity to Szczecin and the good road infrastructure attracted investments from Poland in the border region. Kinder et al. described the rise of the migrant economy in the border town Löcknitz, but as well bigger companies like the auto parts manufacture Boryszew opened a new factory in Prenzlau with more than 350 work places. (Kinder, Lis et. Al. 2014, Nordkurier 2017) In the understanding of Bürkner, the narrative of the poor Poles is challenged, leading to a re-imagining of the neighborhood. Still, as Kinder and Roos put it, the public exchange of opinions and information across the border is limited. Although foundations and NGOs created a certain amount of bilingual magazines and fora, they gain hardly impact outside certain groups. Their contribution towards a common trust or sense of belonging is behind its potential. Local elites stated that the thesis that the borders in the heads will disappear automatically over the time, just as it did at other EU borders is still valid. (Kinder, Roos 2013:4).

The border area is turned into a laboratory where the locals test new forms of European identity. Lis claimed that the cross-border area will be turned into a laboratory for everyday life,
language, education, work and leisure – providing a space of ideas of how Poles and Germans can develop the region together. (Lis 2014: 10-11).

The local discourses in the border regions had been slightly different to the national ones, reflecting the proximity of the border and the consequences on the everyday life of the citizens. All in all, the border is providing a degree of connectivity – regarding the physical character, the mobility or economic activities – and dis-connectivity – especially regarding culture and language. A new regional identity named Szczettinstan is promoted by local artists and activists. It must be proven if such a bi-lingual and bi-national regional idea might have an actual chance. (Kinder, Roos 2013: 3pp)

**Szczecin as a motor of trans-regional connectivity – milestones of trans-border mobility in the region**

Lis idea of the border region as a laboratory of ideas and as a common space of cohabitation, is promoting a tendency towards connectivity – but connectivity requires connections and mobility. In consequence, it is important to analysis the institutionalized cooperation in the region and if they are enabling mobility.

Alas Szczecin was already integrated in the Euroregion Pomerania and various cross-border projects in the frame of the EU Interreg-Programme had been deployed, it can be stated that the access to the Schengen area in 2007 opened the border physically and mentally for locals. (Balogh 2014: 17)

The open border connected Szczecin not just with a lost hinterland, but also with new areas for suburbanization processes across the border. While the city witnessed an economic boom, housing in the city and its eastern suburbs became expensive, leaving no space for the young middle class. The areas in the west of Szczecin are good connected with the city. A highway is connecting Szczecin with Berlin – two train lines offer two-hourly services from and to
Szczecin. However, the German areas could not benefit from the metropolitan effects. (Bürkner 2016: 33)

The German regional plans even failed until 2015 to recognize the suburban potential of the area. Instead the region had the status of a rural, under developing, shrinking region, with almost no development potential. In contrast the suburban towns became attractive for the Polish middle class. The pull factors are beside the cheaper housing costs, the good infrastructure, the existence of German-Polish institutions, like the German-Polish Gymnasium in Löcknitz or the kindergarten in Gartz, higher living standard and standard of services, and the positive attitude of local institutions. The Löcknitz Housing company started already in 2007 to provide services in Polish, the community of Gartz is intensely seeking Polish inhabitants or businesses. The motivation of the German communes is not just to gain new inhabitants or generating higher tax venue, but most importantly to secure their infrastructure. (Bürkner 2016: 33p)

The new dynamics soon raised the question how those processes can be integrated in spatial planning. The German side faced ignorance, while the Polish communes where confronted with resistance from the Polish planning authorities. Thus, the cooperation was in the beginning mainly initiated through personal contacts and funded by first cross-border funds and programs of the EU. Those networks depended on individuals, providing a limited degree of sustainability. A first step to institutionalize the cross-border cooperation was done through the establishment of the Euroregion. While the Euroregion was a perfect body to intensify the cross-border cooperation in general, it was too big by size and small by capacity to tackle the problems of an emerging trans-border urban area. (Balogh 2014: 30p)

With the revision of the national planning policies and the urge to create metropolitan regions in the frame of the European spatial planning, Szczecin went ahead and initiated together with its Polish neighbor communes the Association of the Szczecin Metropolitan Area (Stowarzyszenie Szczecinskiego Obszaru Metropolitarnego) in 2009 (Malachowski 2013:203).
With the German communes missing, the Association concentrated primarily on the development of public transport but included the aim to rebuild transport connection across the border to Germany (Malachowski 2013:210).

The degree of interaction was too less for the German communes. Some towns like Gartz tried to become associated members of the association. The German-Polish development concept for the trans-border metropolitan region Szczecin brought together the regional planning authorities from Germany (the Länder Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Brandenburg) with those from Poland (the Voivodeship and the city and powiat of Szczecin). The cooperative approach is underlying the cohesive, connectivity oriented integration of the transborder region. Sagan states the strong central city versus surrounding areas relationship would lower the chance for cohesion. She states: “However, this type of metropolitan region appears to be less favourable for cohesive regional development. The threat of separation of the strong urban centre and the functionally linked system of the lower tier cites from the rest of the region’s territory is quite high.” (Sagan 2014: 318)

The communes in the Szczecin area started to reply to the new subbordia by creating common strategies towards the spatial integration of the region. (MIR 2014: 141)

The term ‘Subbordia’ combines the words suburbia and border. We use the term to describe transnational cross-border migration and commuting, centered on an urban core in the neighboring country. Inhabitants live on the one side, where their families are based, and their children visit schools and kindergartens – while at the same time the earners commute for working, shopping and cultural events to the center across the border. Those groups form a new transnational space of cohabitation, where crossing the border becomes a daily routine and the connectivity a necessity.

In the case study area those activities are almost exclusively performed by Poles. (Janczak 2017:53).
Löcknitz and Gartz – living in subbordia – two cases of connected transnational places.

The transnational migration in suburban context was enabled by the de-bordering processes of the Europeanisation. The cohesive policies of the European Union stimulated new flows in the remote border region, helping towns like Löcknitz and Gartz to gain a new development perspective. (Janczak 2017:55)

The most researched town in the German subbordia of Szczecin is Löcknitz. The town is 25 kilometers away from the city center, situated in the east of the state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. It has a direct road connection and has two-hourly direct train and bus connection, making the town ideal for commuters. In 2016 the town had 3200 inhabitants, of which roughly 700 are Poles. The demographic is remarkable, since it is one of the few spots in Northeast Germany, which has a population growth. (Janczak 2017:54)

The town attracted Poles mainly due to two drivers – first the town has already since 1995 a German-Polish Gymnasium (High School) which was turned in 2002 into a Europaschule. Secondly the Löcknitz Housing administration started early to promote flats in the otherwise empty socialist apartment blocks to Poles. The company made advertisement in Szczecin and hired Polish speaking staff. Consequently, Poles became aware of the affordable housing and started moving to Löcknitz. In 2011 the town opened in cooperation with the Polish neighbor town Police a bilingual kindergarten for 270 children.

The town is offering a couple of bilingual services and companies like banks, real estate agencies but as well shops start to advertise bilingual. Underlying the commitment of the town to connectivity is the establishment of the Euroregion Pomerania Secretary in Löcknitz.

The town has the longest established Polish migrant community in the region and the administration is realizing the influx of new inhabitants and the proximity to Szczecin as an advantage. Due to the solid public transport connection and the availability of flats, the
migration to Löcknitz is not just comprising the upper middle class, but as well lower middle class and workers. (Janczak 2017:54)

Next to commuting the number of Polish investments is increasing. A study from 2012 stated that Poles mostly opened small and medium sized businesses, in the trade and construction sector. In 2012 the study counted more than 100 Polish enterprises in the town of Löcknitz. The decision to start businesses in the border region is mostly influenced by the proximity to Szczecin. (Kinder, Lis et al. 2014: 10)

Kinder, Lis et al. quote: “According to the mayor of a border town, Poles are more flexible than Germans and fill particular market niches faster. About 30% of Polish companies often make changes, like the transfer of business to another location or adjustments to the market. They are aware of the competitiveness of the local economy and provide services in industries that are often not of interest to Germans. Poles are also more willing to learn the German language and work in the afternoons, evenings and at weekends, which could be one of the reasons why the majority of Polish companies operating in the region usually employ Polish workers.” (Kinder, Lis et al. 2014:11)

It can be summarized that the new suburban migrants integrate into the German border region society, alas the local Germans benefit indirectly from the new inhabitants, but they do not share the same social space.

However, the vacancy and availability of cheap apartments is slowly ending, regarding Janczak (2017:56) the vacancy dropped due to Polish migrants from 12% to 1%, and the town is now in competition on attracting the Polish middleclass. As the local administration took the influx as self-evident and granted, the town concentrated on their own advantage instead of committing towards the metropolisation process, which is slowly backfiring. As well not all citizens are in favor of the new migration – the extreme right NPD won 13,9% of the votes at the last local election, representing one of the highest voting results in all of Germany (Balogh 2013:199).
Janczak states: “The creation of this new multicultural community is not smooth; problems result, among others, when some of the Polish inhabitants treat the German border towns as a suburb of Szczecin, having most of their everyday life activities on the Polish side. This results in social alienation and limited contact with the local German population.” (Janczak 2017: 56)

The rather reverse case is Gartz, situated in the North-East of the state of Brandenburg. The town is situated 35 kilometers from central Szczecin. Unlike Löcknitz, it is not connected by public transport but has good road connection. The town had 2016 roughly 2500 inhabitants, from which 250 are Poles. Since the town consist mostly of family houses, the town attracts the Polish upper middle class. The local government embraced the metropolisation process as an opportunity for Gartz. The influx of new inhabitants stabilized the population and secured crucial infrastructure, like kindergarten and school. Due to the process, the town was not yet incorporated with the neighboring communities and could secure their status as self-governing local body. (Tautz 2014:63)

Though, the town is lacking institutions and bilingual services to support and attract the Polish newcomers. The missing public transport connection might be a threat for the town, when young Polish families become older. In 2011 20% of the children in the German-Polish kindergarten had been Polish (Janczak 2017:56)

Though the increasing engagement of Poles in local associations hints a growing identification with the subbordian town. Nonetheless, the strive to integrate the community into the trans-national metropolitan region is created by individual actors – in the case of Gartz the major.

The perception of the new suburban reality is depending on the individual support of the German institutions and how the de-bordering processes are translated into local narratives. While in Gartz the influx is understood as the last straw and an unforeseen opportunity, the perception in Löcknitz is more mixed. Here the nationalistic circles try to play the card of
national belonging and the fear of foreign takeover or so called ‘Polonization’, even though local companies and social institutions already accepted the new reality and the local administration is aware of the development potential. (FAZ: NPD-Hochburg Löcknitz. Brücken ohne Enden. Accessed April 16th 2017)

Still, the national symbolic of the border is preventing the town to commit fully to the trans-border metropolitan region and accept the fact that it is already a functional subbordian suburb of Szczecin.

**Conclusion – towards a transnational metropolitan area**

As stated at the beginning of the paper, the German-Polish border is described as a hard, dis-connected border with rather alienated relations. The case study of Löcknitz proved, that this notion is for certain milieus a reality, even so both the bottom-up and the top-down approaches rather validate the emergence of a new transnational space. Alas, utopian concepts like Szczettinstan are still idealized visions, the border region started to developed a common perspective. The regional narratives on both sides are heading towards cooperation and connectivity - differing, especially on the Polish side, significant from current national discourses favoring isolation. This leaves the borderlanders with a notion of otherness (Opilowska 2014:32).

As Kimura (2015:84) elaborated, there is a significant language barrier, limiting cooperation beyond its potential. Though, the linguistic landscape of the German and Polish border towns is changing. Polish and German is spotted on billboards, road signs and shops, creating a landscape of multilingualism.

It is obvious that the open border is providing a resource for regional developments, leading to a more cohesive improvement of the peripheral region – partly in turning the periphery into a trans-national metropolitan region. It is noteworthy, that the metropolitan region is developed
in cooperation between the surrounding area (in Germany and Poland) and the core city, as otherwise the cohesive development would be on stake.(Sagan 2014: 318).

The notion of connectivity is supported by trans-border migration of the Polish population, living a suburban lifestyle in another country, which is challenging the cultural differences on local level and leading to a new form of not yet defined identity – an identity where the border is the crucial everyday determinant. The hard border is significantly softened by the ‘in-between spacers’, who are not constrained by borders, or as van Houtum and Eker (2015:44) called them: ‘Grenzgänger’.

While the connectivity in the everyday life is determining the personal experiences of the Grenzgänger, the communes are striving a bottom-up process to create a common trans-border metropolitan region, forming a kind of institutional Grenzgänger. This process faced long time either ignorance (from the German planning institutions) to resistance from national policies on the Polish side. After all, the feeling of being left-behind drove the region rather together.

It must be noted that the degree of commitment is depending on individual actors. Alas, since the region is now officially recognized by national planning institutions is already over the point where the policy could be easily reversed.

The paper underlined the necessity of paying attention to local everyday bordering and de-bordering processes. While national policies are favoring dis-connectivity and national solutions, border regions like the Szczecin metropolitan region highlight the positive role of open borders on regional cohesion and even more on revitalizing the common European idea by a Europeanisation from below.