

CROSS-BORDER DIMENSION OF (UN)SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN BORDER REGIONS

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Abstract

Several attractive tourist regions in the Czech Republic are located in border areas, making them accessible to visitors from the other side. Although the Czech Republic has been a member of the Schengen area since 2007 and border controls have since been abolished, the border is still present, for example, in non-connected public transport, insufficient cross-border infrastructure, or in tourists' preferences for accommodation. These factors contribute to unsustainable forms of tourism in border areas, manifested by large numbers of day visitors arriving by private cars.

The paper analyzes the topic of the Czech-Polish border, using semi-structured interviews with tourism actors (cities and municipalities, entrepreneurs, and NGOs). The results show that after 1945, the Czech-Polish border was re-bordered for political reasons, and cross-border contacts also suffered due to population exchanges on both sides. A strong border effect is still present, which may lead to overtourism in some famous places without adequate financial benefits for the affected destinations. The paper concludes by presenting recommendations on how to mitigate the border effect in tourism and thus contribute to the sustainability of tourism in the region.

Keywords: Destination management, nature protection, cross-border tourism, border effect, Czech-Polish border.

Introduction

The presence of efficient cross-border public transport is crucial for the sustainability of tourism in border areas. Cross-border transport infrastructure facilitates the movement of tourists between neighboring regions, enhances territorial integration, and promotes tourism development (Medeiros, 2019). A lack of cross-border transport can limit spatial interaction, hinder the growth of border regions, and create barrier effects that restrict tourism flows and infrastructure development (Jacobs-Crisioni & Koomen, 2017; Ramadani et al., 2020). Political instability in neighboring countries can further impede tourism entrepreneurship and activities reliant on border access (Anisiewicz, 2021).

The absence of efficient cross-border public transport poses challenges for establishing sustainable tourism development. It can hinder cross-border cooperation, stakeholder engagement, and the implementation of sustainable tourism practices (Paunović & Jovanović, 2017; Jelinčić et al., 2019). Additionally, the lack of cross-border transport can create obstacles inhibiting tourism development, especially when national interests conflict with the mutual benefits of cross-border cooperation at the regional level (Ioannides et al., 2006). This lack of cooperation can impede the successful development of tourism products, economic activities, and governance structures in cross-border destinations (Stoffelen, 2018). Addressing the inadequacy of cross-border public transport is essential for fostering tourism development, economic growth, and regional integration in border regions by improving transport infrastructure, enhancing cross-border cooperation, and promoting sustainable tourism practices.

An exemplar of a border delineating the conspicuous impact of insufficient cross-border public transportation on the sustainability of tourism within border regions is the boundary separating the Czech Republic and Poland. Historically, the majority of this border, save for Těšín/Cieszyn Silesia, demarcated the frontier between the Czechoslovak state and Germany, fostering robust cross-border interactions amidst a predominantly German-speaking populace on both sides. However, following the upheavals of the Second World War, ethnic Germans were displaced, and the borderlands were resettled by inhabitants from Czechoslovakia and Poland, hailing from disparate regions and lacking local affiliations. Consequently, a phenomenon known as re-

bordering unfolded in the Czech-Polish border vicinity, artificially intensifying the border's impact and disrupting the flow of cross-border activities.

Re-bordering is the process of redefining and reinforcing boundaries and borders between regions or countries, often in response to changing geopolitical situations, economic conditions, or social factors. This phenomenon can be observed in the restructuring of cross-border relations, the establishment of new regulations or policies governing border areas, and the reinforcement of border controls or restrictions (Jańczak, 2019). Re-bordering can impact cross-border cooperation initiatives by influencing the dynamics of collaboration, altering the perception of borders as barriers or facilitators, and shaping the development of shared resources and infrastructure along borders (Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2022). The concept of re-bordering highlights the fluid and evolving nature of borders and the significance of understanding how these changes affect cross-border interactions, cooperation, and regional development. It underscores the need to adapt cross-border cooperation strategies to address emerging challenges and opportunities arising from redefined borders and shifting geopolitical landscapes (Jańczak, 2019).

Materials and methods

The article draws upon two primary data sources for its analysis. Firstly, it relies on semi-structured interviews conducted with a diverse array of stakeholders involved in regional development within the Praděd/Pradziad, Nisa/Neisse/Nysa, and Glacensis Euroregion. A total of 24 interviews were conducted, some of which were recorded while others were not. These interviews explored various aspects of cross-border cooperation and related issues, with specific focus on segments pertinent to tourism.

Secondly, the analysis incorporates an examination of cross-border public transport networks, utilizing historical maps of the region alongside archived and contemporary timetables. This analysis tracks shifts in public transport infrastructure, the frequency of connections, and the availability of transport routes viable for tourism purposes in the present context.

Results

During the initial phase, the content of the interviews underwent analysis. Findings revealed that despite the presence of several highly alluring tourist destinations along the border—such as the Jizerské Mountains, Krkonoše National Park, the rock towns of Broumovsko, Orlické Mountains, and Jeseníky Mountains – visitors from neighboring regions typically engage in day trips and opt for accommodation on their respective side of the border. Consequently, this pattern results in substantial traffic congestion, parking challenges, and related issues in certain areas. In Poland, this challenge was further compounded by a populist campaign preceding parliamentary elections, wherein accommodations in Poland were subsidized. As a consequence, in the preceding year of 2023, notably fewer Polish tourists ventured into the Czech Republic compared to previous years.

Tab. 1: Overview of railway lines that exist, or existed in the past, across today's Czech-Polish border

Railway	Operation status
Frýdlant – Heřmanice – Bogatynia – Zittau	Dismantled
Frýdlant - Zgorzelec	Personal traffic cancelled
Jindřichovice pod Smrkem – Gryfów Śląski	Dismantled
Tanvald - Jelenia Góra	Functional
Královec - Kamienna Góra	Functional
Meziměstí - Mieroszków	Personal traffic cancelled
Otovice zastávka – Ścinawka Średnia	Dismantled
Náchod – Kudowa Zdrój	Dismantled
Lichkov - Kłodzko	Functional
Bernartice u Javorníka – Otmuchów	Dismantled
Vidnava – Nysa	Dismantled

Jeseník - Głucholazy - Krnov	Travel possible only from Czechia to Czechia
Krnov – Głubczyce	Dismantled
Opava-západ – Pilszcz	Dismantled
Chuchelná – Racibórz	Dismantled
Bohumín – Racibórz	Functional
Bohumín - Zebrzydowice	Functional
Český Těšín - Cieszyn	Functional

The interviews yielded various intriguing insights, with some respondents noting that tourists tend to mentally confine themselves to one side of the border, preferring to stay and dine within their own territory while venturing out for excursions on the opposite side. The dearth of cross-border public transportation, which is only sporadically available on select major routes, emerged as a significant concern, leading to several adverse effects and rendering public transport links impractical for border tourism. Criticism was also directed towards the limitation of tourist information materials, which typically cease at the border of the tourist region, leaving visitors uninformed about attractions across the border even at tourist information centers. Consequently, tourists lack the motivation to explore regions beyond the border for extended periods, thereby gravitating towards familiar highlights and exacerbating the strain on the sustainability of tourism in these destinations.

During the second phase of the research, an examination of historical and contemporary cross-border public transport connections was conducted. A notable disparity was observed post-1945, following the aftermath of the Second World War, during which both Czechoslovakia and Poland sought to delineate the border between the two states as distinctly as possible. Consequently, measures were implemented to reinforce the border psychologically, including the disruption of railways and public transport networks in general (refer to Table 1).

The findings reveal that out of the original 15 cross-border railways, only 3 remain operational today in areas affected by population exchanges after 1945, while no railways were disrupted in regions unaffected by such exchanges. This underscores the phenomenon of re-bordering, which continues to impede border traffic to this day. A similar analysis was conducted for bus transport, yielding comparable results, albeit space constraints prevent their detailed presentation within this article.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the research underscore the significant psychological barrier that the border imposes on visitors. Despite the Czech-Polish border being largely open and accessible without significant hindrance since 2007, aside from a brief interlude during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, both nations predominantly utilize their respective border regions for leisure activities. This phenomenon presents a paradox, considering the minimal language barrier between Czechs and Poles, and the fact that many Czechs engage in shopping excursions in Poland. Yet, when it comes to vacations in border areas, they tend to favor their own side of the border, even though this choice often entails financial disadvantages. This inclination persists despite the regularity with which citizens from both nations visit historical cities (like Praha or Kraków) or, in the case of Poland, the Baltic Sea.

The repercussion of this tourism landscape is a heavy reliance on car travel, which, alongside air transport, stands as one of the least environmentally friendly modes of transportation. Passenger vehicles exert significant capacity and spatial pressure on tourist destinations, particularly detrimental in nature reserves, national parks, and other ecologically sensitive areas. This concerning scenario necessitates intervention, requiring concerted efforts from tourism institutions at various levels—national entities such as CzechTourism and the Polish Tourism Organization, as well as regional bodies including regions, voivodeships, and tourist regions—alongside cross-border collaboration facilitated by euroregions. Presently, such collaboration predominantly occurs within euroregions, albeit with comparatively limited financial resources compared to the aforementioned organizations. Consequently, areas beyond the border often remain relatively unfamiliar to visitors.

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Souhrn

Řada turisticky atraktivních regionů v Česku se nachází v příhraničních oblastech, díky čemuž jsou dostupné i návštěvníkům z druhé strany hranice. Ačkoli je Česko od roku 2007 členem Schengenského prostoru a na jeho hranicích jsou od té doby zrušeny hraniční kontroly, hranice však je doposud přítomna např. v podobě nenavazující veřejné dopravy, nedostatečné přeshraniční infrastruktury, či v preferencích turistů ohledně ubytování. Tyto faktory pak přispívají k neudržitelným formám cestovního ruchu v příhraničních oblastech, projevující se velkým množstvím jednodenních návštěvníků přijíždějících osobními automobily.

Článek analyzuje dané téma na příkladu česko-polské hranice, přičemž využívá metody polostrukturovaných rozhovorů s aktéry v cestovním ruchu (města a obce, podnikatelé, neziskové organizace). Z výsledků plyne, že po roce 1945 došlo na česko-polské hranici k re-borderingu z politických důvodů, přeshraniční kontakty také utrpěly z důvodu výměny obyvatelstva na obou stranách hranice. Silný border efekt se zde projevuje doposud, kvůli čemuž v některých populárních destinacích může vznikat overturismus, a to bez adekvátního finančního přínosu pro postižené destinace. V závěru článku jsou prezentována doporučení, jak border efekt v oblasti cestovního ruchu zmírnit a tím přispět k udržitelnosti cestovního ruchu v regionu.

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