

Spatial behaviour of consumers in the divided towns on the Polish-German and Polish-Czech borders

S u m m a r y

The relation between individuals and the space they use constitute one of the basic research problems of behavioral stream of human geography. One manifestation of this relation is consumer spatial behaviour such as cross-border buying movements. This is the case with towns that straddle the Polish-German and Polish-Czech borders. The specificity of these towns stems from the fact that in the past they constituted harmonious urban organisms spanned by the same legal and administrative rules, but were later divided due to political processes that shifted the national borders.

The book analyses consumer spatial behaviour in selected urban areas on Poland's borders. It specifically focuses on the consumer cross-border movements in divided towns such as Słubice and Frankfurt an der Oder, Gubin and Guben, Zgorzelec and Görlitz, and also Cieszyn and Český Těšín. The time frame for this research was 2009-2017. The empirical material analysed and presented in the book came from numerous sources such as surveys concerning consumers' buying and spatial behaviour, measurement of the intensity of consumer traffic on bridges spanning the borders and a detailed investigation of daily buying activities of a selected group of inhabitants of the divided towns.

The theoretical section of the book presents a general *ex ante* model of the cross-border consumer behaviour in divided towns. In constructing this model, use was made of general models of human spatial behaviour, consumer economic behaviour, and a temporal-geographical model of society. The model contains fixed and variable factors, which shape consumer cross-border behaviour (such as the level of infrastructural development, differences in political and legal systems, economic and demographic differences).

In the light of the empirical data collected and analysed in this book, the frequency and directions of consumers' cross-border buying movement was influenced most by such factors as currency exchange rates, the differences in the level of socio-economic development, the price differences between given countries as well as the permeability of a particular state border. The relatively low level of formalization

of the Czech and German borders since 2007 (when Poland became part of the Schengen Zone) has led to a greater bi-directional flow of cross-border consumers. It can be also noted that this flow of consumers was of a predominantly sub-regional range. In contrast, despite the reduction of legal barriers, there was a clear asymmetry in Polish-German border transit, as significantly more foreigners crossed the border into Poland than Poles in the opposite direction.

The analysis reveals that the differences in the spatial behaviour of consumers originating from the countries in question were manifested in different motives for making purchases in the neighbouring country, the frequency and form of cross border buying movement, the type of transport used to cross the border, the type of retail outlet visited by consumers crossing the border, the most frequently purchased items, the amount spent on purchases made over the border, the time taken for shopping in terms of daily routine, and use of the neighbouring country's language, among other things.

This analysis also resulted in a typology of consumers by place of residence. When it comes to the latter, the key difference between consumers resident in the divided towns and consumers from outside these towns lies in the frequency of their purchases. Greater purchasing activity is seen among inhabitants of cross-border towns. In general, the greater the distance between the place of purchasing and that of residence, the lower the frequency of purchasing.

At the final stage of the research, the *ex ante* theoretical model was used to develop specific models of Polish consumer behaviour on the German and Czech borders, as well as models of Czech and German consumers' behaviour on the Polish border. The existing literature seems to suggest that the buying activities of Polish, Czech and German consumers will gradually become homogenous due to increasing globalisation and economic integration. However, this study shows that in divided towns on the Polish-German and Polish-Czech borders, such homogenisation is hardly observed, due to persistent differences between consumers in terms of their value systems and their ways of perceiving and interpreting reality. Without doubt, this has an effect on the enduring spatial differentiation in cross-border consumer behaviour, in which the global is entwined with the local.

Translated by Rob Pagett