

Symmetries, asymmetries and cross-border cooperation on the German–Polish border. Towards a new model of (de)bordering*

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Abstract

The border between Germany and Poland represents one of the most interesting examples of dynamic political, economic and social transformation one can observe in post-Cold War Europe, being a very successful example of close cooperation. Ongoing debordering logics can be noticed there, but their forms and pace also reveal stagnation, or even regress in some sectors. It is claimed that the dynamic intensification of cross-border cooperation there after the collapse of the communist regimes in this part of Europe resulted from a complex set of interactions on the European, national and local levels. The key objectives there were relatively convergent which contributed to rapid debordering. They started, however, to diverge over time, differently on each of the levels. This process was contextualized in the symmetries and asymmetries existing on the border, which in many cases resulted in rebordering tendencies.

Keywords: asymmetries; German–Polish border; debordering

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Resum. *Simetries, asimetries i cooperació transfronterera a la frontera germano-polonesa. Cap a un nou model de (des)fronterització*

La frontera entre Alemanya i Polònia representa un dels exemples més interessants de dinàmica política i transformació econòmica i social que es poden observar en l'Europa posterior a la Guerra Freda, i és un exemple reeixit d'estreta cooperació. Les lògiques desfronteritzadores en curs poden detectar-se aquí; tanmateix, les formes i els ritmes revelen un estancament i, fins i tot, regressió en determinats sectors. S'argumenta que la intensificació de la cooperació transfronterera, després del col·lapse dels règims comunistes en aquesta part d'Europa, va ser el resultat d'un conjunt d'interaccions a escala europea, nacional i local. En aquell moment, els objectius principals eren relativament convergents, la qual cosa va contribuir a una ràpida desfronterització. No obstant això, amb el temps, aquests objectius van començar a divergir entre els diferents nivells. Aquest procés s'ha contextualitzat en el marc de les simetries i asimetries existents en la frontera, que moltes vegades han donat com a resultat tendències refronteritzadores.

Paraules clau: asimetries; frontera germano-polonesa; desfronterització

Resumen. *Simetrías, asimetrías y cooperación transfronteriza en la frontera germano-polaca. Hacia un nuevo modelo de (des)fronterización*

La frontera entre Alemania y Polonia representa uno de los ejemplos más interesantes de dinámica política y transformación económica y social que pueden observarse en la Europa posterior a la Guerra Fría, y es un exitoso ejemplo de una estrecha cooperación. Las lógicas desfronterizadoras en curso pueden detectarse aquí; no obstante, sus formas y ritmos también revelan un estancamiento e, incluso, regresión en determinados sectores. Se argumenta que la intensificación de la cooperación transfronteriza, después del colapso de los regímenes comunistas en esta parte de Europa, fue el resultado de un conjunto de interacciones a escala europea, nacional y local. En ese momento, los objetivos principales eran relativamente convergentes, lo que contribuyó a una rápida desfronterización. Sin embargo, con el tiempo, dichos objetivos empezaron a divergir entre los diferentes niveles. Este proceso ha sido contextualizado en el marco de las simetrías y asimetrías existentes en la frontera, que en muchos casos han dado como resultado tendencias refronterizadoras.

Palabras clave: asimetrías; frontera germano-polaca; desfronterización

Résumé. *Symétries, asymétries et coopération transfrontalière à la frontière germano-polonaise. Vers un nouveau modèle de (dé)frontérisation*

La frontière entre l'Allemagne et la Pologne représente l'un des exemples les plus intéressants de dynamique politique, et de transformation économique et sociale, devenant ainsi un exemple d'une coopération étroite réussie. Les logiques de défrontérisation actuelles sont ici détectables, cependant, leurs formes et leur rythme révèlent aussi une stagnation, et même une régression, dans certains secteurs. Nous soutenons que l'intensification de la coopération transfrontalière qui a eu lieu après l'effondrement des régimes communistes dans cette partie de l'Europe était le résultat d'un ensemble d'interactions au niveau européen, national et local. A cette époque-là, les principaux objectifs étaient relativement convergents, ce qui a aidé à une défrontérisation rapide. Néanmoins, au cours du temps, ces objectifs ont commencé à diverger entre les différents niveaux. Ce processus a été contextualisé dans le cadre des symétries et des asymétries existantes à la frontière, qui dans de nombreux cas ont abouti à des tendances de refrontérisation.

Mots-clés: asymétries; frontière Germano-polonaise; défrontérisation

Summary

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1. Introduction

The border between Germany and Poland represents one of the most interesting examples of dynamic political, economic, and social transformation that one can observe in the post-Cold War Europe. Deeply rooted in conflict legacies and assigned a separating role, it became not only a contact point, but also a very successful example of close cooperation.

The main aim of this article is to provide an overview of the border developments between Germany and Poland by investigating the debordering and rebordering tendencies. It is claimed that the dynamic intensification of cross-border cooperation after the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe resulted from a complex set of interactions on the European, national, and local levels. The key objectives of each level were relatively convergent which contributed to rapid debordering. Over time, the objectives began to diverge. This process was contextualized in the symmetries and asymmetries existing on the border, which in many cases resulted in rebordering tendencies. The non-linear and complex nature of border change has led to a new, non-linear model of (de)bordering visible in this case.

The paper consists of four sections. The first section develops a theoretical framework, which provides a conceptual platform for further analysis. Next, legacies of the German–Polish border are presented, which allows interpreting the cross-border interactions over the last three decades and eventually mapping the de- and rebordering tendencies in the context of asymmetries.

2. Theoretical settings

This paper is based conceptually on three theoretical considerations:

First, that border-related processes in Europe, especially the Central and Eastern parts, are inseparably connected to the European integration processes. Consequently, the concept of downscaling, considering border relations in Europe (Bürkner, 2015b) as a local manifestation of continental integration processes (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008; Kolossov, 2005: 628),

is fundamental in understanding border developments. (Cross-)border units represent a micro-version of European unification (van Houtum and Ernste, 2001: 103), making the towns and regions' transcending borders laboratories of European integration, or at least laboratories of sectorial integration (Gasparini, 1999-2000).

Second, the theoretical apparatus of European studies is employed to interpret border developments, including the three *grand theories* which are considered to be the main analytical framework of interpreting integration in Europe, adjusted to border studies. The analytical framework of neo-functionalism is particularly beneficial, assuming that cooperation and integration are needs and are function driven (Haas, 1964). Elimination of barriers for the exchange of goods and services is the starting point of deborderization and spills over into other fields (Lindberg, 1963: 123), including politics and culture. This linear process is connected to creating institutions and transferring competences to the supranational level. Cross-border cooperation can be seen as a pragmatically oriented, economically driven process of intense creation of cross-border territorial units. The second intergovernmental approach emphasizes the role of states and their interests (Hoffmann, 1966; Moravcsik, 1998), considering local involvement in cross-border relations as an instrument of state policies that can be supported or limited depending on the centers' interests. Finally, there is the social constructivism framework, which approaches integration as the process of communication and standardization of identities, norms, and values (Diez and Wiener, 2004). In the border context, this framework concentrates on cross-border community formation as well as cross-border identity construction.

All three *grand theories* also frame processes of de- and rebordering, with neo-functionalism stressing the former (Lefkofridi and Schmitter, 2016) and intergovernmentalism concentrating on the latter. In the context of constructivist thought (corresponding with the conceptual turn in border studies and "border construction" being the dominant approach now) it is pointed out that the process of Europeanization often means top-down debordering. This causes a reaction in the form of rebordering, constructed by individuals and their groups, as a bottom-up adaptation (Bürkner, 2015a). It is stressed that both debordering and rebordering are not exclusively conducted by states, but also by other actors, especially individuals and collective players (Laine and Tervonen, 2015). It is also important to note that both processes are not mutually exclusive, they often occur simultaneously at different levels and in different manifestations. At the same time, when global and integrative influences contribute to border erosion (Popescu, 2012: 70), national level actors can be invested in their own longevity. Additionally, subnational level action contributes to both de- and rebordering, which suggests a multilayer approach and a multidimensional analysis, conducted at different scales (Laine, 2016: 466). The three abovementioned scales can be conflicting when constructing and deconstructing borders (Konrad, 2015: 11). Due to its border politics, the role of the European Union seems to be facilitating border erosion at

both geopolitical and societal levels (Scott, 2015: 35). The policies that are implemented at the local and regional levels frame states' involvement in border-related processes from both the top and bottom. Gabriel Popescu associates rebordering tendencies with the situation of global flows meeting territorial states (Popescu, 2012: 74). Consequently, as Leine demonstrates:

borders must be understood as complex, multiscalar, multidimensional, yet dynamic entities that have different symbolic and material forms, functions, and locations. [...] [They] are negotiated vis-à-vis questions of identity, belonging, political conflict, and societal transformation, and [...] they are re- and deconstructed through various institutional and discursive practices at different levels and by different actors. (Laine, 2016: 465)

Moreover, they are not static, but are in “motion” (Konrad, 2015: 1).

Third, there is the concept of asymmetry that frames de- and rebordering processes. The author would like to propose asymmetry as a new and innovative method of interpreting the above tendencies, by both conceptualizing the category and then testing it empirically in the case of the German–Polish borderland.

Asymmetry itself is commonly defined as a lack of symmetry that is characterized by “correspondence in size, shape, and relative position of parts that are on opposite sides of a dividing line” (Webster’s Dictionary, 1993: 3217). Following this popular understanding, the research on border asymmetry concentrates on comparative approaches to potentials of a democratic, economic, power-related, etc. character (Velasco Ortiz and Contreras, 2014: 39–40). That being said, one of the constitutive features of symmetry is “an axis” and reflection of a structure on the other side. When symmetry means transformation, the constructive features of the object are not modified even if they change proportions and sizes, making “symmetrical” structures that represent similar patterns or having similar origins. The difference in potentials represents more categories of “imbalance” or “disproportion” than asymmetry (Kubiak, 2009: 28). Similarly, “in sub-national cross-border contexts, the asymmetry is regularly manifested by differences in competences, central-local relations, budgetary cycles, administration hierarchies, the roles of elected officers and public servants, and by the extent of central government engagement” (Laine, 2012: 57). Consequently, differentiating between imbalance/disproportion (associated with various potentials) and asymmetry (incommensurability, “the relationship between things which have no common measure”, Thomas, 2001: 32), is necessary. The analysis of asymmetry in border studies rarely refers to any specific understanding (Lauth Bacas and Kavanagh, 2013), conceptualization or theorization of this category and is used as an equivalent of imbalance in some sectors (e.g., Decoville et al., 2013: 226).

In Europe, due to the eroding and dividing character of borders, (cross-) border actors experience asymmetries but also contribute to their weakening in the process of social learning in mutual contacts, which occurs at two levels: potential differences and structural asymmetries in dealing across borders with

partner structures and potential differences and structural asymmetries when dealing with hierarchies across borders.

The question remains, however, how potential differences and structural asymmetries interact with de- and rebordering processes. Asymmetry is often perceived as an atypical state of affairs (Kupiecki, 2016: 31), but also a tool of mutual supplementation (Decoville et al., 2013: 223). If understood as an imbalance of potentials, asymmetry simply leads to neo-functional flows of goods and individuals, as well as to the creation social contacts in the further steps. Leine claims that some of the asymmetries, such as price (of goods and services) or legal differences, enhance cross-border competition, while others (e.g., financial resources, language differences, etc.) make cooperation more difficult (Laine, 2012: 58). Additionally, in asymmetric relations between states, the weaker partner can pick two strategies: closure (to protect itself) or openness (to take advantage of the partner's potential). The stronger side can additionally try to dominate the weaker side or ignore it all together (Kozák, 2010).

3. Legacies of German–Polish border(s)

Examination of the German–Polish border is the analysis of current events contextualized by preceding historical events. The extant border was delineated as a consequence of the Second World War and the border relations have been constructed on several levels:

The border was relocated west (Trosiak, 1999) following the decisions proposed by the Soviet Union in attempts to establish a new geopolitical order in the post-war Europe (Map 1).

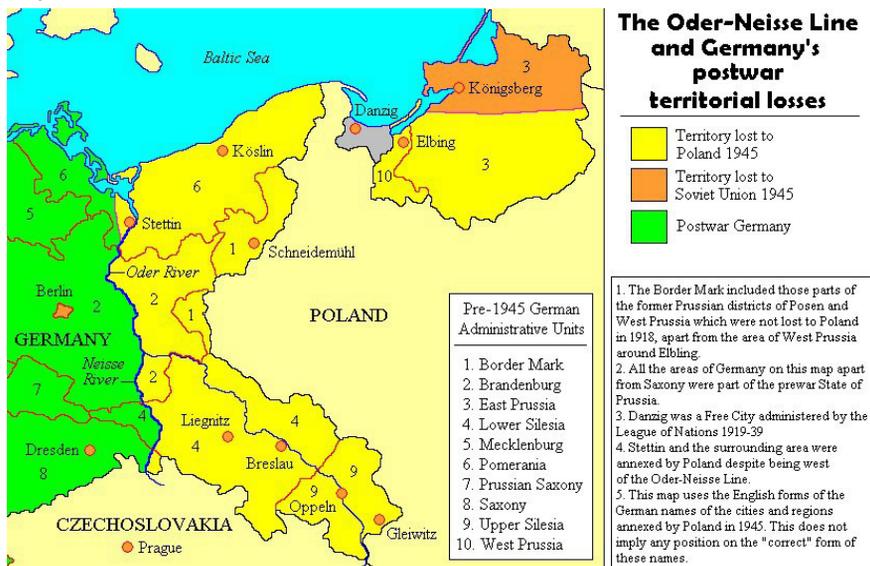
As a result of the shift, the German–Polish border became a contested line and a potential cause of confrontation for decades. The border was, however, accepted by the German Democratic Republic in 1950 (Koćwin, 1993), German Federal Republic in 1970, and finally, permanently established in 1990 (Halicka, 2013).

The border shift has had consequences on the border populations of both nations. Germans were replaced with Polish citizens, most of whom originated from Poland's pre-war eastern provinces ceded to the Soviet Union (Halicka, 2013). Consequently, for several decades, no local identity or identification with the territory was developed on the Polish side of the border.

The border populations were isolated from one another. The border itself was closed for most of the communist period causing the cultural alienation of Germans and Poles, who had neither the opportunity for frequent or direct contact, nor any chance of creating a cross-border culture (Koćwin, 1993; Jańczak, B.A., 2015: 118).

This situation resulted in economic underdevelopment on either side of the border. This was acutely experienced in the Polish borderlands as a result of remoteness from larger urban centers (with the exception of the northern part of the border) to which poor infrastructure connections contributed. The feeling of temporariness and uncertainty resulting from the territorial dispute

Map 1. Relocation of the German–Polish border in 1945



Source: Coll (2017). (Image produced by Adam Carr and provided by Electionworld under Creative Commons licence CC BY-SA 3.0)

meant that, until the early seventies, and the confirmation of the border location by Western Germany, the Polish state, organized under the principles of a centrally planned economy, was hesitant to locate resources in areas that could potentially be lost. The same attitude hindered the economic behavior of the local population. Consequently, the border areas suffered from low levels of economic development for several decades.

The communist period was characterized by an absolute dominance by the state level in border relations and bordering processes, revealing strong asymmetries of a political nature (Poland, as a controlled part of the Eastern Block, sought recognition of the border by West Germany), as well as visible differences in potentials (i.e., level of economic development despite being within the same centrally planned economies).

4. Debordering under growing asymmetries and disproportions: (cross-)border relations after 1989/1990

The collapse of the communist systems in Eastern Europe and the expansion of the Western structures into the East reorganized border construction within German–Polish relations.

The political and economic transformation in Poland, initiated in 1989 and followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union, allowed Poland to opt for a Western orientation in terms of foreign policy. This Westernization required

not only successful reforms, but also the reorganization of relations with all of Poland's neighbors, including border issues. Concurrently, Germany reunified and became a direct neighbor of Poland. Developing stable and peaceful border relations with all its neighbors, especially Poland, became an important test of the reliability and trustworthiness of the newly reunified Germany (Pfluger and Lipscher, 1994). Within this context, cross-border relations can be considered at three levels: local/regional, state and European.

The ramifications on cross-border relations as a result of the fall of Communism were first of all, experienced locally and regionally. As a result of the reforms that introduced a free market economy, created consequential political change, and liberalized the border regime, the communities located alongside the border discovered the enormous potential of the borderline to alleviate the economic depression caused by the economic transformation: disintegration of entire sectors of the economy resulting in high levels of unemployment, decreasing production and other problems (which was more severe on the Polish side and less so—due to federal transfers for reconstruction—on the German side). The opened border resulted in a local economic boom fueled by cross-border trade. German customers started to visit Polish markets (called *bazaars*), and bought enormous amounts of goods. The price difference between Polish and German goods made this local border trade one of the most important components of the local economy and a source of income for thousands of Poles. Petrol and cigarettes became the most attractive products in terms of prices, but the range of goods on offer, especially in the 1990s, was very wide. On the other hand, the Polish border inhabitants purchased electronics, clothes and alcohol on the German side of the border. Very quickly, a service sector appeared on the border, enabled because of the price differences. Hundreds of barber shops, beauty parlors, dental offices and other establishments offering services to German customers, began to appear in the Polish border region. The black market economy followed this cross-border path, with rampant prostitution, grand theft auto, and smuggling.

These bottom-up, cross-border (neo-)functional developments were very quickly reflected in the cross-border orientation of the local authorities (Medve-Bálint and Svensson, 2013: 17). They realized that the new environment created a chance to overcome several problems that many of the local territorial units were suffering from, such as underdevelopment, peripherality and isolation, among others. Border authorities very eagerly initiated cross-border contacts with partners located on the other side of the border in order to develop and institutionalize cooperation.

This dynamic cross-border cooperation clearly followed a neo-functional logic and spill-over mechanism, which was additionally reflected in the symbolic space of the towns and regions, testing the European idea locally often before their state (Poland) joined the European Union and began the process of continental integration (Gasparini, 2008). This advancement was reflected in the creation of numerous initiatives using European discourses, including the creation of Euroregions and Eurotowns, hosting European events and the

European branding of local initiatives and enterprises. This contributed to attempts to develop a cross-border understanding and a cross-border identity. These developments occurred at the local level within the context of visible border differences in potential (with the GDP per person rate) as well as structural asymmetries (Eastern Germany being absorbed into the Federal Republic with immediate structural changes vs. Poland transforming its economy and political system from the ground up). Both significantly contributed to the debordering process that was more functional in nature. Identity issues have been negotiated much more slowly with still limited results.

The state level represents another dimension of border relations. Germany and Poland, after finally solving the border issue, started to treat it as a test for the new, friendly relations. The plans and actions implemented since the early 1990s have always been ambitious, making the border not just a no-problem line, but an exemplary reconciliation and friendship zone. A united Germany was trying to prove its reliability in the new European environment and Poland was demonstrating its readiness to join and participate in the integration projects (Hajnicz, 1996). Border-related initiatives began to be implemented: the development of transportation and border crossing facilities, new education programs, and cultural programs, among others, which created platforms for German–Polish contact between young people and made steps towards fostering a generation of bilingual elites with a high level of knowledge and understanding of the realities on both sides of the border. This intergovernmentally driven support was crucial for creating a European spirit in the cross-border relations and supporting them with resources.

The Polish government has approached all of the initiatives (for example the Oder Partnership) that could be perceived as undermining the exclusive sovereignty of the border region hesitantly because they undermined Westphalian principles, which consequently led to the termination of the debordering experiment. Poland has also acted with concern for the differences in potential and structural asymmetries that could create a situation in which the less economically powerful nation could be coerced by a stronger and more influential Germany. Both states' strategies of openness and political-economic benefits resulting from potential differences and structural asymmetries were supplemented on the Polish side with elements of closeness. The central focus on the border has been weakening since the Eastern Enlargement in 2004 and the Schengen zone enlargement in 2007. This is critically approached by the local actors who miss the central support for debordering that they had previously experienced.

The European Union offers a wide range of instruments in support of cross-border cooperation, which various actors involved in German–Polish border relations have utilized. Euroregions (Grix and Knowles, 2002), European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, (EGTC) (Dumała, 2009; Jańczak, J., 2016), and financial instruments such as Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies (PHARE) and the European Territorial Cooperation, better known as Interreg (Pete, 2014), have all been utilized in

efforts to address the asymmetries existing in the German–Polish borderlands. Again, local actors, especially local authorities, have been very active in creating cross-border projects, applying for European support and implementing projects in the border area. This has been strongly supported by national centers and has significantly contributed to border region development because of resources unavailable for other actors. At the same time, this process strongly contributed to the creation of a cross-border sense of community based on the principle of interdependence rather than on a normative or identity-related basis (Jańczak, J., 2007). Despite the fact that numerous nongovernmental organizations have been cooperating across the border, the cross-border community seems primarily to be a community of interests.

Also relevant is the process of European integration itself, and the effect it has had on the border developments. Before the Eastern enlargement in 2004, border located actors had already been preparing for this inevitable process. On the one hand, they had been exposed to and directly experienced the European Union. On the other one, they had been participating—unlike other parts of the state—in institutional forms of cooperation, among them the Euroregions (Scott and Collins, 1997: 103-106). In 2004, the border regions relationship developments were given an additional impetus. Further debordering resulted from the Schengen zone enlargement in 2007, and entirely opened the border to various initiatives of cross-border interactions. This had two interesting consequences. First, it pushed local actors to strengthen already developed relationships, which would, in effect, speed the process of debordering. On the other hand, however, it reduced the level of interest of both states in the border regions. After achieving their national goals (final border stability, reconciliation and enlarging the European Union) both Berlin and Warsaw lost interest in active support in border-related processes. The European integration laboratory approach had to be replaced with pragmatic unification in order to reach a high level of synergy. At the same time, however, social integration were contested by many of the border inhabitants, with the belief that rebordering was worth considering. Rebordering sentiments were tangible on the German side of the border and the extent varied from the ideas of reintroducing border control to general support for a nationalistic anti-Polish movement. These processes manifested themselves differently in various locations along the border. To understand their nature, a brief look at the current structural profile of the border is necessary, as well as at the construction of differences in potential and structural asymmetries.

5. Structural and functional characteristics of the border: towards a model of (a)symmetric relations

The German–Polish borderland is marked by several differences in potential and structural asymmetries: economic (Dołzbłasz, 2015: 10), social, administrative, perceptual (Krzemiński, 2004), linguistic (Jańczak, B.A., 2017: 150) and cultural-organizational. The analysis of the border between Germany and

Poland in an economic sense, utilizing GDP per capita as an indicator of wealth and development, shows that the former is four times more financially successful than the latter (Jańczak et al., 2011: 137-140). This is reinforced across a wide spectrum of indicators, starting with higher income levels and ending with the higher prices of services in Germany (that mainly consist of labor costs) (Scott and Collins, 1997: 106-108). But structural asymmetries are even more interesting. They span from different administrative cultures (local and regional institutions competences, procedures, organizational differences), to different economic structures (prevalence of family enterprises on the Polish side that have been flexibly reacting to the changing environment and big brands on the German side).

On the other hand, most of the border regions present inversed structural asymmetries and differences in potential. The German side of the border has been experiencing a dramatic population decline (with an almost 30% drop in the population of some towns and communities compared to the early 1990s), high levels of unemployment, and general economic and social stagnation. The border communities are amongst the poorest in their regions, and in the whole of Germany. All this, despite the fact that billions of euros have been pumped into the provinces by the federal authorities since reunification. Conversely, the Polish border area is comprised of territorial units that have been experiencing great prosperity in the last (almost) three decades.

When investigating the issue, the relationship between the “public” and “private” spheres must be considered. In Germany, both the state and local authorities have high levels of institutional efficiency, and are facilitated by the public funds they are provided. Consequently, the areas within these jurisdictions uphold high standards of both public infrastructure and public services. This is visible in the aesthetic of the border areas, represented by nicely renovated towns, modern transportation systems, and widely available recreational spaces, among others. The Polish side of the border represents an opposite model. Lower institutional efficiency, combined with meager public funds, means the public infrastructure and common spaces appear neglected.

The picture changes, however—again reversing the asymmetries—when investigating the denizens. The outflow of young and educated inhabitants from eastern Germany to the western Länder has resulted in the visible presence—if not domination—of older, less dynamic inhabitants who are dependent on various forms of welfare. The prosperous cities are, consequentially, often filled with penurious citizens. On the Polish side of the border, due to the economic boom and lack of social assistance, individuals were forced to be economically active and became heavily involved in border-related business. This resulted in a high level of enterprises belonging to the local inhabitants and a thriving local economic landscape. The “poor” towns in the west of Poland are filled with prosperous inhabitants.

But the above considerations still do not constitute a comprehensive picture of the process. It has to be supplemented by a fact that the differences in potential and asymmetries are present differently in the three sections of the border.

Cross-border cooperation on the German–Polish border has been territorially divided into three regions. This is caused by the federal system in Germany, and the fact that the states are responsible for border related activity there. These are, respectively, Mecklenburg Vorpommern/Brandenburg–Poland, Brandenburg–Poland and Saxony–Poland. This administrative division corresponds with the three functionally different sections of the border, with their own peculiarities and diverse environments for cross-border cooperation.

The northern part of the border is the only part demarcated on land. On the western side there is the German Mecklenburg–Vorpommern state; on the east, the Polish region of Zachodniopomorskie. Most of the two areas once formed the historic region of Pomerania, with the city of Szczecin/Stettin, a huge Baltic Sea harbor, now located on the Polish side very close to the border. Both regions are among the least developed and populated regions in their respective nations. This is especially true of Mecklenburg–Vorpommern, which is the poorest and most depopulated of all the German states. Big cities and regional development centers are absent. Szczecin, on the other hand, is one of the larger Polish metropolises (Musekamp, 2010), but is marked by a lack of innovation in comparison to other Polish cities. With its economic and demographic potential, however, it dominates the mainly rural German border areas. The northern outskirts of this part of the border, especially the Usedom and Wolin islands, are very popular tourist destinations which attract numerous people from both countries and Scandinavia, especially in the summer season.

The central part of the border is the line where Brandenburg State neighbors the region of Lubuskie, the latter being the historic, eastern part of Brandenburg. The state boundary follows the rivers that cut across several towns (or nowadays towns and villages), including Küstrin Kietz–Kostrzyn, Frankfurt (Oder)–Ślubice and Guben–Gubin (Jajeśniak–Quast, 2000). Both sides of the border are rural, with visible forest areas. Aside from the zone of influence created by Berlin, the rest of this German region is experiencing depopulation. The region is connected with this dynamic conurbation by a fast, local train (about 50 minutes, usually running every half hour), thus offering job opportunities for many of the German (and Polish) border region inhabitants.

The southern region is determined by the neighborhood of the German state of Saxony and the Polish voivodeship of Dolnośląskie. The current border, which follows the Neisse River, is the historic borderland of the former German provinces of Saxony and Silesia, as well as a meeting point with the territory of the Czech state. Both sides of the border region are more densely populated, with a divided town (Görlitz–Zgorzelec). The economic profile of the borderland is marked by industry, especially coal production, and alpine tourism. The German side has been experiencing depopulation for the last twenty-five years.

To summarize, structural asymmetries and differences in potential on the German–Polish border are complex in nature. The recognition of the dichotomy between the public and private sectors affords a new perspective. Additionally, in comparing the state and local/regional levels, reversed logics

are visible. Moreover, three sections of the border are marked by peculiarities. The question remains as to how the situation presented above contributes to de- and rebordering tendencies.

6. Differences in potential and structural (a)symmetries vs. de- and rebordering tendencies—the case of the radical right

The inverse differences in potential as well as structural asymmetries have contributed to re-bordering tendencies at the local level. Support of the radical right parties in border regions of Germany illustrates this phenomenon. The Polish side of the border has not been subjugated to such tendencies.

The problem of right-wing radicalization on the German part of the borderland can be associated with the Polish migration to this area. Of the 600,000 Poles living in Germany, only about 10,000 reside alongside the Oder–Neisse rivers. Roughly half of the Poles who live in the German borderlands live in the North, in Mecklenburg–Vorpommern. In some areas, especially near Szczecin, a few Poles live on the German side but work on the Polish side of the border and commute every day (Frelak and Łada, 2011). These Polish “settlers” are concentrated in the towns of Löcknitz in Mecklenburg–Vorpommern (Zensus, 2011, 2014). This German region has been plagued with unemployment, with the districts of Ucker–Randow (19% in 2010) and Löcknitz (25% in 2008) at the top of the list. Contrary to the pre-enlargement predictions, it has not been the Germans who have utilized their economic advantage to purchase real estate on the Polish side, but Poles who have started to move to the German banks of the rivers and filled empty apartments and houses and established their own businesses, bringing some life to the static economic environment of the depopulating German borderlands.

The growing (but still marginal) presence of Poles on the German side of the border has caused a negative reaction, including increased resistance to the settlers, which has been reflected in political life. The influence of radical right-wing parties in the border region is higher than in other parts of those states. For example, the National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, NPD) has been very active in border communities, especially in their northern parts. For several years, the party has been building its position based on anti-immigrant and anti-Islam rhetoric. In the border communities, where there are very few Muslim immigrants, the rhetoric has become anti-Polish. Poles have been constructed here as the local emanation of migrants, and they became the focal point of the question of identity and belonging in the borderland. The newly settled Polish inhabitants have been described as invaders who steal jobs and bring crime to the region (Jańczak, J., 2017). Beginning with the immigration crisis in 2015, the conservative position enacted by the NPD has been to some extent taken over by a new political power, Alternative for Germany (German: Alternative für Deutschland, AfD). Again, the same pattern of territorial distribution of support can be detected, with AfD winning significantly more support in the

eastern provinces of Germany, with the top results in constituencies located alongside the border. Table 1 presents the support in parliamentary elections for the radical right parties. It indicates the first and second vote in % at the national level, three border states (Mecklenburg–Vorpommern, Brandenburg and Saxony) and the counties, which are also electoral constituencies (Ucker–Randow/Vorpommern–Greiswald, Frankfurt (Oder) and Görlitz) located directly on the border, which most intensely experience its realities, including debordering and asymmetries.

As can be seen in the table, a border location corresponds in Germany with the growth of radical attitudes. The closer a state is located to the border with Poland, the more intense the support for radical right parties (Map 2). Also, reducing the scale of analysis, within each of the border states, the highest levels of support can be detected directly on the border in the border towns where Polish settlers are present. One can also easily discern regional differences. Support is the lowest in the central part of the border (Frankfurt/Oder) and highest in locations with high concentrations of Poles in the northern and southern parts (Ucker–Randow/ Vorpommern–Greiswald and Görlitz) (Table 1).

The data presented above suggest not only that there are visible rebordering tendencies at the local level (which follow ongoing functional debordering) associated with growing resistance towards further steps in the creation of open borders. The strategy of closeness is proposed by radical right-wing parties for the German state in the form of protection against threats originating from the Polish side. Regional differentiation suggests that the reversed disproportions in potentials, the poor and less dynamic provinces of more developed Germany vs. dynamic regions in less dominant Poland, result in structural asymmetries (depopulation and Polish immigration). This contributes to bottom-up rebordering tendencies (in, so far, a debordering-friendly local environment)

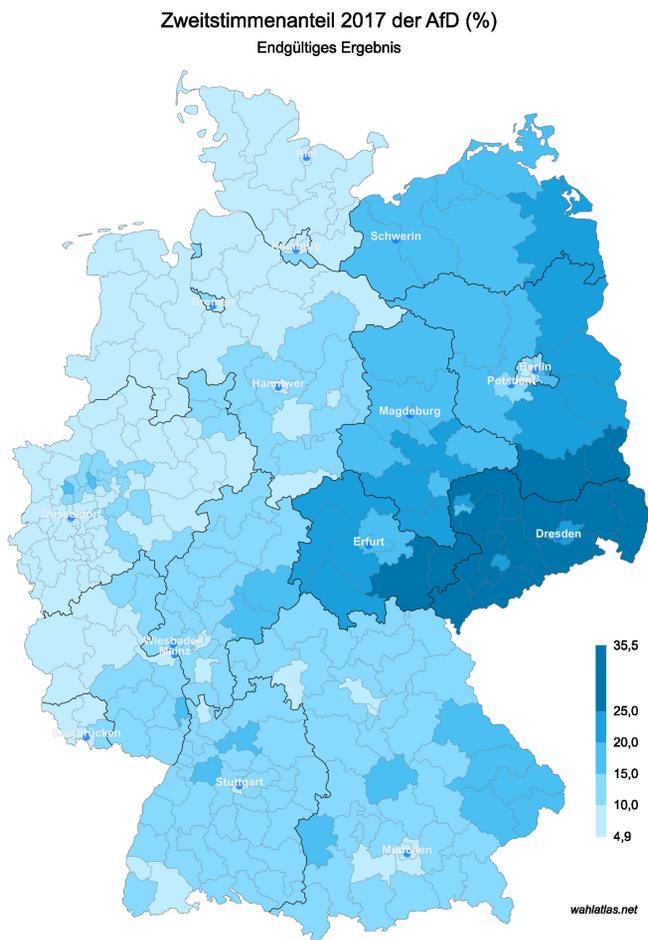
Table 1. Support for radical right parties in parliamentary elections at the national, state, and selected border units in the period 2005–2017

NPD RESULTS%							
	Germany	Mecklenburg– Vorpommern	Ucker– Randow/ Vorpommern– Greiswald*	Brandenburg	Frankfurt (Oder)	Saxony	Görlitz
2005	1.8/1.6	3.3/3.5	4.8/4.6	3.3/3.3	3.7/3.6	5.0/4.8	6.8/6.1
2009	1.8/1.5	3.4/3.3	5.0/4.6	3.4/2.6	3.7/2.8	4.1/4.0	5.3/5.5
2013	1.5/1.3	3.4/2.7	5.8/4.6	3.4/2.6	4.2/3.1	3.4/3.3	5.6/4.2
2017	0.1/0.4	0.9/1.1	1.8/2.0	0.1/0.9	1/1.1	0.2/1.1	0/1.5
AfD RESULTS%							
2013	1.9/4.7	0/5.6	0/6	-/6	0/6.4	0/6.8	0/8.2
2017	11.5/7.9	18.2/18.6	23.5/23	19.4/20.2	21.9/22.1	25.4/27	32.4/32.9

* Ucker–Randow, until 2011 a separate country, then a part of Vorpommern–Greiswald country.

Source: the author based on Bundeswahlleiter.

Map 2. Support for AfD, parliamentary elections 2017



Source: Wahlatlas, <www.wahlatlas.net>.

with aspirations of transposing them onto the national level where, because of sovereignty principles, there is more inclination to accept them.

7. Conclusions

The German–Polish borderland represents a space of dynamic cross-border processes. Rooted in a history of conflicts, the borderland was transformed in the context of European integration into a stable and densely traversed connection because of the interaction on the local, national, and European levels. Originally fueled by local and regional actors invested in economic

development, debordering was the embodiment of neo-functionalism. The border gained its current profile because of the tools and instruments offered by both Germany and Poland in their post-Cold War relations, as well as by the European Union, in preparation for expansion into the East. In the post-enlargement environment, more practical rather than symbolical interactions were enforced by the new elements in the Union's cross-border policies. The asymmetries between the German and Polish sides of the border, in their different forms across the three boundary sections, have contributed to new tendencies in the mutual relations. These relations are characterized by the relatively constant and successful implementation of joint projects and a regression in cross-border community building. Here the rebordering tendencies are connected to differences in potential and structural asymmetries, which are visible in three different segments of the border.

It is important to note that the analysis of border asymmetries reveals not only the asymmetries of neighboring states, but also those between local actors. Moreover, they can be oriented differently at the state and local level (dominant state with dominated border actors vs. dominated state with dominating border actors). Mapping inversed differences in potential and asymmetric structures elucidates the re-bordering tendencies exhibited at the local level on the German–Polish border.

This research demonstrates the complexity of the debordering and rebordering processes. It is relevant to remember that asymmetries are dynamic and change over time both with regard to power relations of the neighboring structures and sectors. The question remains as to whether de- and re-bordering contribute to the pace and nature of these changes.

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