

Identification of Conditions of the Spatial Economy in Cross-Border Regions

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Abstract

The objective of the article is the analysis of conditions of conducting coherent spatial management specific to cross-border regions. The most important are geopolitical conditions, determining the character and functions of the national border. Socio-economic and spatial processes occurring in the conditions of both closed and open borders are also of importance. The institutional-legal distance occurring between entities located on both sides of the border may prove to be a serious hindrance in the conducting of coherent spatial policy in cross-border regions.

Keywords: spatial economy, cross-border region, geopolitical conditions, legal-institutional conditions, socio-economic conditions

JEL: R58

Introduction

The objective of this article is the analysis of conditions of conducting coherent spatial management specific to cross-border regions, whereas such management is defined in broad terms, namely of management in space, management of space, as well as spatial management and spatial policy aimed at obtaining spatial order (Parysek 2006, 16–21). The importance, and—in spite of the dynamic progress in the scope of cross-border cooperation from the 1950’s to the second decade of the 21st century—validity of the issue is confirmed by the European Charter of Border and Cross-Border regions, amended in 2011 on the 40th anniversary of establishment of the Association of European Border Regions (30 years after passing its original version). It stipulated approximately a dozen problems with the functioning of cross-border regions not solved in a satisfactory manner in the fourth position: “variable spatial planning and its rules.”¹ The same document also mentions smoothing the “seams” of European spatial policy as one of the objectives of cross-border cooperation.²

According to the author, the most important conditions of spatial policy typical of cross-border regions—subject to more detailed analysis further in the paper—are geopolitical, socio-economic, and institutional conditions. However, conditions such as environmental aspects, which always play an important role in spatial management irrespective of the location of regions, were excluded. A cross-border region is defined as an area constituting a part of geographic space located along a national border on both sides. Due to the multitude and complexity of the conditions and factors shaping it, each region of the type is unique (Anderson and O’Dowd 1999, 593). Its delimitation and importance can often dramatically change in time and space. Specific attributes of cross-border

1. See: European Charter for Border and Cross-Border Regions. Association of European Border Regions, Gronau, 15th September 2011, page 7.

2. *Ibid.*, page 8.

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regions include (Chojnicki 1998; Koter 2003; Miszczuk 2012): geographic (geopolitical) location and the resulting character of the national border, differences in the level of economic development and how the economy functions in comparison to the neighboring areas (economic distance), institutional distance related to the competence inadequacy of neighboring administrative regions and subregional units, differences in the state of management on both sides of the border, low transport accessibility, and multiculturalism and its material heritage.

A cross-border region can be delimited based on the uniformity of parameters (zonal region) or relations (nodal region). In the former case, various criteria can be applied—e.g., cultural (similarity in nationality-ethnic terms or in terms of language or religion) or historical-administrative (past nationality). Some researchers also adopt a certain distance from the national border on both its sides or number of elementary units (e.g., communes) in the scope of which statistical information is collected. The nodal cross-border region can be delineated as the range of actual or potential influences of an urban center located at the border or divided by the border. If the population residing in a cross-border region is characterized by common territorial identity, the concept of a territorial social system proposed by Chojnicki (1996) is also applicable.

A cross-border region can take the institutional form of a Euroregion which according to Wolters (1994, 407) is an organization composed of any number of subregional administrative units on both sides of one or more common national borders, connected with economic, social, cultural relations, etc. The Euroregion is also a political organization, with politicians (leaders), office personnel, budget, and their own vision of development. The European character of this type of institution results not only from the geographic location, but particularly from the cross-national character. The entire Euroregion very rarely has a legal nature. It is more often inherent in particular “national” parts, based on public or private law. Euroregions without a legal nature also function with appointed working groups.

Spatial order is an important term from the point of view of the objective of the analysis. It is defined as a targeted way of spatial management, more specifically meaning: order and harmony between components of space and functions of the spatial structure, and in a broader sense—balance between conflicting development trends (Borsa 2008, 181). Spatial order is described through parameters such as (Kuciński 2015, 55–57): functionality (spatial logic), spatial legibility, ability to maintain the internal balance of ecosystems, optimization of movement of people, goods, and information in space, aesthetics, and optimum relations between the center and peripheries. It is moreover emphasized that spatial order is a dynamic category, variable together with changes in function and spatial structures (Parysek 2006, 93). On the local scale, attempts of operationalization of spatial order through indices are undertaken (cf. Śleszyński 2013).

In the case of cross-border regions, spatial order is particularly related to changes in the character of the national border, contributing to transformations of the functions as well as spatial structures and cross-border relations of areas located on both sides of the border. Shaping spatial order in the conditions of opening a border is frequently related to overcoming the peripherality of cross-border regions both in the transport and socio-economic aspects.

1 Geopolitical conditions

The first and most important condition related to spatial management and conducting spatial policy in the scope of a cross-border region is the genesis and character of the national border. In the traditional approach, borders determined the range of authority of national states and regulated their contacts with the surroundings. They also constituted the basic safety instrument of the country. So-called natural borders (as opposed to artificial borders) gained particular importance at the time. They were based on permanent and difficult to overcome elements of the geographic environment. After World War II, a gradual change in the way of approaching borders has been observed. Integration groups undoubtedly played a significant role in the scope. In accordance with the radical post-modernist approach, globalization of the economy through intensive movement of people, goods, and information contributes to the decline of national borders. In the moderate postmodernist approach, the disappearance of national borders is not observed so much as

changes in their functions. The constructivist trend treats borders not in their actual dimension as physical borders, but more in a metaphorical sense, as an instrument of diversification of space. The critical trend identifies the exclusive—due to ethnic and racial reasons, low social and material status—character of national borders towards newcomers, which remains at variance with the model of liberal democracy (Golunov 2014, 120–123).

In reference to the postmodernist approach, Martinez (1994), quite often cited in the literature on the subject, proposed a model of border evolution involving the following stages: hostility, coexistence, cooperation, and co-dependency. The stage of hostility is usually a result of violent political events related to a threat to the existence of a country, and integrity of its territory and borders. The national border then fulfils a disintegrating function (Moraczewska 2008, 58–61). From the point of view of spatial policy, it is important whether the delimited national border has an antecedent or subsequent character. Antecedent borders are primary to forms of spatial management, and subsequent—secondary. Subsequent borders are usually imposed (Rykiel 2006, 128). They cause a number of negative spatial effects involving the breaking of the existing connections between areas located on both sides of a new border, and often radically changing the hierarchy of settlement units, disturbing the existing spatial order as a result.³

The transition from the stage of hostility to the stage of coexistence requires time, the longer the border fulfilled the disintegrating function. It is easier in a situation when one of the impulses for undertaking cooperation between cross-border areas is—according to Bennett (1997)—exceeding the functional (economic, socio-cultural, etc.) space outside the borders of countries. The phase of coexistence can be also described as the phase of exchange of information. It occurs in different aspects and between different entities.

In the scope of the cooperation phase of borders, the intensity of cross-border contacts is strengthened. In both of the said phases, the border fulfils a fragmentative function (i.e., it opens to certain impulses and closes to others). The border phase of co-dependence involves further strengthening of the relations in the scope of the cross-border region through technological and capital solutions, movement of employees, and common undertakings based on rules of partnership. The border, fulfilling the integration function at the time, gains an imperceptible character, which can be considered a certain desirable targeted state.

Areas of high importance in the development of a cross-border region, particularly in the phase of cooperation and co-dependence, include:

- natural environment and spatial planning,
- transport and communication infrastructure,
- economy and labour market,
- health services, social care, and housing,
- education, research, and culture.⁴

3. For example, the delimitation of the eastern border of Poland after World War II and features of a closed border (hostility, disintegrating character) for more than 40 years caused the discontinuation of the previously functioning 65 road and railway routes. This led to the transport peripheralization of many urban centres. The city of Chełm is a good example. It constituted an important railway node in the years 1928–1939, and the seat of the East Regional Directorate of State Railways. Strategic Polish railway connections from Lviv to Brest, Białystok, and Vilnius, and from Lublin to Kiev met here. The railway line towards Lviv ends in Zamość and is of local importance, similarly as that towards Brest and Vilnius ending in Orchówek near Włodawa (the railway station Włodawa was located on the Belarusian side). The connection towards Kiev was reactivated only in the 1990s.

Cities located near the border partially lost their zones of influence (nodal regions). In the case of the eastern border of Poland, the areas concerned included Grodno, Brest, and Lviv. It also negatively affected the situation of smaller cities separated from centres of the higher order related to them thus far. It is evident in the case of cities such as: Biała Podlaska, Terespol, Włodawa, Chełm, Zamość, or Tomaszów Lubelski. A particularly good example in such terms is the city of Przemyśl, located directly on the eastern border of Poland. In the inter-war period it had a population of approximately 63 thousand. It had a similar population in 2015, whereas the population of Rzeszów at the same time increased from approximately 30 thousand to 186 thousand.

4. See: Handbook on Transfrontier Co-operation. 2006 edition. By Charles Ricq, Council of Europe, pages 108–122, [@:] <https://localgovernment.gov.mt/en/dlg/legislation/documents/legislation/the%20hb%20of%20transfrontier%20co-operation.pdf>.

From the point of view of the spatial economy, the first two areas are particularly important. In their case, detailed measures in cross-border regions could concern such aspects as:

- preparation of common research on environmental pollution and ways of its elimination,
- implementation and management of environmental protection programmes,
- provision of information on actual and potential environmental threats,
- development of a common database on plant and animal species,
- development of cross-border nature parks and common undertakings for cleanliness of rivers and lakes,
- initiation of common policy in the scope of spatial management and harmonizing spatial plans on both sides of the border,
- preparation of studies concerning the socio-economic structure and urban system, together with sectoral studies providing the basis for the development of common implementation projects,⁵
- monitoring of cross-border relations and preparation of common projects concerning the development of the main elements of technical and social infrastructure,
- analysis of transport needs of the population residing near the border, and organization of the cross-border system of public transport, or
- undertaking activities for the optimization of cross-border road, railway, and air transport.⁶

In the conditions of cooperation or co-dependence, the above list could be expanded and more detailed, adequately to the specificity of a given cross-border region. Notice, however, that the process of transformation from a disintegrating (closed) border, through a filtering border, to an integrative (open) border is of a time-consuming, complex, multi-aspect, and not necessarily unidirectional character. In modern times, as a specific response of national states to processes of integration and globalization associated with threats—e.g., related to uncontrolled inflow of migrants, a return to the traditional perception of national borders as a kind of tool of isolation from the surroundings is observed. Should this tendency be maintained, then activities in the scope of cross-border regions will return to the phase of coexistence at most.

2 Socio-economic conditions

The geopolitical conditions are undoubtedly the most important and necessary, but insufficient for conducting a coherent spatial economy in the scope of a cross-border region. The socio-economic conditions resulting from the geopolitical situation of the cross-border region are equally important. In the conditions of a closed (disintegrating) border, the development of areas located on both sides adopts different trajectories. This may lead to the occurrence of economic distances, defined as differences in the level of economic development and way of functioning of the economy. Cross-border areas located at a closed border are subject to the phenomenon of socio-economic and spatial peripheralization, manifested in such ways as: low transport accessibility, operation of few means of transport, and weak position in the transport system, export of labor resources, import of finished goods and services, deterioration of the quality of human and social capital, migration outflow (depopulation), low density of population, lack of local elites, and selective space management (Miszczuk 2013, 18). This results from legal restrictions related to movement in the near-border zone, location of military objects, and other inconveniences of the type, as well as from lack of interest of public authorities in the development of an area with a high potential threat on the part of the neighboring country.

On the other hand, complete opening of a border does not always entail benefits in the socio-economic aspect for the entire cross-border region. It may disturb the existing spatial order and cause chaos in spatial management. Positive effects can be described as cohesion (continuation)

5. This type of document is exemplified by the Cross Border Cooperation Strategy of the Lubelskie Voivodeship, Lviv, Volyn and Brest Oblasts for 2014–2020. Lublin, April 2014, prepared in 2014 based on the initiative of the Self-Government of the Lublin Voivodeship, in cooperation with authorities of the Brest Oblast in Belarus, and the Lviv and Volyn Oblasts in Ukraine, available at http://archiwalne.lubelskie.pl/img/userfiles/files/EWT/02_CROSS_BORDER_COOPERATION_STRATEGY_OF_THE_LUBELSKIE_VOIVODESHIP_LVIV_VOLYN_AND_BREST_OBLASTS.pdf. See also (Miszczuk 2014).

6. See: Handbook on Transfrontier Co-operation..., op. cit., pages 108–113.

and “islands” (Miszczuk 2013, 121–123). The former involves the integration and stimulation of socio-economic development over an area of approximately 40–60 km into each country. Its occurrence is dependent on favorable topographic conditions permitting easy crossing of borders, relatively high population density on both sides of the border, and lack of large cities attracting population at a distance of at least 100 km from the border into each of the countries. To obtain such a situation, “hostility” cannot divide the cross-border region for too long, and its economic structure should be of a complementary character. The effect does not cause sudden changes, including considerable spatial conflicts. The “island” effect concerns a cross-border region in the territory of which a large urban center develops in spite of its parts belonging to different countries. Opening the border strengthens the potential of the center and restores its proper spatial range of influence (a nodal region).

Unfavorable—from the point of view of socio-economic conditions of spatial policy in cross-border regions—effects of opening the border include: the drainage (skip) effect and exclusion effect. The former occurs when the cross-border region does not show a sufficiently high development potential, including particularly an entrepreneurial population and capital resources. This can also concern not very convenient topographic conditions along the border. At the same time, in each of the neighboring countries, large urban centers (metropolises) are located at a certain distance from the border. For them opening the border becomes an important development impulse, including through cross-border inflow of workers and capital and development of many inter-metropolitan relations, excluding the area directly adjacent to the border, becoming increasingly peripheral.

The second of the negative effects, described as exclusion, involves only one part of the cross-border region benefitting from opening the border at the cost of the other. Such a situation occurs when its particular parts do not represent a complementary structure and socio-economic potential. The effect can concern: variable accessibility and prices of goods, variable situation in the labor market, social benefits, salaries, taxes, and other conditions of conducting economic activity, variable educational conditions, particularly in the scope of higher education, or variable accessibility and quality of medical services. It should be emphasized that part of the variabilities can be of a transitional character, because opening the border gradually leads to the equalization of differences within the cross-border region.

In the case of a closed border, and an open border causing the drainage or exclusion effect within the cross-border region, the phenomenon of “social steppization”⁷ occurs, defined as unfavorable demographic tendencies reducing the quality of social capital with a simultaneous lack of strategy of activities on the part of public institutions.

3 Institutional-legal conditions

One of the most serious problems related to the functioning of cross-border regions are the variable structures of public administration of neighboring countries and the scopes of their competences.⁸ This variability can be described as institutional-legal distance. It is determined by many factors of which at least two deserve particular attention. The first is the political regime of the country—i.e., the group of methods used by the state in order to influence the behaviors of large social groups (Wojtaszczyk 2003, 267–271). They include:

- totalitarian countries where the authorities have full control over citizens, cult of an individual develops, the only right ideology is valid, terror is applied towards citizens, and the media are subjected to propagating the binding ideology;
- authoritarian countries where the majority of regulators of social behaviors (ideology, law, market) is not very effective and plays a secondary role, society is characterized by passiveness and apathy, and its participation in political life has a ritual character and occurs under strict control; and
- democratic countries which are states of law implementing the rules of the nation’s sovereignty, political pluralism, and division of power.

7. The term was used by prof. Michał Kulesza during the meeting of the IV Congress of Polish Urban Planning in Lublin on 20–21 September 2012.

8. See: European Charter for Border..., op. cit., page 7.

The first two types of countries are usually isolated in the modern international environment. They conduct the policy of isolationism. Therefore, their borders are usually of a disintegrating character. Sometimes, particularly in the case of authoritarian countries, in conditions of their deteriorating economic situation, borders can be selectively opened, although the cross-border cooperation usually has a very narrow scope.

In the case of democratic countries, they can be further divided into:

- countries with consolidated democracy, involving: free elections, competition of political parties, guaranteed rights and political freedoms, common acceptance of political institutions and democratic rules;
- countries with a non-consolidated democracy characterized by free elections, competition of political parties, guarantee of rights and political freedoms, but lack of consensus of political elites on democratic order;
- countries with limited democracy, characterized by restriction of social participation in social groups with a higher material status; and
- pseudo-democratic countries where political competition is restricted, and elections take place in conditions of intimidation of society (Wojtaszczyk 2003, 267–271).

The functioning of cross-border regions with component parts belonging to countries with a consolidated democracy is the easiest. In other cases, larger or smaller institutional difficulties are encountered.

The second important factor contributing to the development of institutional-legal distance is the territorial-legal structure of the country. From this point of view, the following occur in modern times:

- unitary countries which are internally uniform in terms of legal system, citizenship, system of judicial, legislative, and executive authorities
- federal countries – composed of parts having legal independence and specified scope of political independence (Wojtaszczyk 2003, 260–264)

Unitary countries are currently predominant, but they do not constitute a uniform group. They are differentiated by the degree of centralization of authority at the regional and local level. They can be decentralized countries with functioning autonomic regions participating in legislative and executive governance, or self-governments constituting only a part of executive governance, and unitary centralized countries with administrative-functional regions usually having only a planning-statistical character. Federal countries also include autonomic regions with a broad range of legislative, judicial, and executive entitlements. At the local level in countries with consolidated democracy, self-government structures occur, constituting a part of executive governance.

At the local level, considerable institutional-legal distances rarely occur, unless in cases of cross-border cooperation between democratic and non-democratic countries. Distances occur considerably more often at the regional level. Lack of compatibility between regional entities on both sides of the border can cause the necessity of involvement of central institutions in decision making processes (cf. Jakubowski et al. 2017, 71–79). This concerns the general functioning of the cross-border region, but also for example activities in the scope of coordination of spatial management plans. In the case of competence compatibility of entities of the cross-border region, procedures with prevalence of horizontal relations are applied, and in the case of its lack—vertical.⁹ Attempts to eliminate the institutional distance can provide the basis for undertaking processes of reformation of the political system of regions and subregional (local) units of the neighboring countries.

Conclusion

Spatial economy in cross-border regions has undoubtedly a specific character due to the conditions occurring in their area. The most important are geopolitical conditions, determining the character and functions of the national border. Socio-economic and spatial processes occurring in conditions

9. Of course, the central authority—irrespective of competence compatibility at the regional and local level—must be the decision making entity (e.g., in the case of undertaking investments in the cross-border region of strategic importance for both countries). There is no such need for each case of coordination of spatial management in the area.

of both a closed and open border are also of importance. Whereas the former case involves evident prevalence of negative processes (breaking of previously existing relations, transport and socio-economic peripheralization), in the latter case either strengthening or weakening of the level of development and territorial cohesion of the cross-border region can occur. Institutional-legal distance, occurring between entities of cohesive spatial policy located on both sides of the border, and resulting from different political regimes of the neighboring countries and their territorial-legal structure, can prove to be a very serious hindrance in conducting such policy in cross-border regions.

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