A Look across the River at Frankfurt-Oder and Its Inhabitants: Stereotypes and Liking in the Polish-German Divided Town in View of Social Geography

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ABSTRACT   In this article, we deal with the specifics of the Polish-German borderland based on the example of Słubice and Frankfurt-Oder. Both Germany's position in Europe as well as Poland's geopolitical orientation after 1989 have had an impact on the shape of social relations in the borderland under question. In this article, we apply selected categories from the scope of social geography together with an analysis of sociological empirical results. We conclude that experiencing the space as well as the valorization of German urban and natural elements – both typical of the humanistic coefficient – coexist with the competences of the residents of Słubice: that of communication (using the German language) and interaction (having German friends). In divided towns, opinions about neighbours are hard to modify under the influence of the events taking place far away from the immediate neighbourhood. This has to do with "borderland effect", i.e. more frequent and more intensive contacts with the neighbours from across the river. Frankfurters are characterized by the residents of Słubice as "punctual", "complying with regulations", "outgoing" and "sociable". Liking (generally speaking) of Germans coexists here with such categories of experiencing, important for social geographers, as space, a piece of land, natural landscape, urban landscape, bridge, border, river's width, type of banks, distance between the developed land and the river itself, distance from the state border to particularly attractive sites (e.g. the Old Town, bars and restaurants), and the aesthetics of the surrounding.

KEY WORDS   Słubice, Frankfurt-Oder, Polish-German borderland, stereotypes, liking, social geography

Although the Polish-German borderland enjoyed the interest of social researchers in the times of the Polish People's Republic, it is since 1989 that we have seen a significant growth in analyses of this type. They include a wide spectrum of local social initiatives between Poles and their western neighbours, who take a special place on the map of the Polish borderlands for historical, cultural, political and economic reasons. Looking at the problem from the point of view of the social sciences one can, however, observe that the specifics of this border consists not only in the German neighbour's potential but also in the local conditions (Sternberg 2017). These peculiarities are revealed especially in the towns divided by the state

border, of which Słubice and Frankfurt-Oder constitute an example. The research questions that we pose here are, firstly, which categories applied by social geographers are worth being employed when describing the level of liking towards the neighbours across the river? Secondly, how can the emotional approach of the inhabitants of Słubice towards Frankfurters be described?

The Polish-German borderland in a social perspective

Taking into account a range of factors – in particular Germany's position in Europe and Poland's geopolitical orientation after 1989 – only a few years after the process of making the Polish-German borderland accessible was launched it became a point of reference for the social initiatives accomplished in Poland's other borderlands (Kurcz 1997: 33). With time, particularly on the wave of Poland's integration with the European structures and of the social processes triggered by this, the aforementioned tendency became broadened and differentiated to encompass new spheres of social life (e.g. Polish settlement in various parts of the borderland in question, first of all in the eastern part of the federal state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern). As a result of these transformations the Polish-German borderland has increasingly assumed a social character, as a considerable part of interactions which take place there go beyond the most schematic and most common one, i.e. shopping (indicated by 94 % of respondents) (Dolińska, Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak 2016: 235–237). If for a social scientist the most interesting are those reasons whose accomplishment is connected with getting into contact with the neighbours, then from the perspective of social geography other activities deserve attention: walking, making use of public transport, participation in the cultural life or going for sport, as such activities require a person to be interested in the very fabric of the town – as a place (green areas), and in the products of the material culture thereof (sports facilities, transport infrastructure, institutions of culture) – which accentuates the significance of relations of an instrumental character[1].

At the same time it is noteworthy that twenty-five years of a shared Polish-German neighbourhood, and a great number of the initiatives accomplished in the borderland, have not been able to remove dissonance between the relatively rich, institutionalized activity by political elites – on both local and transnational, including the EU, levels – a base indispensable for formation of the transborder regional identity of the local community; a community that appears rather feeble now (Opiłowska 2014: 278–282). The list of factors hampering the development of transborder identity includes: asymmetry of potentials, mainly economic and political, with the Polish-German relations in the borderland being a consequence thereof; a mode of social phenomena incompatible with political realities (on the local and regional levels); the persistence of different national narrations and symbols (quite often in competition to each other), both on the state and local (borderland) levels (yet to a different extent). It should be noted that besides the process of Europeanization of the Polish-German borderland, in the literature one can find descriptions of the tokens of

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[1] The same categorization of practices, yet with no reference to Słubice, appears in an article by Dolińska, Makaro and Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak (2013: 31–46).

nationalization and, parallel to it, the so-called shifting of this borderland, which means that one state's sphere of influence moves into the territory of the weaker neighbour (Kurcz 2014: 41–50).

In the analysis of the presence of the national component in the reality of borderlands, the category of banal nationalism proposed by Michael Billig (1995) becomes useful as well. Within this framework it is worth considering one of the phenomena by which this banal nationalism comes into prominence in the public sphere: it being "flagged" constantly yet often inconspicuously. This term, Billig argues, stands for continual "flagging", or reminding, of nationhood, for example by means of "the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building" but also "in so many little ways," which are not "consciously registered as reminding" (Billig 1995: 8).[2] By referring the assumptions concerning banal nationalism to the category of borderland, one may note that "flagging" the space is particularly conspicuous on the outskirts of the state, since these are the only places where signs with the note "State Border" occur, with border poles painted in the national colours (sometimes also with the coat of arms), and this is one of the few areas of the intensive and overt presence of border guard functionaries. It needs to be noted, too, that in the prevalent fragment of the Polish-German border, the Odra and Nysa Łużycka rivers[3] embody a peculiar form of flagging; as barriers, they remind us of the existence of this dividing line, which in Poland's remaining Schengen borderlands is already basically unnoticeable. In this way, in the dominant part of this borderland the anthropological context (the awareness that "different people live over there, on the other side of the border") and the infrastructure (the border as a line marked by means of anthropogenic components such as the aforementioned signs and poles) become enriched with a natural platform, the river (Dębicki and Doliński 2013: 10).

A separate issue constituting the world of the Polish-German borderland is the presence of towns divided by the state border – Słubice and Frankfurt-Oder, among others – which as of 1945 constituted single organisms. Bearing in mind the historical circumstances which have shaped the socio-political processes taking place in these settings over decades, Jarosław Jańczak points that in the case of these towns, one can speak of two phenomena relating to state borders: boundarization and (re)frontierization. "The process of boundarization is connected with the creation of nation states in Europe and their attempt to execute sovereignty within precisely marked territory. Whereas (re)frontierization is linked with an erosion of nation state, as a result, among other things, of the European integration. The first process sometimes occurs in the times of tensions and international conflicts when

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2   In this context it is noteworthy to mention "that abstract space, produced and perpetuated through grids, plans, and schedules, is utilized and dominated by the capitalist system of production. So why do we continue to live our lives structured in this way? Lefebvre suggests that socially produced space and time is held in place through administrative policies, social conventions, and technological systems for living so that each day as people wake up to an alarm, commute to work, watch television, or pay bills, this system of space and time is perpetuated and reproduced" (Gieseking et al. 2014: 285).

3   The names of the rivers in the two languages are: "Odra" and "Nysa Łużycka" (Polish) and "Oder" and "Neisse" (German). In the article the Polish names tend to be used.

the centres try to maintain their reign over the state territory, the second one – in the times of peaceful coexistence" (Jańczak 2013: 267). This coexistence opens up new prospects, first of all for the inhabitants of the divided towns who, owing to the small distance, on the wave of integration, have a special opportunity not only to redefine their perception of their neighbours, but also to recognize and give meaning to the space on the other side of the border – the urban system, public facilities, landscape.

As we mentioned, regardless of the multifarious development barriers that the Polish-German borderland has faced, over the last twenty-five years the inhabitants of this area have worked out many platforms of contact. The natural consequence of this has been acquiring and broadening the knowledge about cross border partners, which, however, more than once has assumed the shape of stereotypes; for by means of getting into contact with one another, representatives of both cultures have discovered, strengthened and reduced certain attributes of their neighbours from across the river. The inevitability of these clichés is particularly visible within the framework of the socio-cultural approach to stereotypes since, as Csaba Kiss argues, it is through learning the images of other nations that we become members of our own national community (Kiss 2013: 41); having got familiar with them, one finds it difficult not to make use of this form of knowledge while categorizing the "Others". In other words, stereotypes constitute an irremovable element of relations among groupings that get in touch with each other, and for that reason (and also as a result of it) they are not transparent to each other. This assumption is fully confirmed in the borderlands where mutual relations have the highest probability of coming to pass, becoming a good context for the classical anthropological dichotomy "Us/Them" to be filled with content.

Słubice and Frankfurt-Oder in terms of social geography

The divided town we are interested in is located in the middle part of the Polish-German border, exactly on the Warsaw–Berlin axis. On the southern outskirts of Słubice there is a stop on the most important Polish-German railway crossing, yet in 2016 this rank was established by the significance of the transportation axis and the category of trains operating there (EC Warsaw–Berlin), rather than the number of trains (five), the more so as they did not have a scheduled stop in Słubice. Local train connections are serviced by means of two pairs of trains: Zielona Góra–Berlin and Zielona Góra–Frankfurt-Oder. The German part of the divided town is an important junction (including for rail – with perfect connections to Berlin), which is worth noting in the context of the opinions of some of the inhabitants of Słubice cited below, who declared they crossed the border in order to travel further into Germany. It needs to be added that transborder mobility is facilitated thanks to regular bus connections (as an element of the towns' transportation services).

To the south of the twin town there is also the A2 highway (on the German side labelled 12), which is part of the E30 European transportation corridor (formally, its location was in Świecko–Frankfurt-Oder). As for the local perspective, there is one border crossing in Słubice, and (besides the railway and highway crossings) it is the only corridor to Germany along a stretch of 70 kilometres. As for the border bridge itself, its explanatory potential for the stereotypes and attitudes was revealed by Michelle Brym (2011: 19–21). In her research,

realized by means of photo triggers, she asked her respondents about their associations with this object, and received indications of its functions such as "marking the road home" or "a bridge between the two cities".

Considering the usefulness of the output of social geography for the explanation of such phenomena as stereotype or liking, one should start by noting that in order to avoid the traps of simple categorizing and descriptions of the borders, geographers have learnt to identify and understand the dialectics of the relations between borders and the human environment (Donnan and Wilson 2001). As opposed to the natural approach, the cultural approach to ecological issues is more complicated. A scholar of cultural studies is forced to conceive the space in a different way than a natural scientist or mathematician, which means s/he proceeds in line with the humanistic coefficient – a classical methodological directive put forward by Florian Znaniecki. According to this sociologist, apart from a few exceptions (e.g. astronomers, philosophers, physicians, geometrists and geographers when they work scientifically, and technicians when they work technically):

> Human subjects never experience a universal objective, unqualified, unlimited and unlimitedly divisible space in which all objects, including themselves, exist and move. They experience countless "spaces", qualitatively different, limited, indivisible, variable, and positively or negatively appraised. [...] Such "spaces" or "space values" (in generic sense) include for example occupied or empty places, small or big interiors and – simultaneously – "exteriors": settlements, regions, centres, frontiers, surveyed lands, limitless expenses, "sides" (front, back, right, left, top, bottom), perspectives, roads, pathless tracts, and so on. None of these space values occurs individually in human experience in a way allowing for their separation and in association with other space values with a common geometric relationship. Each is a component of some non-spatial system of values in relation to which it has a specific content and importance. It can be a religious, aesthetic, technological, production, economic or social system. (Znaniecki 1938: 91)[4]

According to Znaniecki, these spaces are commonly "possessed" by people (even for only a short time, e.g. during a rally at a public square) and constitute their "spatial values". It is these values that "do not get geometrically isolated or aggregated as fragments of an objective space". A sociologist, applying the humanistic coefficient, "can see lots of qualitatively different spaces each of which constitutes the self-closed wholeness, separate from others – yet not as a geometric figure but as a collective value, common subject of human experience and evaluation. Just as phonetically identical combination of sounds occurring in various languages in each of them may be a different word, the same is with geographically identical piece of land is not the same social subject in human experience" (Znaniecki 1938: 92), as e.g. the territory of a state, commune, religious or national group.

It is worth bearing in mind these reflections when getting into the products of socially oriented representatives of the natural sciences, such as in studies on landscape. As was pointed out by Dobiesław Jędrzejczyk (2004: 207–209), the studies on landscapes proposed by humanistic geography come down to "the relation between a man their mind and

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4   Translation after R. P. Misra (2002: 74–75).

emotions, and the landscape in which human beings exist. Such interpretation of the urban landscape lets bring the human perception up to the central theoretical position, and to make the interpretation of the meanings of landscape one of the main methodological tasks of urban geography". The humanistic conception of the urban landscape relates it to "the human subjectivity by means of which it loses its exclusive status of objectivity". Consequently, one may assume that the knowledge of a landscape "is always an expression of a certain set of values. [...] For the landscape perceived is not only directness but also interpretation of the sense – thanks to stretching the world of experience beyond the world of senses". This idea, regardless of the fact that it attracts our attention to certain conventionality of beauty, needs to be remembered in the context of the Polish borderlanders accentuating the attractiveness of the fabric of the German part of the town. For although it is difficult to speak about the degree to which the reception of Frankfurters by the inhabitants of Słubice, as diagnosed below, is conditioned by urban factors and factors of spatial arrangement, we argue that the experience of a broadly understood landscape sometimes moulds the emotional atmosphere, especially in the case of divided towns where this space is experienced and understood (meaning *Verstehen*) almost every day, sometimes even without crossing the border.

We are referring to analyses by Henri Lefebvre (1991: 33; cf. Schmid 2008: 44) concerning social aspects of the construction of space: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. The second and third of these aspects are of particular importance to us since they display linguistic and communicative ways of "framing" the same by means of definitions, and, consequently, as Schmid (2008: 37) underlines it, "the material 'order' that emerges on the ground can itself become the vehicle conveying meaning. In this way a (spatial) symbolism develops that expresses and evokes social norms, values, and experiences". Moreover, Kevin Lynch underlines that the need to bring order to one's surroundings is of special emotional and practical significance. Inhabiting an integrated, orderly and clear environment (including the urban) becomes the first foundation of emotional safety. Secondly, thanks to "data" being delivered to collective symbols, together collective memory and group communication may serve as a reference framework for the organization of individual beliefs and group knowledge (Lynch 1960: 4–5). The reflections by Znaniecki, Lefebvre and Lynch pointed to above suggest the possibility of building an interpretative foot-bridge between considerations of a geographical nature (particularly from the perspective of social geography) and the empirical sociological analyses presented in this article (the relation between them is written into the communicative and interaction aspects).

Apart from the asymmetries being a function of the dissimilarities between the neighbours, the two towns feature at present a considerably disproportionate urbanism in Słubice (17 000 inhabitants) – which by the end of WWII was a suburb of Frankfurt – which is approximately four times less populated than the German part of the divided town. According to data from the end of 2015, the commune of Słubice is inhabited by 715 foreigners, among whom Germans are the leaders, whereas in the town itself this number is 668 (Bielecka 2015). As far as Frankfurt-Oder is concerned, at the end of 2014 there were 1600 Poles living there, with a total of 3 634 foreigners in the city. It is also known that among people employed in Frankfurt there are 1 115 Poles; however, the only way to estimate what fraction of them

are Poles is *per analogiam* to the data above, which, however, would not necessarily be an appropriate move (*Kommunalstatistischer*… 2016: 24–25, 44). As for commuting, it seems that only a relatively few people engage in this form of transborder activity. We make this claim based on empirical findings, according to which going to work in Frankfurt did not appear among seven transborder activities most frequently declared by the residents of Słubice. The most seldom-mentioned purpose – visiting a German friend/acquaintance – was mentioned by 3 % of respondents (Dolińska and Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak 2016: 237).

This demographic difference between the two parts of the divided town is clearly distinguishable in the field since Słubice seems to be a small appendage of Frankfurt, a district "attached" to its mid-eastern edges, its recreational and shopping hinterland.[5] This impression is strengthened by the Polish town's spatial arrangement, in which settlement becomes thinner as it gets closer to the river. Looking in the opposite direction, we note that the town "moves away" from the river, which makes those parts of Słubice that are located even only a rather small distance from the border bridge look as if they lost their riverside and frontier character (which is not the case with Frankfurt). This relatively narrow belt of town fabric that clings directly to the river probably also creates a circumstance that accounts for the fact that the Polish banks of the river have not so far been turned into a recreational area, although this big empty space offers much room for manoeuvre here. The question of negligence of this sort is part of a broader problem that was brought up (yet with no relation to the riverside itself) by Brym's interviewees from Słubice. The persons who did not profit from the commercial visits by Germans there complained some time ago that the town authorities had directed their efforts to attract the clientele from across the river (e.g. by investing in new stores) and neglected the recreation infrastructure and entertainment facilities for the inhabitants of Słubice (Brym 2011: 24).

This problem may be summed up with the statement that even such poor infrastructure as the riverside benches looking out to Frankfurt can be treated as an element that contributes to taming the neighbour's space. One can also ask a question: will the inhabitants of Słubice mould their attitudes to the neighbours from Germany, who may be associated with the reason why the local infrastructure is neglected? Another thing here is the way in which Słubice tames Germans with itself: through (excessive) advertisement of cigarette sales, which has established the town's reputation almost as a business card or trade mark. This climaxes at twilights when Słubice exposes its *Zigaretten* with a bright light, whereas the illumination of the riverside of the much bigger Frankfurt is more toned down and devoid of the merchant background. And although, for contrast, one needs to add that Słubice as seen from Frankfurt during the day appears to be an oasis of green and peace, or an invitation

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[5]   The subordination of the Polish part of the divided town is clearly distinguishable from a broader perspective in which Słubice is Frankfurt's suburb, this town being in turn a distant suburb of Berlin. Bearing in mind such a spatial asymmetry, the term "divided town" may even seem misleading, for it may suggest – as it were, contrary to the dictionary meaning – that this division is more or less symmetrical. It is noteworthy that with respect to this, the pair of towns we are interested in sharply contrasts with the remaining two divided towns at the Polish-German border, Zgorzelec/Görlitz and Gubin/Guben.

to the whole region tempting Germans with its beauty, still one cannot but help posing a question about the holistic aesthetic valorization ascribed to Słubice by their neighbours from across the Odra River. The importance of this issue is confirmed by observations made in Zgorzelec, whose inhabitants praise the architectural and spatial attractiveness of Görlitz (Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak 2011: 66–70),[6] as well as with a reflection by Jędrzejczyk (2004: 211) that "landscape is *sui generis* a message received by a human on the same terms as he/she perceives any other linguistic message". According to Umberto Eco's conception, one of the functions landscape may play is emotional: "a message may trigger an emotional reaction", e.g. "it is beautiful" (Jędrzejczyk 2004: 211).

Similarly to Zgorzelec/Görlitz, the divided towns that are the subject of investigation here show a separate urban topography. Their centres lie far from each other, and this distance is a consequence of socialist urban planning. Today, it is not realistic to establish a new centre along the river, not least because such an idea would have a negative effect on the ecological system of the townscape by destroying green areas. Not even the aesthetic arguments are in favour of intensive development. The real scenario for a common urban area could be a mixture of services (like cafés, bars) and spaces for recreation activities; the price differences in services between Germany and Poland encourage the establishment of gastro-venues on the Polish riverbank with a view of the historical townscape (Dębicki and Tamáska 2014: 7). As we noted, this would be of particular importance for Słubice, which currently seems to have its back towards the other side of the river.

Once more referring to the category of banal nationalism, it is noteworthy that its importance is revealed especially in divided towns. If we consider cases where the border runs some distance from a given town, creating a sort of transition area, then in Słubice (as well as in Gubin and Zgorzelec) the town's western edge at the same time constitutes the state's end; this means that the state flag – or the EU flag with the words *Rzeczpospolita Polska*[7] written on it – is here necessary for administrative reasons. Consequently, "flagging" the state's beginning/end is noticeable in these towns on an everyday basis; the inhabitants see it while doing the most trivial activities, e.g. while having a walk along the river bank. If all this border infrastructure – signs, poles, guards – became written into the stream, deriving from Romantic ideology, but also from the era of the Polish People's Republic, then in relation to contemporary times we could obtain a vision of a *sui generis* mission or even an imperative to keep a symbolic guard at Poland's borders; a consequence of this metaphor would be the attitude these borderlanders would have towards Polishness, Poland's western borderlands, and their German neighbours (Dębicki and Doliński 2013: 10).

Because knowing the German language is a competence that makes it easier for an individual to experience the space around them, some practical manifestations of this resource should be paid attention to. Reading German signage, initiating conversations, participation in "real life" going on right next to us, and understanding Germans in their

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[6]   See also Galasińska, Rollo and Meinhof (2002: 118–119), who report a range of evidence that the inhabitants of Zgorzelec have a (very) positive image of Görlitz; this, however, does not necessarily result in having positive attitudes to Germans.

[7]   *Rzeczpospolita Polska* ("The Republic of Poland") is the state's formal name (in Polish).

own environment (understanding in mental and cultural, not linguistic, terms) may be treated as abilities contributing to the perception of Germanness – both their material culture and the human factor. It is worth mentioning that a fuller experience of the borderland space is facilitated by a mixture of linguistic competence and having German acquaintances on the other side of the border.

And finally, one needs to underline once again the fact that the Polish-German border is marked mostly by the river. This fact, by definition, means that initiation and intensification of social interactions was possible only by making the border and the neighbour's territory more accessible. It is not only about an obvious fact of eliminating the infrastructure failure dating back prior to 1989, but also about enabling the inhabitants of both banks of the river to make use of the blessings of the Schengen Agreement – for the possibility to cross the border in a formally unhampered way cannot be fully discounted in a situation where people are inable to get to the other side of the river. This, in turn, to a relatively large degree reveals itself in the case of divided towns with considerable concentrations of people. In this sense the Polish-German borderland, as compared to the Polish-Czech, Polish-Slovak or Polish-Lithuanian border areas – even despite the mountainous character of the first two – appears to be underprivileged, for the costs needed to open up a border crossing there are lower than in the case of the border running along a river. One can thus argue that a river, as an important element of the space, "highlights the substantial inevitability of the border" (Kurczewska 2009: 197). For although the facilities resulting from the participation of Poland and Germany in the Schengen Agreement make the act of crossing the border between them trouble-free, yet this relatively big space occupied by the Odra River dividing Słubice and Frankfurt is extraposed in the awareness of the towns' inhabitants onto the border itself; in this way the border becomes associated with the river (including its width) and a barrier posed by each watercourse. It needs to be added that in such a perspective not only the towns of Słubice and Frankfurt but also almost the whole of the Polish-German border, establishes a separate body marking the type and character of transborder relations.

Empirical findings

While discussing the question of sympathy and stereotypes the inhabitants of Słubice have towards Frankfurters, we are going to refer to the results of the research project "Borderland Location of Słubice in the Opinions of its Residents".[8] The research was conducted in Słubice in May 2015. The sampling method was based on the address list of the blocks of flats, and flats themselves, obtained from the Statistical Office in Zielona Góra, Branch Słubice. A simple two-stage cluster sampling was applied. Firstly, in the course of a simple random

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[8]   The Polish title of the research project is "Pograniczne położenie Słubic w opiniach ich mieszkańców". This study is an element of a bigger project regarding three divided towns in the Polish-German borderland, managed by Kamilla Dolińska, Julita Makaro and Natalia Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak from the Department of Sociology of Borderland, Institute of Sociology, University of Wrocław. We would like to thank these scholars for sharing their empirical materials with us.

sampling without replacement (SRSWR) a household was sampled and then, by means of the same procedure – a unit. A trained interviewer requested to interview a person who was supposed to celebrate his or her birthday soon. When setting the size of the sample, a finite population correction factor was applied. The required sample size was 365 persons, the level of significance was 0.05 and the standard error did not exceed 5.1 %. Face-to-face contact in a schedule-structured interview was employed in the research. Some of the questions referred to stereotypical German features that should not be omitted when carrying out an analysis of the way in which the twin town is experienced.[9]

Although "a town/city is such a huge work of civilization and lasts for so long" that it can be treated "as if it were a work of nature", yet it should be added that "landscape is a product of culturally determined subjectivity" (Jędrzejczyk 2004: 219). As we have already indicated, man experiences a town/city by means of reflexive integration of elements of memory, knowledge and imagination on a sensory plane (taste, smell, touch, image) and "intellectual" plane (concept, text, understanding). In the context of our considerations it is the competences of two types that refer to this reflexive integration: that of communication (knowing the German language) and that of interaction (having German acquaintances). As can be inferred from the results of the research presented below, the experience of Poles of the German space across the river is based on positive valorization of material and non-material elements of this space. With the inhabitants of Słubice, such a direction of valorization is written into a sphere of liking and disliking that they declare, which – bearing in mind Georg Simmel's observations – turns out to be controversial. For, over one hundred years ago, Simmel signalled that, on the one hand, aspects of indifference rather cannot be written into close relations on the group and individual levels since this proximity forces some kind of reaction; and the fact is that whether we react to a stimulus positively or negatively seems to be of secondary importance. On the other hand, in the reality of a big city a variety of stimuli and the saturation of one's everyday life with short-lived and fleeting contacts may deprive us of mutual emotional reactions leading to indifference which, according to Simmel, is a defence reaction (Simmel 1997: 154). Thus, his reflections and our analyses presented below suggest that analytical attention paid to the area of indifference is as cognitively interesting and practically important as the area of liking and disliking, especially in the context of divided towns in Poland's western borderland.

It could also be noted that the expression in interviews of liking, treated as an indicator of social relations between nations, tends to be treated as a form of sociological reflection which may bring interesting information on psycho-social condition of one grouping evaluating others, *inter alia* with regard to the shape of its identity or the level of its tolerance (Bokszański 2002: 255–256). Despite this, liking, as a separate analytical category, is not often subject to conceptualization considerations; it is usually assumed – and that is what we have done in this article – that liking poses a correlate of other notions: a stereotype or an evaluative dimension of attitude. In this sense, this category is constituted by the contents conditioning the gist of both these phenomena, which means that emotional factors often play

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[9]   For more information see: Dolińska and Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak, "German Neighbours from Across the River – Insiders? Strangers? Others?" (in the present volume).

here a substantial role. "Often", however, does not mean "always", and "substantially" directs our attention also to other circumstances. Both provisos appear to gain momentum in the case of borderland areas, and even more so in divided towns where the image of the neighbour is based more than on emotions alone, on relatively frequent and – more importantly – personal observations leading to deeper reflection. One can also assume that these factors translate into higher durability of people's opinions, which are less vulnerable to events stimulating the overall population's imagination – "random", taking place "somewhere out in Germany" and whose actors are "some unidentified Germans" – and are to a larger extent built upon what is visible and perceptible "here and now".

The attitudes expressed by the inhabitants of Słubice about their neighbours across the river can be summarized in terms of the following numbers: 48.2 % of them declare liking Frankfurters, whereas 47.7 % express indifference (Table 1)[10].

Table 1: Attitudes towards Frankfurters

What is your attitude to Frankfurters?	Frequency	Percentage
I like them very much	25	6.8
I like them	151	41.4
They are indifferent to me	174	47.7
I do not like them	6	1.6
I definitely do not like them	5	1.4
I do not know	4	1.1
Total	365	100.0

Source: Borderland Location of Słubice in the Opinions of its Residents

Liking of Frankfurters is clearly connected with having acquaintances on the other side of the river, whereas indifference or even antipathy refer to those people who do not have social contacts there (Table 2). Having German acquaintances is correlated with sex, length of time living in Słubice (e.g. from birth), and with reported experience with cooperation with Germans (including linguistic competence; see below).

As the research shows, males, a bit more often than females, declare having German acquaintances, and lack of social contacts is definitely more characteristic of females (35.4 % as compared to 18.3 % of males). Interestingly, people born in Słubice declare a lack of such acquaintances more often than those who moved to the town (34.5 % versus 21.7 %). Having acquaintances may result in a frequency and type of contacts with German neighbours, the more so as a huge role is here played by linguistic competence.

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[10] It is noteworthy that such a result can be interpreted analogically to the attitude by the inhabitants of Zgorzelec towards their neighbours from Görlitz. Such a phenomenon – a mixture of indifference and liking with almost no dislike at all – has been referred to by us as 'warm indifference' (Dębicki and Doliński 2011: 143, 2013), and this term can also be applied also to the reality of Słubice and Frankfurt.

Going on to the next part of the analysis, it is noteworthy that those who speak German fluently cooperate with Germans almost five times more often that those who do not speak the language well (31.0 % versus 6.7 %). The gap grows bigger among people who do not know German at all – lack of cooperation is declared eleven times more often by those who do not have this competence.

Table 2: Attitudes to Frankfurters and having German acquaintances in Germany

Q 43.2 What is your attitude to Frankfurters?		My acquaintances in Germany are Germans		Total
		No	Yes	
They are indifferent to me	Numbers	33	72	105
	Percentage out of 43.2	**50.8 %**	41.9 %	44.3 %
I like them	Numbers	29	99	128
	Percentage out of 43.2	44.6 %	**57.6 %**	54.0 %
I do not like them	Numbers	3	1	4
	Percentage out of 43.2	**4.6 %**	0.6 %	1.7 %
Total	Numbers	65	172	237
	Percentage out of 43.2	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

Source: Borderland Location of Słubice in the Opinions of its Residents

Communication competence is thus the next statistically significant feature of the context under investigation. Respondents' knowledge of German is relatively poor: every fifth person speaks it fluently (20 %), 66 % make use of it in a passive way or are familiar with elementary vocabulary only, and 14 % do not know the language at all. Indifference is strongly connected with respondents with very poor knowledge of German or no knowledge at all, which is in fierce opposition to the situation for respondents who know the language used by Poland's western neighbour well or very well (Table 3).

It is noteworthy that sex, education and age are the features that – owing to their statistically significant dependencies with linguistic competences – set up potential contexts for a certain emotional response to the German neighbour to appear. Males make use of German a bit more; in each category of German language competency there are more males than females, and the biggest differences are seen at the most advanced level (24.0 % versus 17.3 %) and among those who lack knowledge of German (7.8% of males and 19.3% of females).

Flexible knowledge of German is positively correlated with higher education: the higher it is the more respondents declare the most advanced knowledge of German (primary – 11.1 %; technical – 14.6 %; secondary – 15.9 %; higher – 36.2 %). Just the opposite situation refers to a lack of this competence (respectively: 36.1 %, 19.1 %, 12.4 %, 3.2 %). Moreover, the highest-level language competence is shown by respondents aged 34–49 (and a bit worse, aged 18–33), and the lowest level or a lack of this competence is shown by those over 55 years of age.

Table 3: Attitude to Frankfurters and self-evaluation of one's knowledge of German

Q 46. What is your attitude to Frankfurters?		How do you evaluate your knowledge of German?				Total
		I understand German and communicate in it fluently	I understand German but am able to answer simple questions only	I know some German words and expressions only	I do not know German	
They are indifferent to me	Numbers	26	51	68	29	174
	Percentage out of 46	**35.1 %**	**44.7 %**	**55.7 %**	**58.0 %**	48.3 %
I like them	Numbers	46	60	52	17	175
	Percentage out of 46	62.2 %	52.6 %	42.6 %	34.0 %	48.6 %
I do not like them	Numbers	2	3	2	4	11
	Percentage out of 46	2.7 %	2.6 %	1.6 %	8.0 %	3.1 %
Total	Numbers	74	114	122	50	360
	Percentage out of 46	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

Source: Borderland Location of Słubice in the Opinions of its Residents

The levels of liking and indifference we are dealing with are also connected with the frequency of answers about Frankfurters' particular positive or negative features. Table 4 shows detailed data (rank-decreasing).

Comparing the "definite" evaluations made by respondents declaring liking and indifference, we should underline that the former point at Frankfurters' positive attributes more intensively. As for the majority of features, the former, at least twice more often than the latter (sometimes even more than three times) point at the positive dimension in a definite way.

The above-mentioned regularity can also be confirmed with the frequency of indications concerning the first five positions occupied by particular attributes in the ranking (column "Position"): well-mannered (72 % – position 1 among the ones who declare liking, versus 15.1 % – position 13 among those who declare indifference), punctual (respectively: 60 % – position 2 versus 33.1 % – position 2), complying with regulations (respectively: 56 % – position 3 versus 28.5 % – position 3), outgoing (respectively: 56 % – position 3 versus 41.3 % – position 1), clean (respectively: 52 % – position 4 versus 25 % – position 6), resourceful (respectively: 52 % – position 4 versus 17.4 % – position 10), sociable (respectively: 52 % – position 4 versus 28.5 % – position 3), and cheerful (respectively: 48 % – position 5 versus 25.6 % – position 5).

Table 4: Indifference and liking versus Frankfurters' features (ranked)

Position	Frankfurters are indifferent to me	Definitely yes [%]	Numbers	Position	I like Frankfurters very much	Definitely yes [%]	Numbers
1	outgoing	41.3	71	1	well-mannered	72	18
2	**punctual**	**33.1**	**57**	2	**punctual**	**60**	**15**
3	**complying with regulations**	**28.5**	**49**	3	**complying with regulations**	**56**	**14**
3	sociable	28.5	49	3	outgoing	56	14
4	patriotic	27.5	47	4	clean	52	13
5	pedantic	25.6	44	4	resourceful	52	13
5	cheerful	25.6	44	4	sociable	52	13
6	clean	25.0	43	5	cheerful	48	12
7	rich	21.1	36	6	tolerant	44	11
8	nice	19.2	33	6	pedantic	44	11
9	honest	18.6	32	6	patriotic	44	11
10	resourceful	17.4	30	6	helpful	44	11
10	ambitious	17.4	30	6	ambitious	44	11
11	tolerant	17.0	29	7	rich	36	9
11	hard-working	17.0	29	7	unaggressive	36	9
12	with a sense of humour	16.9	29	7	intelligent	36	9
12	intelligent	16.9	29	7	nice	36	9
12	optimist	16.9	29	7	honest	36	9
13	well-mannered	15.1	26	8	hard-working	32	8
13	unaggressive	15.1	26	8	with a sense of humour	32	8
13	helpful	15.1	26	9	modest	24	6
14	hospitable	14.0	24	9	hospitable	24	6
14	modest	14.0	24	9	optimist	24	6
15	sincere	12.2	21	10	humble	20	5
16	teetotaller	7.6	13	10	altruistic	20	5
16	religious	7.6	13	10	sincere	20	5
17	generous	4.7	8	11	generous	12	3
18	altruistic	4.1	7	11	heroic	12	3
18	heroic	4.1	7	12	teetotaller	8	2
19	humble	2.3	4	12	religious	8	2

Source: Borderland Location of Słubice in the Opinions of its Residents

Moreover, the thirty features identified for evaluation by the respondents to whom Germans are indifferent can be limited to nineteen positions (assuming that a few features were given the same number of indications), while in the case of those who declare liking

– they were limited to twelve positions. This gap grows bigger if we take into account the "rather yes" answer (23 versus 11). Thus, those who are indifferent not only point at Frankfurters' positive attributes with lesser intensity but also – due to the structure of the range being more "flattened" – they are less decided as to the importance of particular features. One may say that the power of indifference by which they are driven is biased towards the will to avoid the risk of giving univocal answers. Whereas respondents who declare liking are more strong-minded as for underlining that it is the simultaneous action of many various personal, interactive, contextual features that matters in a range of real social situations. Such a declaration of liking a neighbour, which is so "controversial" or equivocal in terms of evaluation owing to the existence of its various dimensions (historical, political, economic), requires that a respondent be more intellectually (but also emotionally) engaged – that they think over all these shades of evaluation more thoroughly – than is the case with indifference. In this sense, being a more univocal feeling than indifference, liking appears to be an emotion that is, so to say, more risky for a respondent.

Here we should thus make an additional observation. As for the thirteen features analyzed (tolerance, moderation, being well-mannered, pedantry, being a teetotaller, richness, punctuality, patriotism, compliance with regulations, resourcefulness, sociability, religiosity, being an ambitious person), the difference between indications made by people of various emotional attitudes about Frankfurters has the following pattern: moderate grades ("rather yes") are more often presented by those who show indifference than those reporting liking; simultaneously, definite evaluations ("definitely yes") are more often made by the latter than by those who articulate indifference. Table 5 presents this regularity for the four (out of five) most-often indicated features from Table 4.

Table 5: Indifference and liking versus the "definitely" and "rather" level of Frankfurters' features

Frankfurters are indifferent to me		Percentage	Numbers	I like Frankfurters very much		Percentage	Numbers
well-mannered	definitely yes	15.1	26	Well-mannered	definitely yes	72	18
	Rather yes	37.8	65		rather yes	20	5
punctual	Definitely yes	33.1	57	punctual	definitely yes	60	15
	Rather yes	31.4	54		rather yes	20	5
complying with regulations	Definitely yes	28.5	49	complying with regulations	definitely yes	56	14
	Rather yes	31.4	54		rather yes	28	7
sociable	Definitely yes	28.5	49	sociable	definitely yes	52	13
	Rather yes	38.4	66		rather yes	32	8

Source: Borderland Location of Słubice in the Opinions of its Residents

Although negative features are not the subject of our concern here, it is noteworthy to point out that only two negative evaluations (swaggering – 19.3 % of indications, and

miserly – 16.5 %) got on for every fifth indication. Every tenth respondent pointed to Frankfurters being: egoistic, alcohol-abusing, irreligious, lazy, moderate, not heroic (all between 11.9 % and 8.8 % of indications). The remaining features, i.e. twenty-two negative features, did not exceed the level of seven indications.

Conclusion

In this article we have presented the possibility of combining qualitative sociological data with quantitative data deriving from social geography. In answering the research questions posed on these grounds at the beginning, we can notice that the emotional attitudes of the inhabitants of Słubice towards Frankfurters are expressed by means of statements of a symmetrical coexistence of liking and indifference, while negative emotions are almost totally absent. As far as the most frequently mentioned stereotypes are concerned, we distinguished declarations, firstly, by the respondents who are indifferent towards Frankfurters, who pointed to features like "outgoing", "punctual", "complying with regulations" and "sociable" as characteristics of Frankfurters; and secondly, by those who declared liking towards these neighbours and so pointed to features like being "well-mannered", "punctual", "complying with regulations" and "outgoing".

When juxtaposing the above-mentioned results concerning levels of liking of inhabitants of Słubice for Frankfurters and nation-wide data – Poles' attitudes towards Germans, as measured in a 2017 survey – we note that in the twin town in question, the approach to the German neighbours is a bit more positive, yet this tendency appears as if in the background. A similar percentage of respondents declare liking for their German neighbours (48.2 % in Słubice and 43.0 % in the nation-wide survey), but definitely fewer people have a negative attitude towards Germans (respectively: 3.0 % and 22.0 %), with an analogically higher percentage of those declaring indifference (47.7 % and 30.0 %) (the results of the nation-wide survey quoted after: *Attitude*… 2015).[11] This regulation was also described by Dolińska and Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak (2016: 227–228), who have drawn this conclusion referring the results of their own research with regard to different empirical material yet also obtained in the nation-wide survey (carried out by the Institute of Public Affairs in Warsaw).

As for stereotypes ascribed to Germans, Frankfurters are characterized by their neighbours from Słubice most of all as "punctual", "complying with regulations" as well as "outgoing" and "sociable."[12] Referring this set of adjectives to the opinions expressed in the nation-wide survey in which Germans as a whole were described, we observe convergence with regard to features describing "discipline", "order" and "being organized" (Germans as "exact", "well-organized", "punctual", "law-abiding") with an absence of such attributes as "outgoing" or "social" (the nation-wide data quoted after: *Perception*… 2015). As

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[11] There were also many fewer respondents in Słubice (1.1 %) than in the nation-wide survey (5 %) who answered "I don't know".

[12] These characteristics result from joining together the two attributes that were the most frequent among respondents declaring liking and indifference towards Frankfurters (see Table 4); the percentage of respondents expressing antipathy towards the Germans was 3 % (Table 1).

analogical regularity was also observed in the cases of the two other pairs of divided towns in the Polish-German borderland – Zgorzelec/Görlitz (Dębicki and Doliński 2011: 116–119) and Gubin/Guben (Dębicki and Makaro 2017: 357–358) – it is noteworthy to refer to the two hypothetical explanations suggested for the regularity. Firstly, this regularity may follow from the methodology of the research – i.e. the fact that in the nation-wide survey respondents were not offered certain features which, consequently, could have not been expressed; secondly, we may be encountering here the so-called "borderland effect" by which borderlanders are more likely to notice the "human" face of their neighbours owing to more opportunities for direct contact and experience (more frequent and more intensive than it is the case for Poles as a whole) (Dębicki and Makaro 2017: 358–359).

Referring to the socio-cultural approach to stereotypes that we have employed in this article, it needs to be stressed that no matter how long-lived these images are, they are not immortal. For there may appear some favourable circumstances or new significant experiences that will weaken or change these clichés, and this very process may result in both positive and negative alternations (Kiss 2013: 41–42). What is meant by this is the enhancement or weakening of the features treated as positive or negative, and the factor which may play an important role here is the fabric of the town.

As for the second question – the categories made use of by social geographers which could be taken into account when trying to explain liking between the inhabitants of the divided towns – attention needs to be paid to the socio-cultural functions fulfilled by: the bridge, border, space, a piece of land, natural landscape, urban landscape, and the aesthetics of the surroundings. Treating these phenomena in practical terms one can point to a range of variables which seem significant in the context of stereotypes, preferences in the divided towns. They include: the relation of demographic and spatial potentials (the size of both organisms), the river's width, the character of the riverbanks (e.g. their regulation and development), the distance between developed land and the river itself, the distance between spots of particular interest – e.g. the Old Town, gastronomic venues, and other public facilities – from the state border, and generally conceived aesthetics of the other side of the border.

As we have mentioned, "the border infrastructure" (poles, signs etc.) in a divided town becomes a special form of Billig's flagging of space – indispensable, fully understood, not to say natural. This circumstance makes us wonder if this does not lead us to an even more effective form of "reminders of the homeland" facilitating the reproduction of banality in the borderland (Billig 1995: 93). Or maybe, vice versa, this infrastructure – owing to its commonality and obviousness and due to the fact that it appears along a border which has for a decade been friendly and fully permeable – loses its peculiarity and hence its "flagging potential" and becomes not much more than a gadget? At present these questions require deeper investigation, yet even now one can speak of a different role that these phenomena could potentially play in a divided town (or, more generally, in the borderland).

Searching for a link between the answers to both research questions posed at the beginning of the article, one needs to note that for a sociologist the categories to which we pointed that derive from social geography focus within the scope of humanistic coefficient's "acting" which cannot be analyzed without taking into account the simultaneous ways of experiencing

spatial values and understanding them. This reflexive link is definitely enhanced for residents of Słubice by having German acquaintances and communicating in German.

At the same time, however, although we do not neglect the fact that some elements of the spatial arrangement of the divided towns may become a factor that broadens our knowledge of the circumstances under which neighbours become stereotyped, one should be aware of the limited impact of the infrastructural factors on the social sphere. For although "creating public space that would facilitate meetings and everyday communication" is in a given case "of an utmost importance for the process of its integration it is good to remember that such projects are very rarely accompanied by coherent and many years' visions of its socio-cultural development which, as if, is supposed to appear as an effect of new roads, bridges, playgrounds or connections" (Zenderowski and Brzezińska 2014: 175).

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