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Exploring Cross-Border Labor Commuting as a Practice of Tactical Mobility

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Abstract:

Within the last few years there has been an increased interest in the interplay of structure and agency in border studies. Following the strategic-relational approach, these studies generally focus on territorial actors, particularly subnational institutions and how they use their capacities, to establish transnational cooperation and networks, to overcome the obstacles resulting from national and / or multi-governmental policies. Like subnational organizations and institutions on border regions, cross-border commuters develop and use tactics to overcome the socio-economic and legal risks and crises. Based on the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews with commuters from Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Poland, it is demonstrated that by being mobile across the borders, commuters aim at gaining flexibility and a relatively advantageous position in housing and labor markets of different countries. This paper, by referring to the strategic-relational approach, argues that cross-border mobility is practiced as a form of tactical mobility in which commuters constantly revise their mobility practices, depending on new, emerging socio-economic conditions. Moreover, by referring to the concept of de Certeau's (1984) tactic*, three main typologies of cross-border mobility are conceptualized.*

Keywords:

border asymmetries; cross-border commuting; labor mobility; strategic-relational approach; tactical mobility

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Introduction

In recent years, due to the developments in telecommunication technologies and the availability of cheap flights, more and more people have been practicing mobility across borders. Within the last decade or so, the EU has announced new declarations to promote cross-border labor mobility between

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member states. Particularly with the declaration announced in 2011, freedom of movement for workers within the European Union has been encouraged. As a result of the eased conditions and the policies on labor mobility, cross-border labor mobility is practiced by more and more people across Europe.

Cross-border commuting is highly dependent on legal frameworks that regulate social security, taxation, and residency in at least two countries when commuters need to constantly adapt their mobility, in terms of its frequency and temporality, as well as living arrangements in both destination and home countries. In a 2018 Eurostat report, cross-border commuters are defined as those who commute at least once a week to a country other than where they live and then travel back to the country of residence (2018, 22). Some studies extend the definition of cross-border commuting by including different temporalities of mobilities between the places of employment and residence. Accordingly, the term cross-border commuting "might encompass weekly commuting, part-time commuting or working at different workplaces in different countries for one or several employers" (Klatt 2014, 355). Similarly, Hansen and Schack (1997), in their research about cross-border commuting between Denmark and Germany, define the term by putting the emphasis on the employment and legal regulations, and say that "a cross-border commuter is a person who has his/her legal residence in Denmark or Germany, while at the same time for the reason of her/his workplace is included in the regulations of tax and social security of the neighboring country" (Hansen and Schack 1997, 356).

Previous studies on cross-border commuting in different regions of Europe, mostly from a quantitative research perspective, have outlined the characteristics of this mobility by analyzing the pull and push factors in the labor and housing markets and family dynamics (Hansen and Schack 1997; Knotter 2014). Among those, income differences and unemployment rates are the major pull and push factors behind commuting to neighboring countries (Mathä and Wintr 2009; Eliasson et al. 2003; Janssen 2000). In addition to labor market opportunities, factors such as common language in neighboring regions (Mathä and Wintr 2009), marital status, and gender play important roles in commuters' decision-making regarding cross-border mobility. Accordingly, single people are more likely to be mobile than people with children and a partner (Eliasson et al. 2003, 835; Gottholmseder and Theorl 2007), and women are less likely to commute (Huber and Nowotny 2013; Gottholmseder and Theorl 2007; Drevon and Gerber 2012; Wiesböck et al. 2016). A recent study on cross-border commuting in the Central European Region (Centrope), from the border regions of Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic to Austria, finds that although the commuters earn much less

than their colleagues who hold Austrian citizenship, their wages are "more than twice as much as non-mobile employees in Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic" (Wiesböck et al. 2016, 196).

Besides the higher income levels in the host country that attract commuters, it is discussed that other factors such as the housing situation and the relative merits of the welfare state are also important in attracting people to commute, particularly in the Central European Region (Barthel 2010; Balogh 2013; Wiesböck and Verwiebe 2017), and on the Dutch-German border where the real-estate prices show great differences. Dutch commuters reside in the German town of Kranenburg, located near the border with the Netherlands, while maintaining their jobs in the Netherlands, because of better housing conditions in Germany (Strüver 2005; Van Houtum and Gielis 2006).

A similar case of cross-border commuting, which is not solely driven by employment opportunities but also by the motivations of better housing, public services, taxation, and the advantages of the social security system, is the cross-border mobility practiced between Szczecin in Poland and the Vorpommern region in Germany. Barthel (2010, 54-55) argues that the main reasons for cross-border commuting from Poland are the public childcare services and the advantages in housing. The most visible political impact of the commuting from Poland to Vorpommern in Germany is the anti-foreignness discourse of far-right German politics (Balogh 2013). According to Balogh's research with commuters from Poland in Vorpommern, their mobility is instrumentalized by far-right politicians to raise an anti-migrant position, which can be observed in the discriminatory behaviors of the local population and can create tension in everyday lives, such as through Germans' claim that "the Poles are taking away their jobs" (Balogh 2013, 201).

Although cross-border labor mobility differs from one-directional labor migration in its frequency, temporality, geographical proximity, and commuters' efforts in setting living arrangements in both destination and home countries, it is, like one-directional labor migration, framed by a complex set of socio-economic, legal, and historical conditions on the one hand and personal pull and push factors, as well as needs and motivations of the commuters and their capacity to act on the other hand. Hence, this practice is constituted through the dialectical relationship between structure and agency; nation-states and their strategies at the macro level and the capacity of the territorial actors and their tactics at the micro level. Among these actors involved in the cross-border mobility, various border institutions and organizations and cooperation among them and their strategies in border regions, particularly following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and

measures taken following the outbreak, are being researched in the border studies. However, commuters' capacity to overcome obstacles emerge from structural settings and changes is less studied phenomenon.

In this article, following the discussion on theoretical framework on strategic-relational approach and tactical mobility, an overview of the uneven developments in German border regions between the Netherlands, Poland, and Luxembourg will be provided. Particularly, through the analysis of commuters' work-biographies, motivations, expectations and narrations of problem solving, cross-border labor mobility is argued as a tactical act, agency of the "weak" (de Certeau 1984), practiced to overcome risks and/or take advantage of the border asymmetries. The following parts of the paper argue different typologies of tactical mobility practiced in above mentioned border regions by focusing on the findings of the empirical research.

Theoretical Framework

Cross-border relations are like any other social relations, practices of power and domination as well as refiguration and resistance. It is an interplay of the structure and the agency between governance, socio-economic structures and the actors involved in it, such as; institutions and the commuters themselves. Following the discussion on institutional turn (Jessop 2001, 2008, 2013), scholars in border studies attempt to understand institutions and their cooperation in the border regions by applying a strategic-relational approach. It is argued that there is a dialectical relationship between the governance (policies of the nation states and the EU) that define border regimes, and the practices of territorial actors, mostly institutions and other subnational organisations. Additionally, territorial actors develop strategies, such as establishing networks and taking action through territorial cooperation etc., to adopt constantly changing conditions, which in turn result in revisions of the structure.

This holistic relationship between structure and agency has been discussed by Giddens (1984) in structuration theory. Accordingly, Giddens argues that structure and actors' actions need to be understood in a mutual relationship instead of a dualism. Despite its emphasis on relational approach between structure and agency, Jessop (2001) argues that the structuration theory pays less attention to the "the differential capacities of actors and their actions to change different structures" (Jessop 2001, 1222) and hence lacks to overcome the duality between the structure and agency. In turn, Jessop suggests the strategic-relational approach to understand the power and domination relationship between structure and

agency. According to strategic-relational approach, structures are understood as "strategic in their form, content, and operation; and actions are thereby treated analytically as structured, more or less context sensitive, and structuring" (Jessop 2001, 1222-1223). Therefore, studying structures need to include the analysis of "structurally inscribed strategic selectivities" and actions in "structurally oriented strategic calculations." In this sense, the strategic-relational approach sees structure and agency in a dialectical but also dynamic relation in which the emphasis is put on capacity of actors, particularly institutions, to take action instead of positioning them as passive receivers of the structural strategies.

Following the strategic-relational approach and its emphasis on institutions, which Jessop calls as *institutional turn* (2001), scholars in border studies focus on institutions to understand the strategies, such as networks and other forms of cooperation established across borders to overcome difficulties resulting from policy changes and governance at the local, national, and European level (González-Gómez and Estrella Gualda 2017, Nienaber and Wille 2020, Plangger 2018). These studies argue that the ‚inbetweeness,' multispatial and multilevel governance structures of the border regions could be seen as an opportunity for the institutions to reach their goals and interests beyond the nation state policies (Nienaber and Wille 2020). Accordingly, institutions and subnational authorities are territorial actors that develop macro-regional strategies, usually in the forms of networks and cooperation, to cope with the difficulties caused by the nation-state policies and to create new opportunities (Plangger 2018, 2019). Whereas in some cases the strategies are established to overcome the risks caused by crisis, such as the crisis emerged following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (Kajta & Opiłowska 2021). Acknowledging the capacity of the institutions, it is also argued that as a result of strategic selectivities, impacts of the structure differ on various territorial actors where some are more privileged and advantageous while others struggle with rather unfavourable positions.

Despite its emphasis on the dynamic relationship between the structure and agency, the strategic-relational approach focuses mainly on subnational and territorial institutions as main actors that bear the capacity to act strategically. However, like subnational organizations and institutions, individuals are also territorial actors who are subject to the power practiced by the border regimes and multi-governance. Hence, commuters' practices need to be understood as a way of mobilizing their capacity for coping with obstacles resulting from nation-state or European policies, or benefiting from spatial differences. Macro-level political and financial changes have direct impacts on mobility practices across borders. The global economic crisis in 2018 for instance resulted changes in fiscal policies

of the nation-states. But also, political upheavals such as Brexit, had direct impacts on border regimes and the mobility across borders. Border closures following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and constant changes that revised the entry policies of the countries and working conditions of the cross-border commuters can be seen as strategies developed in nation-state level. Particularly within the first phase of the pandemic, European countries have taken measures at the national level that were not always coherent with others which caused confusions and insecurities for the cross-border commuters and territorial institutions.

For a better understanding of the commuters' mobility across borders as the ‚agency', de Certeau's distinction on strategy and tactic is helpful. Unlike the strategic-relational approach, de Certeau's concept of strategy puts the emphasis on power relations that is exercised by isolation of place. Accordingly, strategy needs to create or isolate its ‚own place.' He argues that the *strategy* is: "calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated" (1984, 35-36). Hence, strategy enables management of the threats and facilitates reaching targets. Naturally, like the threats and targets do, strategies need to be revised constantly. de Certeau argues that tactic emerges in this case as an ‚agency of the weak' that actors practice to minimize the risks or gain an advantageous position within these power relations. If strategy needs to create and limit its own place and dependent on place, tactical act needs to reduce the spatial dependence. He defines tactic as:

> [A] calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. [B]ecause it does not have a place; a tactic depends on time–it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing." Whatever it wins it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them to their own ends forces alien to them (1984, 21).

Based on de Certeau's approach, the term "tactical mobility" (Kahveci, Karacan, Kosnick 2020) is developed to grasp the dynamic structure of cross-border labor commuting in which commuters are frequently mobile between two or more countries depending on changing "costs and benefits", and are constantly adapting their mobilities in response to new legal and economic conditions in order to minimize their vulnerability or to take advantage of better conditions in employment, housing, socio-cultural and environmental settings in another destination.

The conceptualization of de Certeau puts emphasis on four characteristics of tactical act, it is an ‚art of the weak', it is a ‚calculus', has flexible and dynamic characteristics, and is hence adaptable to constant changes, and it is vulnerable ("seized on the wing"). Similarly, cross-border labor commuting is a practice of tactical mobility in which commuting practices are (re)shaped according to new socio-economic and legal factors in dual-frame of nation-states. Commuters' decisions about living in one country while working in another are the result of border asymmetries and dependent on various ‚costs' and ‚benefits' calculations or insecurities. Nevertheless, commuters do not simply move to the destination upon employment like in the case of labor migration, rather they choose to be mobile. By this mobility across borders, commuters gain the flexibility of moving between -at least- two places. Based on the following themes: commuters' reasons, motivations, and expectations (pull and push factors), commuting practices (frequency, proximity), place attachment narrations, work biographies (skilled labor/precarious work conditions), narrations of financial insecurity, problem solving and coping methods, three main forms of cross-border labor commuting are categorized. These three forms are named after the most decisive and dominant characteristics that shape the mobility practice of the commuters: life-style oriented, career-oriented, and income-oriented cross-border commuting. In the next sections, following an overview of the researched border regions and methodology, by demonstrating the findings of the empirical data collected in border regions, three forms of tactical cross-border labor mobility will be discussed in detail.

Case Study

Cross-border labor mobility between Germany and its neighboring countries, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, has a long history. Labor mobility was one of the main aims of the European Union, which was first regulated with the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and strengthened in 1957 with the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) (Dowlah 2020, 171). Since 1984, intra-European labor mobility has been organized according to the legal framework defined by the Schengen Agreement. As stated by the German Federal Foreign Office on April 6, 2022, in addition to the bilateral agreements to promote cultural collaboration between Luxembourg and Germany, there are also bilateral agreements between the two countries to support cross-border vocational training and labor mobility, particularly focusing on the border region between the state of Rhineland-Palatinate and Luxembourg. As a result of this cooperation between the two countries, the labor commuting flows from Germany to Luxembourg grew approximately 41 per cent between 2009 and 2019. In 2019,

47,150 people from Germany commuted to their workplace in Luxembourg (IBA 2021, 9). Moreover, Luxembourg is attractive for cross-border commuters from its neighboring countries, particularly due to its high-income levels[2]. The country's economy is highly dependent on cross-border labor commuters, with commuters from Belgium, France and Germany constituting almost half of the employees in Luxembourg's labor market. Commuters are mostly employed in the private sector, such as manufacturing, finance, health, information and communication, construction, scientific civil and technical services. The majority of the commuters (33,470) from Germany reside in Rhineland-Palatinate (IBA 2021, 19). Trier is the most attractive city in the region for the commuters who work in Luxembourg[3]. On the other hand, due to higher real-estate prices in Luxembourg, the number of *atypical* Luxembourger commuters who have residence in Germany and work in Luxembourg continues to increase. In 2019, there were 9633 Luxembourgers living in neighboring countries and commuting to Luxembourg (3320 of them were living in Germany, and 2104 of them were in Rhineland-Palatinate (IBA 2021, 30)[4].

Unlike Luxembourg, the average annual wage in the Netherlands is only slightly more than it is in Germany[5]. In the Nijmegen/Kleve and Kranenburg regions, both in- and out-commuting are practiced. Due to the advantageous situation in Germany's real-estate market, the main tendency is residing in Germany and commuting to the Netherlands for work. In 2015, of 32,927 cross-border commuters, 23,507 commuted to Netherlands from Germany for work (EURES 2021, 24). According to the Information and Technology North Rhine-Westphalia State Statistical Office as of December 4, 2020, the number of workers commuting to the Netherlands from Germany increased in 2018 to 42,710. That year, more than a third of these commuters were Dutch citizens living in Germany. The number of commuters who lived in the Netherlands and commuted to North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) in Germany for work was 7,980 in 2018. In comparison to the German part of the border region (Kleve and Kranenburg in NRW), house

2 The gross average monthly wage in Luxembourg was 6228.80 US dollars in 2020 (UNECE 2022).: In 2020, the average annual wage was 65,580 euros in Luxembourg and 42,500 euros in Germany (Statista 2022a).

3 The 2021 report of the IBA shows that 93 per cent of the commuters from the Rhineland-Palatinate region have their residences in Trier (IBA 2021, 65).

4 According to the IBA Report, another reason for the increased numbers of Luxembourgers who live in a neighbouring country and work in Luxembourg is the new citizenship law, which allows citizens with other nationalities to have citizenship of Luxembourg if they have a Luxembourgian ancestor. 361 of the 3320 commuters with Luxembourgian citizenship are German citizens who acquired Luxembourgish citizenship in 2019 (IBA 2021, 29).

5 In 2020, the average annual wage in the Netherlands was 50,173 euros Statista 2022b).

prices in the Dutch real-estate market have increased massively over the last 6 years[6]. Hence, real-estate market prices and housing conditions play an important role in commuters' decision to live on the German side of the border while being employed in the Netherlands. Another characteristic of this border region is the increase in the flow of cross-border labor commuting of Eastern European citizens, particularly Polish citizens, who live in Germany and commute to the Netherlands for work. Apart from this recent flow of workers from Eastern European countries, commuters in the German-Luxembourgian and German-Dutch border regions are mostly employed in semi- and highly-skilled jobs.

The third region discussed in this paper is the border region between Saxony in Germany and Zgorzelec in Poland. The research focused mainly on the cities of Dresden, Bautzen and the twin cities of Görlitz (DE) and Zgorzelec (PL). The twin cities of Görlitz and Zgorzelec are divided between the two countries only after 1945. With the declaration on 5 May 1998, both cities agreed to social, cultural, and economic collaboration under the name "Eurocity Görlitz-Zgorzelec" (MOT 2022). The flow of cross-border labor commuting from Poland to Germany increased following the Enlargement Agreement of the EU in 2004, in 2007 and after the global financial crisis in 2008 (Dowlah 2020, 173; Janicka and Kaczmarczyk 2016; Kajta and Opiłowska 2021, 5; Mohino and Ureña 2020). However, Saxony only became attractive to Polish cross-border commuters after the agreement on "full freedom of movement for workers" was signed between Austria, Germany and eight Central and Eastern European countries, which came into force on May 1, 2011[7]. Following the freedom of labor movement agreement, the number of cross-border commuters increased from 261 in 2010 to 3965 in 2015 and 5266 in 2016 (Eures Report 2018, 12). In 2019, about 10,000 Polish workers commuted to Saxony for work. The majority of these commuters are male (80 per cent). Following the enlargement of the EU in 2004 and in 2007, the structure of the commuters showed differences in comparison to pre-2004 migration in terms of age and education levels (Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2008; Janicka and Kaczmarczyk 2016). Accordingly, post-2004, there were more young people with higher education levels migrating from Poland. However, it is argued that highly-skilled young Polish migrants tend to migrate fully to Western countries instead of commuting (Janicka and Kaczmarczyk 2016). Statistics on the distribution among sectors show that Polish commuters were employed in Saxony in transportation and

6 In 2015, the average price for a new home in the Netherlands was 274,584 euros, which increased to 449,744 euros in the first quarter of 2021 (CBS 2022b).

7 For more information on the Freedom of Movement for Workers Agreement (Arbeitnehmerfreizügigkeit), see the 2011 report from the Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (Baas and Brücker 2011).

storage (23 per cent), the manufacturing industry (21.7 per cent), the construction industry (9.4 per cent), and in the service sector (34.8 per cent). The service sector, which has the highest share in the distribution of employed sectors, has at the same time the highest percentage of temporary positions (95 per cent) (Sujata, Weyh, and Zillmann 2020). Despite the precarious work conditions, Saxony is likely attractive to the Polish cross-border workers, not only due to its proximity, but also due to its income levels, which are much higher than they are in Poland. Although according to the Eurostat database and Statistics Poland, there has been an increasing trend in the minimum wage in Poland since 2007, from 248.43 euros to 583.48 euros per month in 2020, there is still a huge gap in comparison to Germany where the minimum monthly wage in 2020 was about 1544 euros.

In addition to differences in structural, historical, and socio-economic conditions, these regions are chosen in this research because of the variety of their labor-commuting characteristics. Luxembourg is especially attractive to German commuters because of the higher income levels, and in this region the majority of commuters are out-commuting semi- and highly-skilled workers. The number of atypical commuters, namely Luxembourgers who live in Germany and commute to their home country for work, has tended to increase in recent years as a result of an increase in prices in Luxembourg's real-estate market. Incomes in the Netherlands are not much higher than they are in Germany. Both in- and out-commuting are practiced in the Dutch border region. Similarly, in-commuters are attracted by the affordable house prices in Germany, whereas out-commuting German citizens, mostly semi- and highly-skilled, are attracted by the employment opportunities in the Netherlands. Cross-border commuting in this region is also practiced by citizens of Eastern European countries, particularly Poland, who live in Germany and commute to the Netherlands. The majority of these workers are hired in precarious jobs in the meat industry and transport sector in the Dutch labor market (Palumbo and Corrado 2020). Germany is attractive to Polish commuters due to higher incomes. They are mostly employed in sectors such as transportation, construction and manufacturing in Saxony. In this region, in-commuting is practiced almost exclusively. Most Polish cross-border commuters in Saxony are employed in low-paid jobs with night shifts and fixed-term contracts, which makes their situation more vulnerable compared to commuters in other regions studied here. The higher vulnerability of the Polish commuters became more visible following the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is discussed in the following sections.

Research and Methodology

This paper is based on the findings of the ongoing research project entitled " Cross-Border Mobility: Socio-Economic and Spatial Dynamics of Short-distance Transboundary Migration in Germany"[8]. The project's research design consists of two phases, the first of which is designed to collect primary data for the analysis of the regional infrastructures. This includes interviews with experts, and visits to initiatives, institutions, NGOs, and border information centers. Between April and March 2023, a total of 14 experts were interviewed. With the exception of one interview in Luxembourg, interviews were conducted as online video meetings. Depending on the experts' preferences, interviews were done in either German or English. In addition to information centers on the border regions (offering consultancy services to the commuters on legal issues, employment regulations, taxation, and housing), expert interviews included those who have expertise in cross-border commuting and the problems of commuters and/or cross-border residents, including a local newspaper editor, a trade union representative, and representatives of chambers of commerce.

The second phase of the research is designed to understand the motivations, expectations and practices of the cross-border commuters and consists of participant observation (DeWalt, K. M. and DeWalt, B. R. 1998; Kawulich 2005) and semi-structured interviews (Arthur and Nazroo 2003) with the commuters in four border regions: Saxony-Poland, NRW-Netherlands, Trier-Luxembourg, and Flensburg-Denmark. These regions are chosen for understanding how regional and structural differences impact commuting practices and motivations of commuters. For this research, the topic guide includes questions on: (a) demographic information; (b) biographical information, including work biography; (c) commuting history (reasons for commuting); (d) commuting practices (personal motivations, advantages, obstacles, experiences with nation-states' boundaries); (e) family relations, social networks and daily life practices; (f) division of domestic labor (intergenerational duties and expectations); (g) legal framework of commuting (taxation, social security regulations, pension rights, housing); (h) future plans; and (i) impacts of the Covid-19 measures. Main sampling criteria were defined as; being employed in a country other than the country of residence and commuting between (at least) two distances once a week. To find potential interview partners, the snowball technique is used. Experts who were interviewed in the first phase usually provided information for first contacts. In total, 23 commuters (12 female, 10 male, average age 40.8) have been

8 This work was supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG) under Grant number 442292186.

interviewed so far. Interviews were conducted in English or German, depending on interviewees' preferences, apart from in Saxony, where five interviews were conducted in Polish with the help of an interpreter.

The interview data is analyzed according to the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; 2012; Clarke and Braun 2016). Thematic analysis, as developed and introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006), has six analytical steps: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing results. Similar to the other inductive data analysis methods, like grounded theory, thematic analysis requires constant review and comparison of the interview materials. To capture the patterns ("themes") across qualitative datasets (Braun and Clarke 2012), codes and concepts are compared with each other, and finally the overall themes, concepts and categories are generated and discussed together with the analysis of the detailed field notes.

In the following part, three main forms of tactical commuting across borders will be demonstrated: lifestyle-oriented, career-oriented, and income-oriented. These typologies are categorized through the analysis of themes such as: "problem solving", "advantage-taking", "better living (financial, social, cultural)", "flexibility", "insecurity", and "vulnerability" in commuters' narrations of biographies, commuting history, motivations, work conditions and place attachment. Although there are intersecting interests of benefiting from higher income levels in one country and affordable housing prices in the other, prominent motivations of mobility across borders differ depending on commuters' biographies, expectations, place attachments and employment conditions. Commuters' tactical acts to take advantageous positions or to prevent potential risks in both countries differ depending on the form of their mobility.

Lifestyle-oriented Commuting

Lifestyle-oriented commuting refers to the commuting practice in which commuters seek a place in countries other than the country of employment for "better living." In narrations about place attachment, the dominant characteristics are advantages of place of residence in terms of socio-cultural events, commuters' social networks, or "better housing" conditions (bigger houses, with gardens, or environmental and practical factors such as having a kindergarten, playground, or shopping malls nearby). Similarly, push factors focus on the poor socio-cultural and environmental surroundings of the place, which do not attract commuters to reside. Lifestyle motivations do not exclude the typical motivations of cross-border

labor commuting such as employment opportunities or higher income levels. However, tactically, this form of mobility is dominated by the decisions based on lifestyle gains, whereby commuters' decisions on the place of residence may even be financially disadvantageous, as housing and living costs are higher than in the place of employment.

Since 2018, Miriam[9] (29, f., Nl-D) has been commuting between Nijmegen (Nl) and a small village in NRW in Germany, where she works in a management position at a mid-scale shoe company. When asked about her decision to live in the Netherlands, Miriam talked about the difficulties of finding a rental apartment and complained about the higher prices and smaller sizes of the apartments in the Netherlands in comparison to Germany. However, instead of the advantages of housing in Germany, she prefers to continue living in Nijmegen. She explained her decision as such:

> Yeah, so rental prices are not good [in Nijmegen]. It's actually way too expensive. It's different than in Germany. Rental apartments are also small. And yes, it is very expensive in comparison to Germany. If you go to the German side, if you are in rural areas, it's much cheaper. So, from that aspect, it would be absolutely worth living in Germany. [...] For me, I live here in Nijmegen because it's actually a city. There's urban life and it's also a student city, with a lot of restaurants, a lot of culture, a lot of young people and so on. And that, yes, that is currently important to me, and that is why it is also important to me that, yes, I'm prepared to live in a small apartment and pay more rent instead of living in a rural part of Germany [Miriam, 29, f, Nl-D].

Affordable real-estate prices or better housing options are one of the pull factors for the cross-border commuters in their decision around their place of residence, and in the case of the Dutch-German border, house prices are lower in Germany. However, the case of Miriam shows that other factors about the place and individuals' lifestyle preferences are also important, even though they are disadvantageous in financial terms. Similarly, Emily (29, f., Nl-D) discussed the advantages and disadvantages of living in Germany and the Netherlands in relation to real-estate prices and social networks. Shortly after she found work in the German border city of Kleve, she considered moving close to her job, in order

9 Names used in this paper are pseudonyms. Following interviewees' pseudonyms, information on age, gender and country codes to define the direction of the commuting are provided: Nl for the Netherlands, Lux for Luxembourg, D for Germany, and Pl for Poland. The first-mentioned country is the country of residence, and the second is where the commuter is employed.

to avoid commuting, but decided in the end to move to Nijmegen instead. She explained her decision for residence thus:

> Kleve is relatively small, and it was also relatively new to me. And I still had my friends, social networks and many acquaintances in Nijmegen. And I already knew the city. And that's why I decided to move to Nijmegen instead of Kleve. And the travel time between Nijmegen and Kleve is also only half an hour. So that's absolutely feasible. Yes. [Emily, 29, f., Nl-D].

Like Miriam, Emily discussed the advantages and disadvantages of living in Germany and Netherlands by comparing the rental prices. And like in Miriam's case, despite the financial advantages of living in Germany, Emily's social and cultural expectations of a place played the most important role in her decision. She explained:

> For me at the time it was really the most important thing that I had, my social environment in Nijmegen. That was really the *most important* reason for me. Yes, that was actually the only reason for me to move back to Nijmegen. I really have my social environment here. And... yes... so, my salary, if I were to earn the same salary in the Netherlands, I would have more income, because I pay more taxes in Germany. And in Nijmegen, rents are also much more expensive than in Germany. So actually, I'm doing it the wrong way around (laughs) [Emily, 29, f., Nl-D].

Both Miriam and Emily express the typical pull and push factors of cross-border commuting in their narrations and point out that their mobility does not fit with this typology. Their decisions on their country of residence are not based on economic advantages. Economic benefits appear to be secondary, whereas their priorities are social networks, expectations of an urban life and place attachment in terms of socio-cultural activities and familiarity with the city. Another case, that of Julia (43, f., D-Lux), demonstrates how commuters' decision-making processes involve a complex set of various factors, including economic advantages/disadvantages, familial expectations, familiarity with the place, and practical issues concerning commuting practice:

> [...] the landscape (northern France) depresses me too much. I find the whole area sad. I didn't want to live in France anymore. I didn't know any of Belgium. Luxembourg was too expensive, and my brother lived in Trier, and he's been

> living here for 18 years, right? [...] France, I find it ugly. So, I don't want to [live there] because I don't like it. I mean the landscape, how it looks. I think it's a sad area, that there are so many courtyards, industrial areas, I just find it sad, the houses too, everything is grey. So, it was clear to me that France wasn't [an option]. And there was Trier, just the German way of life. It's a pleasant small town and it's very green, and I also like German schools better; and I just like the German education system better. Luxembourg is just as depressing for me as living on the French side, because it's actually the same thing. And I don't want to move there either. Metz is also a beautiful city, so the city of Metz is quite beautiful, the city itself. But just everything in northern France and on the border, there are these old industrial areas, right? It's an industrial landscape, like now in Dortmund and stuff, which doesn't really appeal to me personally. But it's very personal [Julia, 43, f., D-Lux].

Tactical mobility forms are not static, but instead depend on social, economic, and legal settings, as well as personal expectations, and familial responsibilities. Conditions such as having children, an elderly relative to take care of, or a partner's employment situation, in shortchanging personal needs and expectations, may result in a shift of priorities, and hence a shift in mobility form. Commuters, like in Julia's case, engage in a complex process of calculations while deciding on the place for residence, in which lifestyle motivations play a decisive role. This form of mobility is observed among semi- and highly-skilled commuters who are either in their early career stages or have less fear of financial vulnerability, have less economic dependency and are less concerned about making investments. They do not conceive of living in dual frames as disadvantageous or problematic. The 'bifocality' provides them a kind of "flexibility" wherein they can choose the most advantageous situation in two nation-states' legal contexts, particularly in terms of health insurance, GP visits and child-care benefits.

Career-oriented Commuting

Another commuting form of skilled workers is categorized as career-oriented mobility. The main characteristic of career-oriented commuting is more attractive career opportunities in the host country, in which (some of) the commuters' skills and qualifications are more in demand than in their home countries, or in which the labor market offers better career opportunities. Another reason for career-oriented commuting is that highly-skilled positions are getting more and more competitive: in addition to their degrees, candidates are expected to have additional skills and experience, such as international work experience,

foreign languages, international networks and research experience, to have better chances of landing future positions in their home country. Therefore, even if commuters have future career plans in their home country, commuting to another country is seen as an opportunity to get international work experience, establish networks, improve skills and gain an advantageous position in their home country's labor market. Analysis of the reasons for preferred residence country show that housing conditions, personal and familial reasons, or future expectations of returning back to the labor market in the home country, all play important roles. There are only a few commuters in this research who are defined as career-oriented commuters, based on their motivations for being employed in a country other than their country of residence. In his narration of commuting history, Carl [28, m., D-Lux], who is a researcher at a university in Luxembourg, summarized his ‚calculations' of the recent employment situation in his field and career opportunities in both Germany and Luxembourg as follows:

> So, many of my friends are academics, especially in Germany, but also in Luxembourg and Norway and the USA, and those were the options. But then I asked myself how likely it was that I would get a full-time job and be paid well. And that's how it is in Germany, definitely in [the academic field], that you tend to get fifty per cent or sixty per cent jobs, but you have to work 100 per cent, whereas in Luxembourg you get a 100 per cent contract and you are paid 100 per cent. And I found that to be a fairer exchange of performance for reward. [Carl, 28, m., D-Lux]

Like Carl, Kathrin [53, f., D-Nl] is a researcher. She works at a university hospital in the Netherlands. After working for several years in high-ranking, well-paid positions in different cities in Germany, she decided to work in the Netherlands:

> I finished my residency in neurology and continued to do a residency in psychiatry. And that was about the time when I was getting a little bit settled, and at that point my husband and I were looking for a good opportunity to combine research and medical work, and also to start a family. And we got a spousal-hiring offer in the Netherlands, meaning that both of us could get a job in Holland at the university, though in different areas. And that is how I eventually started working in Holland, and I kind of built up a professional career there [Kathrin, 53, f., D-Nl].

Commuters' interest in taking a position in another country is obviously dominated by their career expectations. These do not exclude financial aspects or housing conditions in their home country, but the main themes in their narrations are choices, various job offers both in the home country and other countries, and a comparison of employment opportunities:

> It was like that; I was in the pleasant position of having many offers that I wanted to take up; I was able to choose. And with this offer in my pocket already, I went to my current boss and said: "Professor, I would like to find out whether you have a vacancy in Luxembourg in the near future. I've heard the conditions are good, I can well imagine it. What offer could you make me? Which position?" And then I said: "I have other offers, so if the content or conditions of your offer don't suit me, then I would feel free to accept another offer." And then he made me a very good offer. [Carl, 28, m., D-Lux]

> So, my position in Germany was fine I would say. And moving to the Netherlands to some extent meant for me building up things from the start again. So, I had a resident position, and I think I would have had the chance to stay as a German "Oberarzt" [Senior Physician]. That would not have been a problem for me. But I must say that in Nijmegen there is a very nice combination of research and clinical work. So, it was also, content-wise, more attractive. [Kathrin, 53, f., D-Nl]

In the interviews, career-oriented commuters cited worsening and precarious work conditions in the field of academic research in Germany as one of the push factors. Among the various forms of commuting, career-oriented commuters are the ones with the weakest ties to places. Having several other possibilities for employment, they are also more flexible in terms of changing place of work and residence. Commuters do not limit their mobility practices to two destinations; rather they consider other options such as England, the US, Australia, and Norway when better career opportunities are offered. Having the loose ties with a specific place, they are able to have flexibility that give them an advantageous situation in which they are able to choose among the best of what they can get in different destinations.

Income-oriented Commuting

In contrast to the lifestyle- and career-oriented cross-border commuting forms, income-oriented mobility is driven by economic benefits: employment opportunities with higher wages in the destination country. Among the forms of cross-border mobility, the income-oriented form is the most discussed in the literature. It entails commuters trying to maximize their financial benefits by taking the advantageous position in terms of income and living costs in at least two destinations. In the three regions researched here, income-oriented mobility appears to be the dominant form of mobility, particularly on the Luxembourgian and Polish borders in the opposite directions: higher income levels in Luxembourg attract commuters from Germany, whereas Polish commuters are attracted by the better paid employment opportunities in Germany. Analysis of the themes – problem solving, advantage taking, better living (financial, social, cultural), place attachment, flexibility, insecurity, and vulnerability risks – shows two groups of income-oriented commuting: income-increasing and income-generating. Although both groups have a shared interest in higher wages and employment opportunities in the work destination country, and taking advantage of lower living costs in the country of residence, they differentiate in terms of mobility as a tactic to cope with poverty risks or as a tactic to benefit from higher wages. The former is driven by a push factor (necessity), and the latter by a pull factor (choice).

As mentioned earlier, Luxembourg attracts many commuters from its neighboring countries with its higher salaries. Commuters constitute almost half of the workforce in Luxembourg, with the majority being employed in the private sector (IBA 2021). Luxembourg's economy, especially sectors such as finance, health and care, administration and management, is highly dependent on cross-border commuters. In order to ease cross-border labor mobility and continue to attract commuters, Luxembourgian authorities pay special attention to legal arrangements, bilateral agreements, infrastructure, and taxation[10]. Higher income levels, an international work environment, and attractive infrastructure make income-increasing commuting in this region the dominant form of mobility. In interviews, commuters who commute to Luxembourg for work usually pointed out having the possibilities of being hired in similar positions in Germany, but

10 A recent example of the Luxembourgian authorities' efforts to ease cross-border labor mobility is lowering commuting costs. As noted in a Luxemburger Wort article on September 5 2019, since March 2020, public transport within Luxembourg has been free, which means that commuting with public transport is much cheaper, since commuters' costs are only the local ticket tariffs of their residence country.

higher income levels were their main motivation to work in Luxembourg. Matthias (48, m., D.-Lux), who has been commuting between Trier (Germany) and Luxembourg since 1999 and is employed in finance sector, said:

> You have a relatively good relationship between work and income. [In Luxembourg there is a] relatively high-income level, and it's easier to find a job there. So, this is the finance industry and in Luxembourg there is a lot of financial industry, banks and corresponding companies that have to do with it. So, there are attractive jobs there. That seemed more attractive to me than going to Frankfurt or something like that [Matthias, 48, m., D-Lux].

Similarly, Jochen (36, m., D-Lux) who is employed as a consultant at a bank in Luxembourg and has residence in Trier, explained that although he was able to get a position in Germany, he decided to work in Luxembourg because of the income:

> I had a job offer in Düsseldorf at a ministry. And then at the time I talked to someone who worked in Luxembourg, and then of course we also talked about something like what he earns there and stuff like that. And it just turned out for me that if I were in public service at this ministry [in Düsseldorf], I think it [my monthly income] would have been 1,600 euros net or something. And of course, I would earn a lot more in Luxembourg [Jochen, 36, m., D-Lux].

Commuters' decisions on their place of residence involve increasing income benefits by living in a lower-cost destination:

> Because the apartment prices in Luxembourg are much higher and in Trier you still live in a more familiar environment, so to speak. Well, in Luxembourg you first have to get used to a different cultural environment, with a lot of French being spoken. But the main reason was actually that the apartment prices are almost twice as high; that's the reason [Matthias, 48, m., D-Lux].

> It needs to be said, and that's a bit of the funny thing about Luxembourg. Of course, you earn first of all – especially as a graduate – you earn quite a lot, you have a really good start. But of course, it is not that much in relation to what Luxembourgers earn and you can hardly live in Luxembourg with a normal graduate salary [Jochen, 36, m., D-Lux].

Lifestyle motivations, such as cultural environment, familiarity with the place, and cultural environment, are not excluded in income-increasing mobility, whereas the main reason behind the residential decision appears to be a financial one in this type. By being employed in a better-paid country and having residence in a lower-cost destination they get an advantageous situation. Analysis of the themes, such as workers' skill levels, work conditions, precarity, language skills, and work biographies, shows that the income- increasing commuters in the Luxembourgian region are well-educated and highly- or semi-skilled employees, employed in higher education or the financial sector in management positions. Their work biographies have commonalities, such as previous international employment experience, speaking several languages, being employed in full time jobs with permanent contracts, and linear work biographies with few employer changes, breaks or pauses. Their narrations about employment focus on choices among various opportunities in which they seek the financially most advantageous option, whereas in income-generating commuting, the main themes are necessity and coping.

The most vulnerable type of commuting among cross-border mobility types is income-generating commuting. Although, both income-oriented mobilities have a similarity in terms of commuters' interest in financial benefits, income-generating commuting is determined by insecurities, part-time and temporary contracts, frequency of job changes and lack of flexibility in workplace preferences. Commuters practicing income-generating mobility are mostly employed in low-skilled and temporary jobs in Germany. In interviews, commuters narrated their motivations to work and commute to Germany as a "solution" to cope with the difficulties in the Polish labor market, lower income rates and higher living costs. For example:

> In Poland the average income is five hundred to seven hundred euros. So, people work ten to twelve hours, they have more pressure. The workers' rights are not like in Germany. They just have to work a lot more. And yes, the financial difference is the most important thing, and they [the Polish who work in Poland] still live two or three generations in one household so that they can afford a life, right? [Sarah 41, f., Pl-D]

In their narrations of commuting history, it is seen that income-generating commuters usually have several migration or labor-mobility experiences prior to cross-border commuting practices between Poland and Saxony. One of the main reasons for this is that until the agreement on "full freedom of movement for

workers", which came into force in 2011, Polish workers were only able to work in Germany as ‚regular' migrants with residence and work permits. Interviewees who had migrated to western Germany also mentioned that they were employed on the black market, in low-paid, insecure jobs. Analysis also shows frequent spatial and sectoral changes in the work biographies of the commuters. Katarzyna [41, f., Pl-D] got married after the birth of her son in 1999 when she was 19. The couple continued to live with Katarzyna's parents until 2001. After leaving her parents' house, although they were both employed in Poland, they had financial troubles. To cope with these financial difficulties, Katarzyna and her husband started to look for possibilities of working in Germany. Soon after, Katarzyna's husband found a job in northern Germany and left home for work:

> And until 2005, it was very, very difficult to work in Görlitz. And I had to work in secret [on the black market]. So, I worked in Poland in a company until 3 p.m. And from 5 p.m. to midnight I worked in Germany. I was mentally and physically very, very, very *kaputt* [broken]. It was really, really exhausting. Even so, there were still difficulties in finding a job in Germany, because those were difficult times. And that's why I continued to work in Poland. [Katarzyna 41, f., Pl-D].

Until 2013, Katarzyna worked in several insecure and part-time jobs in Germany, including seasonal employment on a vegetable farm where she said that she had to work 14 hours for 62 days without any breaks. After 2013, she started working in Germany, and commuting daily from Poland and was employed on fixed-term contracts in several companies in different German cities close to the border. Some of these jobs were paid per hour. In practice, the agreement on full freedom of movement for workers changed the legal status and commuting frequency of the Polish workers, but not the precarious work conditions. Employment patterns of income-generating commuters are very similar in terms of precarity, frequent breaks in work biography, low wages, and long working hours in shift patterns. As a result of their precarious work conditions, this group is also the most insecure, with high vulnerability. Situations such as the loss of a partner, loss of a job, physical injuries, or health problems result in commuters facing large financial problems. Polish couple Anna [55, f., Pl-D] and Piotr [56, m., Pl-D], for instance, talked about their experience as migrant workers for 8 years in western Germany. Their work biography, like in other cases, is marked by breaks, frequent changes, insecurity and illegal work experiences. Shortly after moving back to Poland, in 2010, their house was completely destroyed in a catastrophic flood. The couple was not able to get support from insurance companies and was

unable to pay their mortgage debt. During the interview, there was a tense situation when the couple was talking about the catastrophe and their efforts to cope with financial problems:

> Then in 2010 it was the floods. That took the house away from us. Then we had to somehow be able to get back to Germany, because work was difficult [in Poland]. I sent many applications. I didn't get a job in Poland because I'm already too old. They want 20 years, 20 years old with 20 years of training, a bit crazy. And then we started to work again in Germany. [Anna, 55, f., Pl-D and Piotr 56, m., Pl-D]

The decision to work in Germany was a necessity to cope with vulnerability, with the couple having no options for employment in Poland. Apart from the catastrophic flood and personal problems that increased risks, particularly in terms of worsening financial situations, income-generating commuters' vulnerability has been particularly visible following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Of all the commuting types researched here, income-generating commuting is the only form that does not give the opportunity to work from home. Some commuters had fixed-term contracts which were not renewed during the crisis. Some were forced to use their vacation time during the border closures. Others, who had to work, worked with reduced hours and hence reduced income[11]:

> Suddenly they closed the borders. Our people, the commuters, were stuck in traffic for 12 to 14 hours, one and a half kilometers (traffic queue). The employer also made the decision and told people that they could take vacation immediately. [Sarah, 41, f., Pl-D].

> Well, we were at home for six weeks because the borders were closed. We had short-time work and after that they made us work in four shifts so that they could cover the lost production from those six weeks. So, we really didn't have any weekends, worked overtime and night shifts, rotating shifts, from August 2020 until May this year [Marek, 25, m., Pl-D].

11 Germany's Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs introduced the Reduced Income (Kurzarbeitergeld) Law on 16 March 2020 in order to prevent an increase in unemployment rates during the Covid-19 crisis. Accordingly, companies were given the right to reduce working hours and their employees were paid 60 per cent of the salaries (for workers with children up to 67 per cent) by the Unemployment Agency.

> So, from June 1st [2021], I got an employment contract from the company, but it only lasts until January next year. So, this week I still have short-time work. Well, I get a message almost, well, once at the end of each week, I always get a message [from the employee] telling us whether we are working the following week or not [Katarzyna 41, f., Pl-D].

Interviewees also said that some commuters rented an apartment in Germany to avoid border controls and long hours waiting at the border. The Covid-19 lockdowns had negative impacts on workers who were engaged in sectors in which working from home was not an option. This was also mentioned in the interview with the trade union representative in Saxony. He said:

> A lot of people moved to Germany. But not the ones with children, none of them can do that. But many just moved here. But of course, it was a bad solution, because these are improvised apartments where people often live together, so the risk of spreading the virus was probably much higher than if they could be in their own apartment [Expert interview, trade union in Saxony, Germany].

The relation between high vulnerability risks and insecure jobs is not a phenomenon specific to this region. Precarious work conditions, and hence workers' vulnerability, is dependent on the labor market dynamics, skills of the workers, sectoral structures, how nation-states regulate work conditions, and the strength of the trade unions. Yet, commuters other than income-generating commuters are relatively flexible in terms of adopting to new conditions, revising their mobility, work and residence decisions without a great financial loss, whereas low salaries, high unemployment and high living costs make income-generating commuters more dependent on commuting.

Discussion and Conclusions

Border asymmetries in the European Union create a number of pull and push factors that shape different forms of cross-border labor mobility. Income levels and conditions of waged labor as well as differing living and housing costs in European countries impact labor commuting. Additionally, each region has different historical patterns in terms of legal settings that regulate labor mobility. Factors such as work, language, education of the workers, sectoral structures, precarious and insecure work conditions, housing and other environmental factors have direct impacts on cross-border commuting practices. Against this background, this article analyzed the impact of structural inequalities on mobility

tactics of labour commuters. Specifically, the paper has focused on the motivations, expectations and work biographies of the commuters to demonstrate the interplay of structure and agency. Based on de Certeau's conceptualization of ‚tactic', this paper has examined how the mobility across borders itself is a tactical practice and commuters use their capacities for mobility to gain flexibility for revising their living and working arrangements depending on the changing conditions.

Empirical analysis has revealed that the commuters, like the territorial institutions analysed via strategic-relational approach, actively seek and adapt new tactics for opportunities, gaining advantageous positions or overcoming constraints of the legal or fiscal regulations of the multi-level governance. Moreover, the paper provided insight into the role of mobility by differentiating three main types of tactical mobility practiced in border regions of Germany. Yet, these forms are based on the work conditions, financial insecurities and motivations of commuters and do not define regional characteristics. Although each type has overlapping interests in terms of pull and push factors, it is demonstrated in the paper that each type has a clear motivation that dominates the decision for mobility. The most disadvantageous form of labor mobility is income-generating mobility, which is driven by vulnerability and risks of poverty and unemployment. There, commuters are mostly employed in precarious and insecure jobs, and commuting practice is characterized by necessities and tactics for coping. Other forms of cross-border commuting – lifestyle-oriented, career-oriented and income-increasing – are rather practiced as a matter of choice and due to commuters' tactics for benefiting from both destinations, depending on calculations of advantageous options in their career, income, housing or lifestyle.

Rapid changes and crises have direct impacts on labor-commuting practices at different levels. However, through the flexibility gained by mobility in different destinations, commuters tend to minimize the damage of such rapid changes and unexpected crises. Large-scale regional research is needed to analyze the various forms of cross-border commuting discussed here. In particular, comprehensive research on sectoral differences in border regions could help us understand the impact of work conditions, precariousness, insecurities and income inequalities on commuters' tactics and impacts of these tactics on structure.

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