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The Unbearable Lightness of Bordering? Notes from a Wanderer's Pocketbook as a Contribution to Empirical Unfolding and Theorizing the Polish-Ukrainian Borderland

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Abstract:

The article deals with the cross-border dimension of the social reality in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. My intention is threefold: to describe the local perception of the border and the nature of local cross-border practices, to identify the determinants of the diagnosed state, and to propose an entry of these findings into selected theoretical concepts of border(lands) studies. The basis for my claims were ethnographic activities: a series of observations and interviews conducted with residents of this borderland while walking the entire area (at least 450 kilometers, about 120 towns and villages visited) in 2017–22, that is before the escalation of Russian aggression against Ukraine. The main findings of the research are that the border is for my interviewees a largely tamed phenomenon, almost invisible on a day-to-day basis. Despite its relatively low permeability, it is generally not associated with a barrier or limitation of the possibility of contact with the Ukrainian side of the borderland. This is due to the locals' perception of the low attractiveness of that area and its inhabitants. The underlying empirical findings thus suggest a rethinking of theoretical categories that would be useful in capturing the phenomena inherent in borderlands of this kind.

Keywords:

Poland, Ukraine, borderland, neighbourship, mutual relations

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Introduction

The Polish-Ukrainian border and borderland have been subject of numerous studies and elaborations, focusing primarily on geopolitical conditions and economic factors, sometimes also on related infrastructural constraints, with the works by Andrzej Jakubowski *et al.* (2017) and Andrzej Miszczuk (2017) being among the most comprehensive and cross-sectional ones. In contrast, the present article is centered around the socio-cultural dimension of this borderland,

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described by means of the results of the ethnographic research I conducted there in 2017–2022, in which the sense I attempt to follow the scientific tradition represented e.g. by Joanna Kurczewska and Hanna Bojar (2005, 2009) with their teams. To be more precise, my paper is concerned only with the Polish side of the border, described here as the "Polish-Ukrainian borderland". Such a terminological solution is a part of bigger, yet usually neglected question: About which side(s) of the border one is disputing – one or both of them? According to Zbigniew Kurcz's proposal, when we have in mind only the Polish side of a given frontier, we speak – as it is the case here – of the "Polish-Ukrainian borderland"; when it concerns only the other side, we describe it as the "Ukrainian-Polish borderland"; and when both sides are involved at the same time, we can use either the category of "Polish-Ukrainian transborderland" or "Ukrainian-Polish transborderland" (2008, pp. 23–24); other terms denoting the same idea could be here "cross-borderland" or "cross-border area".

The article reports, in particular, on three issues. Firstly, it is the perception of the Polish-Ukrainian border, the type of transborder (cross-border) practices accomplished by the Polish borderlanders as well as their images concerning the neighbours from across the frontier and their presence thereabout. Secondly, the article points at major circumstances underlying the shape of these developments. And thirdly, it critically embeds all these in theoretical considerations regarding borderlands. These three aims translate into my main argument saying: The Polish part of this borderland but a few border crossings appears to be so underdeveloped as of cross-border practices that one is inclined to revise the usefulness of some theoretical categories prevailing in the scholarly discourse on border(lands) as for the Polish-Ukrainian one. Travestying the title of Milan Kundera's famous novel, I hypothesize, and support it empirically, that the borderland nature of this area – if seen through the prism of the significance usually ascribed to border(lands) – is for its Polish inhabitants so light (meaning: lacking a deeper sense) as to seem unbearable to an outsider; at the same time, however, it does not seem unbearable for the locals themselves.

This socio-cultural dimension of this borderland has attracted less attention from researchers despite several significant factors featuring this area: relative linguistic and cultural vicinity between Poles and Ukrainians, some family and friendship relationships, a common (albeit difficult) history and its legacy, differences in prices of certain goods and services, geopolitical weight of this neighbourship, let alone the very length of the border. As a matter of fact, limited interest in such borderlands characterizes mainly Western European scholars, who seem to have become so much involved in exploring the mechanisms and benefits

of the EU-driven debordering that they have largely lost sight of rebordering and its consequences that have marked eastern borders in Central and Eastern Europe, as if echoing thus the Enlightenment voices of "the other Europe," locating them on the margins of discussions (Wolff, 1994). Having said all this, one needs to underscore the existence of the papers focused on the socio-cultural aspects of this borderland, including on its theorizing (Bürkner, 2017, 2018).

In contrast, my article focuses on the Polish-Ukrainian borderland which presents itself as an area of rather one-sided interactions, whose shape and scale are co-determined by the common boundary as a fixed and hard political line as well as by a range of socio-cultural variables. Thus, I reject here the approaches depreciating research on state (territorial) borders, stemming from political and economic assumptions: the concept of a "world without borders," the idea of the primacy of a community of regional and global economic interests, or the vision of the end of the nation-state, for they have not concentrated intensively enough on the psychosocial, historical-cultural and local-state conditions of life in the borderlands (Newman & Paasi, 1998, pp. 191–193; Bauman, 1998). This applies in particular to those in the EU eastern outskirts, whose inhabitants still appear to think nationalistically and whose realities are constantly embedded in the pattern of a "micro-interactional grounding" and in "the realm of everyday life" (Malešević, 2024, p. 492). In a similar vein, derived from an ethical perspective, the assumption about the new nature of contemporary realities – "of networked societies, multiple allegiances, diaspora communities, *inter alia*, [that] make it increasingly difficult to remain fixated on the territorially delimited nature of borders" (Laine, 2021, pp. 759) – may certainly refer to many areas being under the influence of global phenomena of multiculturalism or migration, but not so much to the Polish-Ukrainian borderland (among others). On the contrary, its essence, as my investigation unveils, is still very much determined by the territorially delimited state border itself as well as "traditional" attitudes to the neighbours from across this line, and hence requires an alternate framework, relevant to the local conditions.

The setting, theoretical frames of the article and empirical underpinnings

The Polish-Ukrainian border came about in its present shape as a result of the Second World War (then as the Polish-Soviet border), with minor changes made in 1951. By the will of Joseph Stalin, the areas of today's western Ukraine, which for centuries had been part mainly of the Lithuanian and/or Polish states, were incorporated into the Soviet Union. This border crosses the territory of the historical Polish-Ruthenian borderland, the remnants of which can still be traced in the cultural landscape and, to a relatively small extent, in the ethnic structure

of the population living on both sides of this line. The Polish-Ukrainian border is 535 km long, of which about half runs along the bed of two rivers: the Bug and the San. In 2022, there were eight road crossings operating there (of which only one was accessible to pedestrians and cyclists) and four railway ones (of which only two served passenger traffic). Additionally, crossings accessible only to pedestrians and cyclists operate at various sites, too, yet only occasionally and for a maximum of a few days a year (within the frames of the so-called European Days of Good Neighbourhood).

All these circumstances are essential for understanding the crux of the phenomena and processes occurring in recent years in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, and hence for realizing limited possibilities of analyzing this area from the perspective of concepts like bordering or borderscapes that have lately been followed in an international discourse on border(lands) studies. This is why I am going to turn to a number of approaches worked out by the sociology of borderlands (theoretically and empirically developed in Poland for more than forty years, yet rooted as far back as in the Interwar period; Wojakowski, 2017, p. 19) which make a substantial contribution to encompassing and theorizing the Polish-Ukrainian borderland in its present state. These conceptions include: administrative vs. social borderland, orientation to border vs. to borderland, the borderland man, and the concept of national neighbourships (along with their different levels).

As for the methodological base for my claims, the material, of a qualitative type, was collected as part of a series of my walks along the entire Polish-Ukrainian borderland (as noted, it means: its Polish part), over a total distance of *circa* 650 kilometers[2]. As mentioned, the research covered only the Polish part of the borderland and hence the observations I made there can by no means be extrapolated to the Ukrainian side. On the contrary, my preliminary investigation conducted there in an analogous manner simultaneously, yet discontinued in 2022, testifies to its substantial distinctiveness. This point, however, demands deeper and complete research across the border.

2 This figure does not include the numerous repetitions of individual sections of the route I made, which would add up to another 100 km or so. In the course of my wanderings, I visited about 120 small towns, villages and hamlets. I did not visit the particular sections of the borderland according to the geographical continuity of the border (from point A to point B, then from point B to point C, etc.), but in the order imposed on me by various factors (from point C to point D, then from point G to point H, then from point B to point C, etc.). My initial idea was to visit and investigate the whole of the Polish-Ukrainian transborderland (that is its both sides), however the Russian full-scale aggression on Ukraine made me discontinue my wanderings about the Ukrainian part (by that time I had covered circa 40–50 per cent of its total length).

I carried out my wanderings in 2017–22, a period marked by two outstanding events: the abolition of visa requirement for Ukrainian citizens entering the Schengen area (for ninety days) in the first half of 2017 (one month before my research began) and the escalation of Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 (followed by only one observation of mine made three months later). Consequently, the time period into which my investigation fell can be seen as fairly homogeneous in terms of the nature of cross-border social relations in the area and the political factors accounting for that; moreover, it can be viewed as a period that is already closed, as the Russian aggression is supposed to have brought much new here (Stokłosa, 2024, pp. 81–83).

The presented research can be perceived as a specific variety of ethnography. In its traditional form, this approach presupposes a relatively long and cognitively intensive stay in a given place, whereas in my case these were usually short visits at particular places at specific times during the period under study. At the same time, my investigation was carried out in a good deal of villages and towns along the entire border (and not just one place), and hence my approach may be associated with what tends to be called a multi-sited ethnography, sometimes also "a particularly interesting variant" of in-depth ethnographic field exploration (Szlachcicowa, 2019, p. 31). As George E. Marcuse (1995, pp. 105–106) explains:

> Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography. […] Multi-sited ethnographies define their objects of study through several different modes or techniques. These techniques might be understood as practices of construction through (preplanned or opportunistic) movement and of tracing within different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon given an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it.

My wanderings offered me a possibility to take a closer, unhurried look at the cultural as well as natural landscape of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, together with important spatial motifs. Therefore, I need to underline this walking mode of visiting the villages itself as an indispensable part of my multi-sited ethnography; this approach, I believe, makes it easier to achieve a particular kind of immersion in the social, cultural or natural space of the lives of the inhabitants of an area. Thus, during my trips, I made some direct, non-participant observations,

enriched with dozens of conversations with people I met along the way (persons of both sexes, mostly middle-aged and older, that is more or less in line with the demographic structure of the area); and since my research was qualitative, I am entitled to base my claims on talks with individuals who were simply accessible to me at a given moment. I gathered these opinions in the process of spontaneously arranged, unstructured interviews (or, rather, talks) of varying lengths, comprising of a number of open-ended questions. They generally focused on three themes: the life near the border with Ukraine (the advantages and disadvantages thereof), cross-border practices (one's own and others' experiences of the Ukrainian part of the borderland and of the interactions with Ukrainians on the Polish side), and the reasons for the inhabitants' (predominantly) little interest in these neighbours. In particular localities, for example, where a border crossing is in operation, or where it is to be opened soon, these themes were modified accordingly, in other cases, in turn, not all of the three plots could be taken up. The answers were analyzed in a way that made it possible to construct a typology of major motives, motivations and images, and all this was supplemented by the literature on this borderland. It should be emphasized that the collected material was definitely saturated; actually, similar or even identical answers started to appear after I had covered just approximately 150–200 km (in different parts of the borderland), that is *circa* one third or even fourth of the whole of the borderland.

A social dimension of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland: Empirical findings

The aforementioned saturation of the material translated into the possibility of creating a set of situations constituting the social dimension of the reality of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. Thus, in this section, I focus, firstly, on the perception of the state border, above all on the advantages and disadvantages of living in its vicinity; secondly, on cross-border practices and the presence (also symbolic) of neighbours in the space in question; thirdly, on some circumstances accounting for the diagnosed state of affairs. It is important to bear in mind that the typologies presented below, in line with their nature, are neither exhaustive nor disjointed.

Perception of the border: Advantages and disadvantages of living thereby

While talking with my respondents, it was not easy to fish out elements which in their opinion would be associated with the advantages of living in the vicinity of the Polish-Ukrainian border. The closest to such a qualification would be the awareness that the area in question is quite safe, as it is intensively patrolled

by the Border Guard or the police and remains under constant video surveillance. Although, in principle, these formations are concentrated on persons who may have illegally crossed the border or may potentially be accomplices in criminal acts (such as smuggling goods or people), the presence of the services, *en passant*, also allows for the recognition and prevention of common crime. In addition, these officers can be helpful in solving everyday problems, quite often not related to the border at all, such as snow clearing or support to elderly people and tourists (especially in the mountains). And, although protecting the border also entails certain inconveniences for the locals, since their access to the charms of the Bug river or the fruits of the borderland forest is limited and as they sometimes need to identify themselves, for a number of people there is nothing special about this. Moreover, some borderlanders cooperate with these services as informants and more than once happen to somehow benefit from it.

Another circumstance valued by some residents (especially those living away from border posts) is the peace, tranquility and beauty of the area, yet the nature of the links between this strand and the proximity of the Ukrainian border is complex. The fact that it is quite an impermeable barrier may give rise to a feeling of a kind of spatial handicap; here, therefore, what matters is not so much the location in the vicinity of the border itself as the location in the vicinity of such a border, also as an element of the essentially less developed eastern Poland, and this is why the place of one's residence has more than once been referred to in conversations as "the end of the world." At the same time, it is worth remembering that the aforementioned peace and quiet, with villages located far from significant centres, suffering from depopulation and offering unfavourable prospects for life and development, are the resultants of peripherality as such, which also happens to be faced by the inhabitants of the interior. Consequently, what for some is a quiet and lovely place, others inexpressively describe as a "shit-hole."

This peripheral location and the social and economic disadvantages associated with it therefore appear to be a good background for the development of qualified (culture) tourism, oriented to the beauties of the natural and cultural landscape and to experiencing them actively and non-invasively. One can find places that are appealing to tourists here: meanders and backwaters of the Bug river, historic Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches, the hills of Roztocze, charming towns and villages, not to mention the immensely popular Bieszczady Mountains. Simultaneously, some people find interesting precisely those places which have nothing in them that a wider public would value – a thesis which gains in validity just in the context of such areas as parts of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. Some of these spots are located in the immediate vicinity of the state border or even form

fragments of it, which only enhances the enjoyment, if one assumes, following Dallen J. Timothy (2000), that the line itself is sometimes considered a tourist attraction, too. Some locals are aware that the border happens to be a magnet for visitors and are able to appreciate this aspect of its existence.

A phenomenon closely linked to the Ukrainian border is border crossings, the perception of which is also sometimes ambiguous. On the one hand, there are the benefits of cross-border cooperation (small-scale trade, joint business with the Ukrainians, development of tourism), which is possible precisely because of the crossings; on the other hand, these benefits are often the case only with selected groups of people, not necessarily borderlanders. This is why my interviewees much more often emphasized the inconveniences associated with living close to the post: the huge, often round-the-clock volume of traffic (noise, air pollution, pollution of the surrounding area, obstructed passage, dangers on the road), the easy availability of alcohol and cigarettes (which develop and exacerbate addictions, also among minors) or the inappropriate behaviour of Ukrainians (disturbing the quiet of the night, polluting the area, parking cars in prohibited places). From the point of view of those who do not personally benefit from the crossing yet live quite close to it, it is only a generator of negative phenomena, overshadowing even this peace and quiet accentuated by some residents of villages distant from the traffic corridors (cf. Jaroszewicz & Mrozek, 2020, pp. 29–33).

The posts could nevertheless bring a bit more benefits to local communities, if it were not for the number of these facilities, their nature and the rules and customs prevailing there. Firstly, on the whole length of the Polish-Ukrainian border (535 km long[3]), there are only eight border crossings, which means that the inhabitants of many villages are twenty-thirty kilometers away from the nearest post (in extreme cases – even fifty, up to sixty kilometers). Secondly, only one of them (in Medyka) is accessible, apart from cars, also to pedestrians and cyclists[4]; this solution thus eliminates from cross-border activity people who do not have a car or do not want to travel this way. This requirement, thirdly, at some crossings means also a waiting time of several hours for customs and passport clearance. Fourthly, the corruptive expectations of Ukrainian customs and passport services, and (here taking into account also Polish officers) the generally unfriendly social climate prevailing at the crossings, are strongly engrained in the memory of some respondents. These

3 In practice, however, if one disregards the river meanders and other line breaks, and follows rather the axis defined by the settlement, it would be approximately 420 km long.

4 For a few years in the previous decade, within the framework of a pilot project, pedestrian and bicycle traffic was also handled by the crossing point in the village of Dołhobyczów.

are circumstances that can discourage even those truly interested in visiting the neighbouring country.

In summary, life in the vicinity of the Polish-Ukrainian border in the light of my respondents' opinions appears to be a mixture of advantages, disadvantages and neutral feelings, but with the latter two elements predominating – sometimes for reasons inherent in the nature of the poorly permeable border, at other times having different reasons. From the point of view of many borderlanders, who are generally not interested in visiting Ukraine and have no contact with its citizens – this border simply is. The fact that it restricts the mobility of the locals is something they have got used to, just as is the case for those living by the sea, whose activities are inevitably also spatially restricted. In the course of many of my conversations, in places just a few kilometers (sometimes only a few hundred meters) from the border, this line – although I sometimes tried to redirect the talk towards it – was therefore difficult to maintain as an object of reflection. I also asked about the border directly on many occasions, usually receiving in reply a reference to the border guards patrolling the area and to the ubiquitous CCTV.

Interactions with the neighbours and their (symbolic) presence

The main thesis of this part of the analysis is that my interviewees have only a vestigial presence on the Ukrainian side of the border (the most important reasons for this are outlined in the next section of the article), and they generally do not have any closer or more permanent contacts with the people living there. Years ago, sometimes it was back in the 1990s, some of the borderlanders used to visit their families on the other side of the border, some local attraction or to go shopping there (mainly for alcohol, cigarettes, fuel and candies); incidentally there were other motivations. Later, however, doubts about the quality of the imported alcohol, the decreasing profitability of this practice, long queues for customs and passport clearance or restrictive border controls have discouraged my interviewees (especially as they have grown older) from such ventures.

At present there are few contacts between them and Ukrainians, and if there are any, they concern two situations. Firstly, it is about living or staying in the vicinity of the border crossing (mainly by border shops which cater to Ukrainians), but also in other places where they trade in vodka, cigarettes (often smuggled) or sweets. Secondly, it is contacts with Ukrainians employed in Poland, yet not necessarily in the very borderland; there are also people passing through a given village in transit (if we can talk about any exposure at all in such cases). Importantly, all these forms of cross-border contacts take place on the Polish side of the border;

Poles, if they are at all interested in foodstuffs from across the border, prefer to buy them (even slightly more expensively) from Ukrainians rather than make the effort to go to the other side – and this definitely low share of Polish citizens in traffic across the border with Ukraine is also confirmed by the data from the Border Guard. Consequently, there is a paucity or even a lack of my interviewees' own non-incidental and relatively fresh cross-border experiences. As a result, their perception of the border, Ukraine and its inhabitants is reduced to a few *clichés*: it is poor, there is nothing there and hence no reason to cross the border. This conviction of my respondents seems to be quite strong and enduring, after all, in the interviews it was emphasized more than once phonetically, semantically and with body language, thus giving vent to their surprise as to why I was asking about such ridiculous things.

At the same time, it is worth bringing up here two motives for cross-border practices (not very frequent, though), mentioned by my interlocutors. Firstly, these are visits to relatives and friends, with an important stimulus being occasional events: religious celebrations (ecumenical masses, joint prayers), visits to cemeteries, accompanied by cleaning and renovation of places of worship, at times also organized cultural events. Secondly, there are tourist and sightseeing activities (on foot, by bicycle or by car), focusing on places such as Lake Svitiaz and its surroundings, the resort complex of Lytovezh, the city of L'viv or a number of places of local interest (visits to wooden Orthodox or Greek Catholic churches, a trip "in the countryside"). It is worth adding that for some people, these ventures enable them to fulfill (for many – the primary) motive for visiting Ukraine: consumption and purchase of alcohol.

Visiting the Ukrainian part of the borderland is facilitated, sometimes even made possible, by the existence of customs and passport control points for pedestrians and cyclists, whereas currently, as mentioned, only one of them serves these forms of traffic. An attempt to compensate for it and at the same time to meet the cross-border needs of local communities, is the European Days of Good Neighbourhood – a bottom-up, one-, two- or several day event, organized in a few border villages (in some cases already for twenty years), during which an *ad hoc* checkpoint is opened at the nearby border. This event enables a wide range of cross-border events of a social, cultural, touristic, sports, religious or commercial nature, albeit it does not change the overall picture of the poverty of cross-border interactions – short-lived, rather schematic and, above all, rare.

This makes it all the more worth noting the peculiar symbolic presence of Ukrainianness in the local landscape. It is about the border itself, marked by the Ukrainian (as well as Polish) border signs visible from quite a distance, sometimes

about the other bank of the river, the fields, meadows, forests, hills or mountains stretching behind it; less often it is about domes of churches or houses, or just plumes of smoke, because in the Soviet times settlement was moved away from the border in many places. Paradoxically, evening is a good time to observe or at least raise awareness of the existence of these buildings, when the lights of the houses can be seen from the Polish side – a stark reminder that "there is life on the other side of the border, too." The importance of this visual contact with elements of the neighbourly infrastructure for building the ties was pointed out, with reference to quite remote times and circumstances, by Stanisław Ossowski (1984, p. 35), although it seems that this type of experience is important nowadays, too. It is also about the traces of Ukrainian, Ukrainian-Polish and sometimes simply vernacular past left on the Polish side of the border, materialized in the form of tombstones, monuments, temples, feral orchards, remains of houses or inscriptions (importantly – in Cyrillic).

Without these artifacts, it is difficult to speak of a material aspect of the local borderland, but at the same time this heritage, given the dramatic history of this land and the far from perfect present, cannot be considered easy to handle today. On the basis of the interviews conducted, it would be equally difficult to assume that any particular value – emotional, aesthetic, cognitive, not to mention practical – is represented for these borderlanders by elements of the natural landscape of the nearby Ukraine (even though they may matter subconsciously). It is therefore time to take a closer look at the circumstances that are responsible for the poverty of the social dimension of the borderland in question today.

Why so "asocial"? A broader look at the life in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland

As mentioned, while talking with my respondents, especially those living away from the crossing, I got the impression that the other side of the border exists for them to a very limited extent. It neither really intervenes in their everyday life, nor organizes their imagination, and if it does, it is mainly on the grounds of the border protection itself. The explanation as to why this borderland is so "asocial" is multifaceted, just as in the opinions of my interviewees different factors accumulate, mutually condition or reinforce each other. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this analysis, I have assigned these circumstances to a number of types, without any claim to a hierarchy of their importance.

The first issue, of a geopolitical nature, is perhaps the most obvious and frequently raised: it stems from the obligations Poland assumed when it joined the European Union and the Schengen area. The regime that was put in place made

the Polish-Ukrainian border a serious spatial and procedural barrier, of an almost *finis terrae* type, largely reducing the space for local transborder initiatives, social contact and cultural diffusion, even though some petty-trade activities (yet of a generically limited scope) do take place here.

However, secondly, a factor of a political and infrastructural nature needs to be mentioned straight away: the involvement of the Polish and Ukrainian authorities in the matter of the network of border crossings, the procedures in force there and the atmosphere of checks; for, contrary to what can sometimes be heard in the public sphere, the EU does not restrict both countries in the development of border infrastructure and the kinds of traffic handled there. Meanwhile, its poverty leads to the creation of a peculiar vicious circle: if someone lives twenty, thirty or even more kilometers from a crossing point and expects to spend several hours waiting for customs and passport control, they must have really good reasons and great determination to take up such a challenge. And since residents of this borderland usually do not have such reasons (and those who do, often give them up in order to avoid the inconvenient journey; consequently, some of them do not even have a valid passport neither money nor motivation to issue one), they usually are not interested in new crossings to be built, as they do not serve the locals, just the opposite – significantly reduce their quality of life. One can thus hypothesize that even if getting to Ukraine becomes significantly easier one day, these borderlanders will not visit the country (especially in the long term) much more often than they do now. At the same time, securitization of the border (its patrolling, monitoring, but also its rhetorical layer) among many locals may strengthen Orientalist tendencies towards Ukraine, reinforcing their conviction that this line does separate two clearly different worlds, and that it should remain so.

Thirdly, the area in question features a particular social structure. It is a sparsely populated area, one source of which is the so-called Vistula campaign (Polish *akcja "Wisła"*) carried out in 1947, during which the Polish Communist authorities expelled entire Ukrainian villages from here. As in other peripheral localities, there is also an exodus of young people to the cities, who are now far fewer in number than a few decades ago, which in turn results in many parts of the borderland being inhabited mainly by middle-aged and elderly people, often not wealthy or mobile, and therefore not particularly interested in visiting any place, not only Ukraine. This depopulation is sometimes compensated for by new settlements, which, however, are often of a temporary nature; moreover, the owners of these cottages do not seem to be interested in any traffic (including tourism or trade) nearby, from which they have fled from larger centres.

Another causal bundle is the respondents' conviction of Ukraine's low attractiveness, which can be reduced to two threads. Traditionally, it was about the commercial offer, yet the times when people went there to buy cheap and good vodka are rather gone, which is certainly due to the gradual enrichment of the inhabitants of the Polish part of the borderland and the doubts sometimes raised about the quality of the drink. As of another thing, tourism and recreation, I often heard that there is substantially nothing interesting to see in Ukraine today, and that what has survived is more worthy of a complete overhaul than a visit. Point-to-point attractions, like Lake Svitiaz in the region of Polesia, have a role to play here, but such a reason to go abroad is not the domain of too many people. Generally, leaving aside the inconvenience of crossing the border, the poverty of activity is also partly due to the perception that the Ukrainian road, transport, recreational, catering or hotel infrastructure is underdeveloped. A certain impulse to visit the not-so-distant Ukraine may also be family motives signaled above; here, however, a much more serious shadow also appears.

And so the fifth reason for the low interest of locals in visiting Ukraine is the human factor, above all history. The key issue here is the memory of the Volhynian-Galician massacre of the civilian population (the extent of which is estimated by Polish historians at up to one hundred thousand dead), which was perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalists in the years 1943–45 on both sides of today's border, but above all on the Ukrainian side. There are still people alive who saw this drama (sometimes involving their loved ones) with their own eyes, and the suggestive intergenerational transmission is also widespread and vivid in the area. An additional component is the reluctance of a number of social and political circles in present Ukraine to openly admit and condemn this crime and the glorification of the political-military formation responsible for it[5]. What we then have here is the border that is, as David Newman and Anssi Paasi would say, perpetuated and reinforced narratively and symbolically (1998, pp. 195–197); it is the line between victims and oppressors, and this historical context seems to overlay and build up the role of the border as "a moral marker of belonging and difference that guide our activities" (Laine & Tervonen, 2017, p. 66).

5 The issue of the massacre is quite complex and divisive, and its presentation should therefore take into account the broader background, constituted, *inter alia*, by the deep (also historical) causes of this drama, the acts of retaliation undertaken by the Polish troops, the attitudes taken on the whole issue by a large set of circles in contemporary Ukraine, and others. In the perceptions of my interlocutors, guided by a personal (rather than historical, political, etc.) perspective, this context was usually absent; its discussion, however, goes beyond both the qualitatively and quantitatively perceived scope of the article.

Sixthly, some of my interlocutors, even leaving aside (but are they really?) these bloody events, see their Ukrainian neighbours as uncultured, unlettered and untrustworthy, while others have stereotypical fears about their own safety while in Ukraine, associated with the activity of criminal groups there and the corruption prevalent in the country; with all the differences in mind, we see here fundamental similarities to "the rhetorical confirmation of difference and the collective imaginaries of Russia," observed in the context of the Finnish-Russian border (ibidem, 65). Following Fredrik Barth's (1969) proposal, we can argue that many of my interviewees tend to see Ukrainian neighbours as different both in the modernist spirit of objective differences (brought out by the securitization of the border) and in that of constructivism: they themselves perceive some differences in these people and regard them as significant (see also Wojakowski, 2017, p. 22). And even though it is difficult to say which of these cognitive sources is stronger here, the borderlanders basically appear to share the view of discretion of national cultures that are anchored in definite places (and, moreover, should remain separated), and hence disregard deconstructivist thinking. In this sense, they follow the pattern of "conscious effects of cultural incompatibility" observed, more generally, in Poland's eastern borderlands also in the course of the field research conducted in the early 2000s (ibidem, p. 25).

When thinking about the reasons for the low level of interest in Ukraine among my interlocutors, it is easy to absolutize the (geo)political factor, thereby obscuring the essence of social conditions. Georg Simmel, however, saw such issues a bit differently, formulating his well-known question: "the limit [meaning the border] is not a spatial fact with sociological effects, but a sociological fact that takes its shape spatially" (1997, p. 142). What I have seen and heard in the field somewhat nuances Simmel's view, as one is inclined to conclude that in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland both factors, although of unequal force, complement each other. This is also the spirit in which the theoretical thread will be taken up below.

Theorizing the Polish-Ukrainian border and borderland

We already know a set of factors relating to both the state border itself and to its significance for the locals (i.e. their level of interest in the borderland and in their Ukrainian neighbours, responsible for the shape of cross-border social life). In the next step, I would like to refer these two phenomena to some popular theoretical frameworks, together with some less frequently mentioned approaches. Let us begin with the border itself, even though it may sometimes be difficult to keep it separated from what takes place around it.

Speaking of the categories currently dominating in border(lands) studies, let us start from a constructivist (processual) shift of the 1990s, stemming from Barth's conception of ethnic boundaries (1969, pp. 13–14). On this wave, conceptualizing borders in a modern way, that is as stable and static phenomena, defined politically and territorially, and seen as lines separating two states, gave way to an approach broadened to include the perspective of borders as transnational spaces of actions, practices and discourses (Paasi, 1999), with bordering (and its derivatives: debordering and rebordering) understood as continual process of reshaping and reconstructing the sense of borders. The search for alternative conceptions of borders was driven by the conviction of the fluidity of the framework constituted by political settlements (the exercise of power over a specific territory), reinforced by the intensification of diverse cross-border practices and social interactions. In this way, a number of scholars came to see border spaces as a forerunner of political change, social inclusion across borders or cultural diffusion.

This redefinition of the meaning and function of borders, as well as sensitizing researchers to the spatial and conceptual complexity of the area around them, gave rise to the introduction of "borderscapes" to border studies (Brambilla, 2015, pp. 15–18; Szlachcicowa, 2020, pp. 41–43). This post-modern, constructivist in spirit concept tends to perceive borders and borderlands as fluid phenomena, re-constructed (also narratively), with their shape and meaning being determined by social practice (Krasteva, 2017, pp. 21–22). It shows the space around the borders holistically through analyzing multifarious cultural influences that take place along them (Dell'Agnese, 2005; after Szlachcicowa, 2020, pp. 42). An overarching problem with "borderscapes," however, is that it 'aspires' to cover quite a vast repertoire of phenomena. On the one hand, it is supposed to concentrate on deterritorialised borders (spaces), i.e. on areas located not necessarily in the very vicinity of state borders; on the other hand, however, it is supposed to serve to explain the reality of a given borderland, e.g. the Dutch-German one, as it was in Anke Strüver's case (2005). In a similar vein, on the one hand, this concept aims at such live and fluid phenomena as transnational flows, dynamic relations or symbolic transgression; on the other hand, Strüver employed in her research "borderscapes" to account for the persistence of the border in the practices and consciousness of the people living near it. But even ignoring the fact that conceptualisation of the term in question is said to be rather broad and blurry (Delle'Agnese, 2017, pp. 58–59), which puts it in line with other catchy and almost all-encompassing categories, one can still legitimately ask of the scale of its applicability to borderlands that separate states and societies of much different nature. Why is it so?

The thing is that even such analyses as Strüver's (that is regarding the persistence of the "traditional" image of borders and its correlates) seem to be, at least implicitly, directed rather at explaining why such social phenomena still do take place, as if *despite* [italics mine] the existence of the fully permeable border there, being a consequence of the European integration (Strüver, 2005; Szlachcicowa, 2020, p. 43). Hence, such an approach does not seem to apply to the Polish-Ukrainian border, characterised, as we remember, by a relatively small number of crossings, which substantially do not serve the Polish local communities very well. For this line has, employing Jarosław Jańczak's terms, much more to do with boundarization (i.e. a spatial and political process of restituting or solidifying state borders) rather than frontierization (a socio-cultural process of cross-border diffusion and softening these barriers) (2017, pp. 48–49; Kristof, 1959). And even though the phenomena going in opposite directions have been registered in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, too, frontierization in its strict form (the same as 'the borderless world' concept and its derivatives) has never had a chance to really happen here, because de-boundarization, as the *conditio sine qua non* of the former, has never occurred here, either.

On a similar basis, interesting comments on the concept of borderscapes have been made from a post-structuralist position, by Hans-Joachim Bürkner. This author points out that constructivist "processes of 'making borders' appear to be oddly detached from structure, power, institutions, political contestation, social antagonism, struggle for resources etc." Meanwhile, the attention of researchers, he claims, should focus not only on the social contacts related to bordering and the "mental involvement" in it on the part of individuals, but also on "pre-established social norms generated at societal macro levels, political pressure exerted by national, EU or other bodies etc." Otherwise, it comes to treating these top-down conditions as something external to bottom-up social practices – an approach that Bürkner captures, in the spirit of mentalism, as "the epistemological solipsism inherent to the bordering approach" (Bürkner, 2017, pp. 86–90).

These factors, the author adds, have been taken into account within the very concept of borderscapes by Chiara Brambilla *et al*. (2017, p. 2), yet more could be done in this regard (Bürkner, 2017, p. 90). The post-structuralist approach proposed by Bürkner has therefore developed the concept of imaginaries, with its spatial type that relates, *inter alia*, "to geopolitics or economic restructuring." Imaginaries thus "address basic ideas about the shape of territories, 'natural' relationships between societies or nations to territories, the way boundaries and borders are drawn." They are also "supposed to make visible how the local ways of addressing borders, and ascribing meaning to them, are connected to larger

political, social and economic conditions." Within this framework: "Local actors define their projects, and the role of borders, according to objectives or benefits they try to realize; this also includes the absence of clear objectives" (ibidem, pp. 93–94).

Thus the obvious usefulness of Bürkner's idea for my considerations lies in accentuating mutual relations between various scales/actors, such as geopolitics and locals. In this sense, it definitely brings us closer to the state of affairs in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland – yet not entirely. For, as my ethnography found, the scarcity of cross-border social practices there is affected not so much by the geopolitical (top-down) factors as by the local (bottom-up) circumstances, that is by little attention paid by the inhabitants of the area to their neighbours from across the border. As a matter of fact, this poorly permeable border does not restrict much the indigenous population in their activities, which, importantly, were redirected to other goals and circles than those in Ukraine already some time ago. In other words, my respondents have adopted and internalized the border's function as a marker of the end of "their" world (typical of the approach from before the emergence of the concept of borderscapes): they know or imagine that further beyond it there is hardly anybody or anything appealing. And these imaginaries, along with stagnation and shortage of optimism, do not serve, as Bürkner would put it, as "the lubricant of relevant discourses" neither "give legitimization to projects." On the contrary, they question the idea of the border and borderland as certain local assets or a point of departure to a change of one's life. At the same time, however, as the author mentions, absence of clear objectives, i.e. a sort of anti-project, can also constitute imaginaries (pp. 103, 94).

Moving deeper into the issue, we can see that the process of quite intensive securitization of this border is, moreover, sometimes considered positive by the locals, which in turn leads us to revisit the assumptions of the concept of borderscapes again. Sticking to Brambilla's words that it "allows to describe how the experience of borders often clashes with the assumptions of geopolitical theory, and to investigate how the rhetoric and policies of borders impact, conflict and are in a dynamic relationship with everyday life" (2015, pp. 27), we observe that in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland one would rather have to do with a relative convergence between these geopolitics, rhetoric, policies of borders etc. and everyday life. Additionally, the borderscapes concept sort of brackets off one more phenomenon: border's territoriality. Importantly, we are not talking here about the most contemporary events changing the perception of borders and bordering, such as the crisis of liberal or postmodern thought, the migration challenges, the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russian aggression against Ukraine and its escalation, that foreshadowed a comeback of a firmly regulative role played

within the EU by nation states (Böhm, 2021). As a matter of fact, while in other geopolitical contexts the consequences of these phenomena can be perceived as indicators of a return to a modernist, more restrictive view of borders, in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland they were merely further elements in a train of debordering and – more often – rebordering practices that had been going on there for decades.

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Below, I will develop theoretically the second issue, i.e. the level of interest of the inhabitants of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland in it, including their foreign neighbours. Looking for some point of reference here, one may once again bring up the observation made by Strüver (2005, p. 21) with respect to the Dutch-German borderlanders, who feature, as she calls it, "cognitive distance" to each other. This is, as the author explains it, "a boundary in people's minds, which includes the *non*-perceptions and -practices related to this very border. In this sense, the boundary's significance in people's minds includes its effects both as a 'barrier' and as that resulting in the (passive, unconscious) ignorance of what is beyond the boundary." This finding, in line with Simmel's observation recalled above, seems underlying for conceiving the nature of cross-border relations in the studied area and correctly fitting them into a number of theoretical models.

So let us consider a few of them, beginning from Oscar J. Martinez's four-item typology of developments in borderlands: "alienated", "co-existent", "interdependent" and "integrated" (1994, pp. 2–5). This model misses to grasp fully two issues central to my considerations. Firstly, it seems to be focused more on macro-structural determinants, such as the shape of international relations, internal political realities or economic interests, which translates into the micro-level, socio-cultural factors being underestimated. Secondly, this typology features a gap between the second and third scenarios (with the model-specific values of these variables remaining a separate issue here). For there is "co-existence", which, as Martinez puts it, takes place "when a serious dispute is resolved by two nation states to the extent that international relations are possible, but not to the point of allowing for significant cross-border interaction". Then, there is "interdependence", which "is made possible by relatively stable international relations and by the existence of a favourable economic climate that permits borderlanders on both sides of the line to stimulate growth and development that are tied to foreign capital, markets, and labour" (with "integrated borderlands" clearly denoting an even deeper cooperation) (pp. 2–5).

Put together, these two circumstances result, roughly speaking, in the following pattern: as long as the proper macro-structural, mostly (geo)political, conditions are satisfied, there is a more or less developed cooperation (above all economic), which entails, if not integration, then at least interdependence of both parts of the borderland. And it is representations of these latter two items of Martinez's typology – cross-border relations that develop relatively smoothly, vigorously and in a multifaceted way – that, as Elisabeth Boesen claims, border studies are predominantly concerned with, at the expense of socially more complex and complicated localities (2017, p. 2). And one such place, synthetically speaking, is the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, which seems, on the one hand, much more advanced than the first two items of Martinez's typology, yet on the other hand – definitely less developed and internally far too complex to be legitimately described as "interdependent". Here, again, the level of social development depends both on the variables identified by Martinez ("the concentration of population at the border, and the condition of the binational economy") and on a combination of socio-cultural factors. Noteworthy, as a step towards the development of an appropriate typology, a five-stage proposal was made, in which the different types of borders and borderlands are presented in the form of adequate metaphors (Golka, 1999, pp. 13 ff). An interesting attempt to relate these metaphors to the social reality of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland was presented in turn by Kurczewska (2009).

It seems useful to distinguish also between administrative vs. social borderland in order to describe the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. The former category denotes an area just adjacent to the state border, where hardly any social relations take place, while the latter embraces relatively frequent and multifarious cross-border interactions, convergence of values and patterns, and hence is sometimes called also "cross-borderland" or "transborderland" (Kurcz, 2017, p. 59; Dolińska, Makaro & Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak, 2017, pp. 215–216)[6]. This corresponds with an opposition proposed by Kurczewska differentiating between experiencing the very border vs. borderland, together with people's orientation towards these two respectively (2006, pp. 15–19). It seems clear that my respondents are generally oriented precisely towards the border as a line symbolizing the end of the world that is familiar, interesting, tamed and safe for them. Hence, one may argue that my interlocutors generally fall into close proximity to the Martinezian category of "national borderlanders," who form such "sectors of the population [that] manage to remain shielded from transnational activities, and their lives are minimally

6 This is therefore the second meaning (besides the indication of the area on both sides of a given border – cf. Introduction) that the term "transborderland" (alternatively "cross-border area") conveys.

affected by proximity to borders." And so the author continues: "National borderlanders have thus low-level or superficial contact with the opposite side of the border owing to their indifference to their next-door neighbours." This stance is even better visible by contrast to "transnational borderlanders", who "maintain significant ties with the neighbouring nation; they seek to overcome obstacles that impede such contact and they take advantage of every opportunity to visit, shop, work, study, or live intermittently on the 'other side'" (1994, p. 6). At the same time, this Martinezian opposition may be further analyzed to see that my respondents fit the "national borderlanders" only partially, which I am trying to show further on.

Developing this plot, it is worthwhile to go beyond the state borderland and to reach for the category of national neighbourship – rather undertheorized and predominantly used in the common sense of the word. Let us therefore explain that, within this category, a distinction is made between relationships (as well as the lack or scarcity thereof) at various levels: micro (in divided towns), mezzo (in borderlands) and macro (among neighbouring cultures in their broadest sense) (Kłoskowska, 1994; Dębicki & Makaro, 2021, pp. 77–79). By adopting this concept, we see that after the first twenty-five years since the collapse of the USSR one could expect more to have taken place than it actually did within the Polish-Ukrainian neighbourship in its social dimension and on relational grounds as a whole, and so that a special stimulus was apparently needed here. In the last decade, this has been provided by labour and war migrations, which have intensified and diversified bilateral contacts in many towns and cities almost all over Poland, but only to a relatively small extent in the border region itself, from where one still tends to look towards the centre rather than across the border. These circumstances can also be seen at the level of paradigms: for while the aforementioned change at the macro level (neighbourship in its broadest sense) is better captured by the concept of borderscapes (postmodern approach), which focuses on unfettered movement of people, transnational flows, symbolic transgression or dynamic social practices, regardless of where (meaning: how far from the border itself) they occur – the reality of "traditional" borderlands, including the Polish-Ukrainian one (micro and mezzo level of national neighbourship) is in turn still most fully characterised by modernist phenomena, and hence would be more aptly grasped by other categories.

Bearing all this in mind, one is even more inclined to reach for, an interpretatively useful, category of "the borderland man," who, when it comes to relations with their foreign neighbours, is in one way or another distinguished from the interior man, i.e. somebody living away from the borderland (Kurcz, 2010, pp. 288–291; Müller, 2017, pp. 24–26). The concept of the borderland man may at first

glance be associated with the Martinezian "transnational borderlander"; the latter, however, while focusing on cross-border cultural diffusion itself (or the lack of it), does not relate it to a wider context (being a reference point here), constituted by the interior, as it is the case with the "borderland man". In other words, it is enough for this Martinezian borderlander to be somehow delved into the neighbouring culture, regardless of how mutual relations on the macro level actually look like. This leads us to the question: What if these relations are equally (or even more) advanced there? That is to say: How about Ukrainians who may live quite close to the border and cross it relatively frequently, yet remain familiar with the Polish culture to a lesser degree than their fellow nationals living in the Polish interior? It is only the concept of the borderland man by Kurcz that would fit this case as well, because it lets such a person be just *different* (in whatever sense) than those living away from the border.

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As I have been trying to unveil empirically, the developments in the Polish-Ukrainian border(land), as a part of the EU's eastern flank, follow a track deserving an approach that takes into consideration outstanding features of such an area. These include the fact that we have to do here rather with the line (not space) that essentially runs in a well-defined place (the question of territoriality), is advanced at separating individuals and their local activities (so here it is not about bordering as an intersubjectively determined phenomenon) as well as cultures and states in a way that can be labeled legally unequivocal (and not fluid), nonnegotiable, fairly physical (so it is visible) and durable (and not unstable),[7] and hence treated as much more than just *potential* to amplify the sharp division between "us" and "them". In this sense, the usefulness of the borderscapes concept is primarily expressed in that its assumptions – relating to a range of types of human activity, its scope and intensity – can be viewed as a set of indicators for determining the character of a given borderland, or more precisely, the (low) degree of its social development in terms of transnational flows.

Generalizing, one can say that the constructivist approach, which goes beyond the territorial aspect of borders, has little application to the reality of such borderlands as the Polish-Ukrainian one; even less so does the approach focusing on flows, interactions or the diminishing importance of various constraints on

7 With important exceptions to all this separateness established by people living close to the crossing, by a few villages being a tiny relic of the once ethnic heterogeneity, by smuggling as well as by such short-lived and occasional events as the European Neighbourhood Days.

the development of these interactions. This borderland, in many of its sections, functions in line with "the modern eye, which often tends to standardize and essentialize borders" (Brambilla, Laine, Scott & Bocchi, 2017, p. 2), i.e. in line with the pre-bordering conception of the late 1980s. The reference to the Communist period is legitimate here, because, in fact, a range of Poles living along the border, even though they are now allowed to cross it, do so rather seldom and, moreover, treat the area abroad as distant, sometimes strange, untamed, cognitively faded or even unknown.

Since the assumptions of globalization theory, which treats the fluidity and blurring of borders as an undeniable symptom of a postmodern society, are embedded within the frames of borderscapes, though not always clearly articulated (Szlachcicowa, 2019, p. 27), and since its followers insist that it is free of the territorial imperative – it should be assumed that relations in such state borderlands as the Polish-Ukrainian one are a phenomenon whose essence can be explained by this concept rather poorly. However, as it was signaled, borderscapes' excessive conceptual capacity makes it difficult to treat certain areas as totally inappropriate for it.

Conclusions

The talks conducted with a range of the inhabitants of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland suggest these people think very little about the border and the space around, they also undertake cross-border practices or experience their Ukrainian neighbours to a relatively small extent, which makes one think there is a kind of cross-border social wasteland there. The existence of this border, although clearly separating their world from the other, seems to have been internalised by these borderlanders in such a way that it has become emotionally and cognitively quite transparent on a daily basis. If this line is associated with formal, state-imposed restrictions, they are mainly of the domestic or local-state dimension, and not the cross-border one (for instance, by regulating presence of the neighbours and the scale of contacts with them). My interviewees do not find the Ukrainian side attractive, for which factors of a socio-cultural, touristic, infrastructural, commercial and historical nature are responsible. Hence, this is the case of, as Jussi Laine and James W. Scott would put it, top-down and bottom-up border-making processes being complementary (2018, p. 254). And although rising and falling waves of de- and rebordering have also washed over the Polish-Ukrainian border for decades, the gist of the processes occurring in this "modernistic" place is different than that in Western Europe, and so it is difficult to expect any immediate and profound change here.

From the point of view of the concept of borderscapes, including such serious contemporary challenges as migration, which direct the attention of border researchers towards political, philosophical, or ethical considerations (Laine, 2018), the diagnosed modernist shape of the social reception of the border, the borderland and Ukrainian neighbours can be seen as outdated and petty – to such an extent that one can speak in this context of the "unbearable lightness of bordering". At the same time, however, this state of affairs is an empirical fact, which, moreover – for a range of historical, (geo)political, socio-cultural or spatial reasons – is hardly valorised negatively by the locals. In other words, one may wonder whether we are *really* dealing here with a lightness of bordering and whether it is certainly unbearable in the local perception.

If, despite the objections raised, we were to apply the concept of borderscapes to the area of my interest, it would be mainly because of the almost all-encompassing nature of the concept: its focus, roughly speaking, on everything that takes place at the border and in its vicinity, as well as on what is not there; on the territorial, but also on the de-territorialised (metaphorical) dimension of the border and the borderland; on (geo)political, economic or administrative, but also on social or cultural phenomena. In this sense, the concept, similarly to "borders" in their underlying anthropological meaning, has inherently come to describe almost the totality of individual and collective human existence, and hence it makes it possible to propose here a broad set of indicators to rank various borderlands as for the level of their "borderscapeness." Furthermore, coming back to the area studied, preliminary (and discontinued) exploration of the situation on the Ukrainian side of the border suggests that the concept in question would analytically be more useful there; for although the barriers to cross this border for Ukrainian citizens are bigger than for Poles, Poland (the borderland and the interior) are evaluated (much) higher there than vice versa, implying a greater cognitive and behavioral engagement in the border itself and the visited reality across it.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that my ethnography seems to be a historical record, at least in part, as the empirical material was collected before the game changer of escalation of Russian aggression in February 2022. Only *in part,* though, as certain things are not clear yet. On the one hand, this war, at least on the ground of international relations, seems to have established the seeds of a new order with regard to Ukraine and its border to the EU. For since that time, one has already seen a significant and multifaceted development of the cross-border transport infrastructure (Jaroszewicz, 2024), it is also difficult to ignore the local reception of the experience of Ukrainians attacked by Russia and suffering various

disadvantages as a result. On the other hand, social relations, especially once the most dramatic moments are gone or tamed, are often characterised by different (i.e. "traditional") dynamics: regulated by the socio-economic "here and now", local historical memory or big (more or less imagined) models of civilization rather than by far-reaching geo-strategic reconfigurations. Therefore, the state of affairs I diagnosed in field is (and will continue to be so for some time to come) more or less up-to-date, continuing to constitute an element of the framework in which the Polish-Ukrainian borderland functions. Be that as it may, February 2022 seems to be a certain caesura that sends an era back to the dustbin of history, even if the transition turns out only partial and does not happen overnight.

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