Chapter 9
Changing Patterns of City-Hinterland Relations in Central and East European Borderlands: Szczecin on the Edge of Poland and Germany

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Abstract This paper examines cross-border cooperation in a broader European context, looking in particular at the experiences of the Szczecin region since the end of the communist rule in 1990. Political reform allowed local and regional governments to create direct linkages with regions in neighbouring countries, as well as with regions further afield. However, as well as administrative and geographical factors, historic and political factors can play a role in the development of cross-border relations and the ability of a city or region to fulfil its broader locational potential. This is particularly true in the case of Szczecin, which, as the city of Stettin, was part of Germany until 1945. After becoming part of Poland, it turned its back on that part of its former hinterland in Germany, and rather than being orientated towards Berlin and the West bank of the Oder, it became orientated towards Warsaw. After 1990, Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Germany favoured closer economic and political collaboration, both to promote development on their territories and to restore the region's relative centrality within Central Europe. However, the Polish government is far more centralised than the German one, and cross-border cooperation was straitened because of this. In addition, local and national politics also influenced the strength and breadth of cooperation. Despite this, cooperation between Szczecin and the neighbouring German regions has grown and continues to grow, both formally, through joint agreements and plans, and informally through bottom-up cooperation, such as cross-border migration in search of housing, cross-border trade in goods and services and, more recently, the development of Szczecin as a low-cost flight destination. Such cooperation has been enhanced by Szczecin's participation in broader European networks. Additional national actors have to some extent removed some of the political sensibility attached to cooperation with Germany alone.

Keywords Re-scaling • City-hinterland relations • Cross-border urban development • Networks • Szczecin

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Introduction

In the past two decades, many scholars, including geographers, have talked of the decreased importance of physical space, place and distance. The idea is that, with information and communication technologies (ICTs), geography and place will matter little (e.g. O'Brien 1992; Mitchell 1996; Flint and Taylor 2007). However, more recent research is showing how geographic identities, places and relations are being reproduced even with the usage of ICTs. With this comes an increasing awareness that many processes of globalisation are taking shape within and are thus limited to state-territorial and local frameworks. Another macro-level example is the recurring reference by states and other actors of "spheres of influence", "economic backyards", etc. One can say that after the Cold War, space, place and geopolitics have received renewed attention (e.g. Götz et al. 2008). Another related new(-old) field is geo-economics, which "analyses economic strategies – notably commercial – decided upon by states in a political setting, aiming to protect their own economies…" (Lorot 1997, 29). In response, one may ask two things. One, must geopolitics and geo-economics only analyse strategies decided by states, rather than political entities on other geographic level (cities, regions)? Second, must these strategies be self-interested, instead of aiming at a win-win situation? One positive example is the Luleå-Narvik railway line that – albeit being built when the two countries were still unified, to ship Swedish iron ore via the Norwegian coast – has led to gains for the economies of both countries, despite their choosing separate paths (Lundén 2004).

While urban areas are widely regarded as the main drivers of economies and innovation, their geographic and economic orientation is of crucial importance. The importance of profiling is related to increased globalisation and emergence of a new-old world order (instead of entering this discussion here, let us just say that we are referring to the past approximately three decades). It is also related to cities' awareness of the importance of geographic location and distance for their development. A Scandinavian example is the fairly strong commitment by several cities to the European corridor project, a broad link for physical transportation between Stockholm and Hamburg, including other places along the way (Europakorridoren AB 2009). The perceived need of cities to profile themselves in a system increasingly based on the division of labour requires strategic thinking and clear policies of what their respective roles ought to be, regionally and internationally. Even though the system is not static, certain path dependencies are sometimes recognised. Thus, urban managers are busy defining and redefining potential or already existing development axes for the territories under their responsibility: Stockholm focuses on the Mälar Valley, Copenhagen and Malmö on the Öresund region, while Vienna focuses on "Centrope".

In regions where major historical events and territorial disputes are more distant or accepted, such strategies are less controversial. In many places of East-Central Europe, the ice between long-standing "archenemies" has only recently begun to melt. In light of this, it is particularly interesting to look at what happens to a rather

large city, Szczecin, located at the border between two strong and well-integrated states, Poland and Germany. In this paper, the German name Stettin will be used in pre-1945 contexts (with the obvious exception of quotations), and elsewhere the Polish (and today single official) name Szczecin is used.

The paper's aim is threefold. One is to increase the understanding of the historical and contemporary geo-orientations of the city of Szczecin. By geo-orientations, I refer to physical spaces towards which a place – in this case a city – unconsciously or deliberately tries to or indeed does develop. The scale can be small (e.g. suburban planning) or large (e.g. directions for international trade and flows), but these can sometimes be interrelated. Such a study has to our knowledge not been done before, arguably for reasons we will return to.

One main reason for doing this is to test empirical observations against more abstract approaches, mostly rescaling theory and central place theory: to what extent can these be applied to the case of Szczecin?

Another aim is to analyse statements and policies on Szczecin's orientations by a number of actors and institutions from Germany and Poland, the two countries which embrace its geographical and historical hinterland. Here, an interesting question is how geography and history are used in support of various theses regarding Szczecin's geo-orientations.

Cities in the Rescaling Literature

As van der Heiden (2007, 4) argues, in the past,

> the … state took care of foreign relations in general and the economic well-being of the country, local authorities were traditionally in the position to manage social policies… The cities were tightly under control of the … state, regulating market and fiscal transfers, tax law and tariff policy. The tight fit between urban dynamism and national economic growth (Sassen 1991) was unquestioned as long as GDP growth rates allowed large redistribution programmes. City governments could concentrate on the management of the cities and on distributing public goods … (Brenner 2003, 299).

Now, with a global market, countries compete both at the national scale and below the national scale, defending themselves by offering the lowest taxes, unrestrictive zoning laws, large subsidies and low- or no-tariff policy. Therefore, the importance of the national scale in policy-making has decreased dramatically (Brenner 2006). However, the question discussed in the rescaling literature is whether other scales, that is, actions at lower levels of government, can compensate for losses at the national scale.

One example of a city that is increasingly aware of the need to have its own "foreign policy" is Berlin, whose senate recognised that although constitutionally foreign policy lies in the hands of the federal government, it is also the concern of the *Länder* to maintain close relations with other regions. There is even a law defining the legal framework for cooperation between the federal government and the Länder in EU affairs (Land Berlin 2003). The senate explicitly proposes that "Berlin has to be

attuned to increased locational competition with regions like Öresund and Centrope"; thus, "identifying and taking measures for common German-Polish interests must be done without delay" (Land Berlin 2005). Another example from the Central European post-socialist region is Riga, which "has been separating itself more and more from Latvia's image, in turn creating its own popularity", leading some to wonder which one of them is more significant and has more to say (Murashova 2010, 5).

The rescaling literature further recognises that

> Although capital is said to be completely mobile nowadays, companies still need an infrastructure to operate and this infrastructure is still mostly immobile, and production processes are also locally bound. Swyngedouw (1997) called this process glocalisation, meaning that although globalisation leads to heavier competition and the erosion of the national scale, economic processes are still rooted in local places, especially in metropolitan areas. Thus, city regions are nodal points for globalisation processes, as they link the national economy to the international market place (Savitch and Kantor 2002).

Therefore, the question is not if some scales have become unimportant in the age of globalisation (deterritorialisation) but rather which territories are the ones where political decision-making is still possible (reterritorialisation) (see Brenner 1999). Cities and city regions, as places where human activities in general concentrate, are nodal points in these economic and political processes (Sassen 1991). Therefore, they do not need to be "leaves in the wind" of globalisation (Savitch and Kantor 2002, 346). Often, the economic development of these city regions seems more and more disconnected from the development of the rest of their country (Brenner 2003, 298).

> In an era of globalisation, there is global competition between large metropolitan areas, competing for the location of businesses on a global scale. It is within metropolitan areas where economic prosperity is still possible, or as Brenner (1999, 298 and 437) puts it, the geoeconomic power of cities is increasingly disarticulated from the territorial matrices of the interstate system. Rescaling can thus be defined as decentralisation of the national scale of accumulations, urbanisation and state regulation in favour of new sub- and supranational territorial configurations (Brenner 1999, 435) (van der Heiden 2007, 4–5).

Perhaps most importantly here, "rescaling theory … predicts a shift of political steering capacities from the … state to urban areas, whereby increased international activities are one of the most prominent possibilities for such shifts to take place. International activities of urban areas are currently mushrooming at a global and especially European level" (van der Heiden 2007, 2).

To what extent were and are these observations valid for Szczecin? It is with this question in mind that we shall review the city's historic and contemporary development axes.

Szczecin's Historical Orientations

Szczecin has been a meeting point of various tribes and peoples for centuries. This is true of many settlements in Central Europe and elsewhere, but the uniqueness of this city lies in its location at the mouth of the Odra River, making it a gateway between important Central European regions and the Baltic Sea and beyond. Various

Germanic and Slavic tribes have resided here, including the Wends and the Lusatian culture. The Germanness or Slavicness of some of them has been a subject of debate for some time (Piskorski 1999, 21). Within the region, towns – which in time became cities – are widely regarded to have been the main drivers of economic development, with many constituting autonomous political entities throughout much of the Middle Ages (which, as geographers and others are now suggesting, they are becoming again). Up until the nineteenth century, trade and wealth mostly depended on access to the sea and/or a river. Thus, many larger cities developed around river mouths. So did Stettin, which owes its growth to trade (first in agricultural products and later natural resources) between the areas around the Oder with its tributaries and the Baltic Sea and beyond.

In relation to its direct neighbourhood, by the twelfth century, Stettin had become the regional centre of the area. Settlements directly located on the Baltic coast (e.g. Wolin, which once saw itself as the most important Baltic town) soon saw their population surpassed by Stettin. In the south, trading vessels from towns on the upper Oder (Greifenhagen, Gartz, etc.) had to pay tolls in Stettin in order to pass up or downstream and were thus outcompeted (Piskorski et al. 1994).

During the eleventh century, a lively trade can be detected between the forerunners of the Germans, Danes, Poles, Russians as well as other Slavic tribes, and the city was part of the Hanseatic League of trading cities. Like Venice, it was less orientated to its immediate hinterland than to more distant markets to which it was linked by trade. From 1310 onwards, Stettin was the centre of a herring trade, and its merchants had established contacts in Skåne (Kirchner 2009). By the fifteenth century, Stettin's significance was more limited to its closer neighbourhood in comparison with Danzig or Lübeck, which served much larger hinterlands (much of Poland-Lithuania and the German states, respectively) (Piskorski 1999). In the seventeenth century, the city's growth potentials beyond the provincial borders were further limited by extensive damage to the whole region's economy due to several wars, protectionist policies and customs by Brandenburg (which controlled parts of the lower Oder), difficult conditions for shipping (exits to the Baltic were becoming too narrow) and lack of investments during the era of Swedish rule (Piskorski 1999).

In addition, during the period of Swedish rule, the city had a peripheral location within the Swedish realm. After Gustav Adolph's landing in Pomerania, Sweden's aim with Stettin was to establish it as a centre for its military operations against Germany rather than as a centre of trade between German lands and the Baltic (Kirchner 2009).

Nevertheless, the conditions for Stettin to become a production and trade centre started to improve after its incorporation into the Prussian state in the eighteenth century, as the borders dividing the city from its hinterland were abolished (Piskorski 1999). This was even more the case after 1740, when Prussia annexed the economically important region of Silesia. However, the Prussian state's trade and customs policies now hampered imports from Poland. Commerce with Western Europe was important, as before, but was restricted by the Danish straits customs (Piskorski 1999). The main driver of Stettin's economic recovery in the nineteenth century was instead its transit role in Central European imports of Swedish iron and other metals and in coal exports from Silesia. In 1843, a direct Berlin-Stettin railway was opened, in order to link the (then) "rich, industrial and commercially significant capital with

the kingdom's number one trading port… The transport of people and goods was soon flourishing" (Buchweitz et al. 2007, 8). The railway lines between Pasewalk and Stettin (west of Stettin) and between Ducherow and Swinemünde (northwest) were opened in 1863 and 1876, respectively (Buchweitz et al. 2007). A direct road was completed between Berlin and Stettin in 1828 (Deutsche Städte 2009), and a new water corridor linking the two cities was finished by 1914, more straight than the one first constructed in 1605 (Wahl 2009). Stettin's harbour became the largest on the German Baltic coast (Kirchner 2009), and it was in these years that Usedom, a nearby island, received the name "Berlin's bathtub". The recreational functions in the area became so popular at the turn of the century that tourists came from as far as the Czech lands, at that time part of Austria-Hungary. Immediately before World War I, the city had a population of 250,000 (a tenfold increase since 1816) and a large port turnover (Mieszkowska 1996). Regarding its extension in relation to the Oder River, it was characterised as a one-bank dominated agglomeration situated on the higher western bank, with only some port functions on the low eastern bank (De Geer 1912).

In 1920, Swinemünde became Germany's maritime link to East Prussia, a province that became cut off from Germany proper by the new Versailles borders. Furthermore, with a part of Eastern Germany transferred to Poland, Stettin lost important suppliers of export coal from Upper Silesia and of crops from the areas around Posen/Poznań (Kirchner 2009). Consequently, during the interwar period, Stettin fell into serious economic decline. The competition of Hamburg and Bremen reduced the port turnover by half, ruining the shipbuilding industry and creating high rates of unemployment. But the city retained its position as a trading centre, adding entire new neighbourhoods and vast parks to its urban fabric. On the eve of the Second World War, its population has grown to 381,000 inhabitants (Mieszkowska 1996). Links to the German capital were further strengthened by the new Reichsautobahn highway that was opened by 1937 (Meynier 1937). During the Second World War, just as during the First, Stettin became the main port for traffic with Scandinavia (Kirchner 2009). Nevertheless, "World War II was a disaster for the city. Allied bombing, mainly during 1944, turned its oldest parts and industrial sites into heaps of rubble. The harbour was 80 % destroyed … By the decision of the victorious powers in Potsdam, Stettin, with the major part of … Pomerania, was passed to Poland" (Mieszkowska 1996, 110).

The entire German population of about 400,000 had to leave Stettin, henceforth Szczecin. By 1947, Szczecin was an almost entirely Polish frontier city (Musekamp 2009). The border towards occupied Germany was quickly closed off. On the other hand, contacts with Sweden were quickly restored, despite Szczecin being transferred to a state under Soviet influence. Swedish trade vessels resumed coal and food imports and viscous cellulose exports to Wrocław via Szczecin from as early as the summer of 1946 (Kirchner 2009).

> Port turnover grew steadily, and in the 1960s the united Szczecin-Świnoujście harbours came to outdistance other Baltic ports. Along with the port, other branches of the maritime economy developed (shipyards, fisheries) as well as several industries based on the flow of materials and products from the hinterland and overseas. … Szczecin grew as a cultural

> centre of the north-western part of Poland, housing several academic schools and various cultural institutions. Its seemingly free contact with the world was, however, severely limited by tight state borders and the Iron Curtain… (Mieszkowska 1996, 111).

The new Polish regime legitimised the Polishness of the "recovered territories" by emphasising its Slavic history (Musekamp 2009). During the Cold War, local contacts with neighbouring East German regions were not maintained, despite the official rhetoric of brotherly relations between the GDR and Poland. The border was closed, with an extremely limited level of permeability (with the exception of the 1970s, when some cross-border mobility was allowed). The entire Polish-German borderland, including Szczecin and its surrounding areas, became a geographically and economically peripheral lagging region. This is particularly true for Szczecin, into which investments were limited up until 1970 (Dutkowski 2009) and which lost its function as a port for Berlin. During the time of the People's Republic, between 1945 and 1989, Szczecin was almost entirely ignored by regional development policy, even though the city went through a strict reorientation eastwards (Dorsch 2003). One illustrative example is the construction of a wide road in the 1960s that crosses the pre-1945 old town and the Odra River, creating an important corridor towards the central parts of Poland. This special treatment of the city had to do with its relatively uncertain status within Poland until the border's recognition by West Germany in the early 1970s, but even so in 1989–1990, some concerns were (re) raised in Poland until reunified Germany finally reconfirmed recognition of the border in late 1990.

From the overview, we can see that Szczecin's historical orientations are the north-south axes between Scandinavia and Central Europe (mostly Silesia and Berlin) and connections with its direct vicinity (in its role as a regional centre), especially to the west, north and east (the areas to the south have tended to have closer ties to Berlin).

Szczecin's Orientation After 1989

Szczecin has received less scholarly attention than much smaller but divided cities along the German-Polish border such as Görlitz-Zgorzelec, Frankfurt-on-Oder-Słubice and Guben-Gubin (e.g. Stokłosa 2003, Jańczak 2009). This may be because in many divided cities, a sort of balance existed where each half of the city was orientated towards its respective country. It is perhaps because of their pre-1945 history as one unit that such cities have received more attention, with many projects aimed at overcoming the divisions. This is less the case with agglomerations located on a state border (such as Trieste, Strasbourg, Oradea, etc.) but – at least until recently – clearly in one country. Nevertheless, as these metropolitan areas grow, urban managers need to consider the direction and location of future growth. Such discussions are not always uncontroversial, as is seen from the following overview of the main hypotheses around Szczecin's geo-orientations.

"Relocating and Leapfrogging" or "Integrating and Restructuring"?

Two hypotheses have dominated the discussions on Szczecin's orientation in the recent years. One predicts that a dynamic economic development of the city will concentrate on the axis Berlin-Szczecin-Skåne/Öresund, while no substantial and lasting economic linkages will develop with the directly adjacent German border area. The other one envisages an emergence of an intensive cross-border economy and labour market, so that a positive restructuring process will start through the utilisation of synergies and the division of labour in strategic sectors and political areas (Maack et al. 2005).

Consequently, studies on the future development of the cross-border region have reached different conclusions. On the one hand, some studies have placed the German-Polish border space in a larger developmental context and reached negative conclusions regarding the area's growth perspectives. These mostly emphasise the particular problems and weaknesses of the German side, which manifest themselves in negative demographic development and a weak economy. At the same time, other studies have focussed on the growth opportunities of border regions in the eve of European integration. According to these, such regions have significant advantages, since they can benefit from diverging conditions in neighbouring states, including wage costs taxation and costs of living. By their nature, arguments in favour of foreign direct investments (FDI) support engagement with border regions. These include opening up new markets through foreign export and production, the reduction of costs by taking advantage of salary and labour cost differences, as well as of differences in environmental quality and environmental legislation, and the activation of innovation potential by utilising local technological competences (Maack et al. 2005).

Both hypotheses find support in spatial theory, where the study of distance and location aspects has an almost two-century-old tradition. Market-hinterland relations were analysed by von Thünen (1826), Alfred Weber (1909), Christaller (1933), Lösch (1940) and others. The latter two developed central place theory, hypothesising spatial patterns of settlement structures in an ideal, homogenous space – based on their market functions – and finding that settlements in a free-market system would occupy different hierarchical ranks. As they move up the hierarchical order, they offer rarer and more specialised services to their surrounding areas. Thus, unless major physical barriers (large waters or mountains) or non-open political borders are present, towns and settlements on various levels of a hierarchical system would be distributed more or less equally. One should note that Lösch paid special attention to border areas, using the relatively open US-Canadian border as an example. He argued that they truncated hinterlands and stunted economic growth. One can find works inspired by this thinking up to this day, not least in Germany (e.g. Güssefeldt 2005, Maack et al. 2005) and East-Central Europe. A recent study from Poznań (Ciok 2009) has identified the hypothetic catchment areas of cities in the German-Polish borderland along this principle, with Szczecin's area of influence

clearly located on both sides of the boundary. Another contribution by an international group of scholars analysed Szczecin's cooperation and conflicts with its direct German neighbourhood, finding that the city's role as a market centre of the theoretical hinterland is unevenly influenced by the state boundary (Lundén et al. 2009).

The past two decades have seen the rise of new approaches that have changed the way geographers and others think about (spatial) distance. For instance, today the perspectives of the New Economic Geography as developed by Krugman (1991) have come to the fore. Krugman, Porter (1990) and others have focussed on factors that contribute to the development of clusters and agglomerations. Another groundbreaking author is Castells (1996), whose works shifted the focus from place and location towards flows and networks. According to this line of thinking, in the information society, networks and flows between actors and cities are more significant than direct physical contact and environment.

The City's Geopolitical Orientations Since 1989

Compared to Gdańsk, Szczecin is weakly represented in various transnational urban networks. However, association with the Euroregion Pomerania (an association of German, Polish and Swedish municipalities located near the border and involved in cross-border cooperation) has played an important role since the mid-nineties (Kommunalgemeinschaft Europaregion Pomerania 2007). Moreover, numerous bilateral partnerships exist with other European cities (such as Rostock, Lübeck, Malmö, some districts of Berlin, etc) (Dorsch 2003).

The process of establishing the Euroregion is itself illustrative of Poland's initial cautiousness towards cooperation with Germany. The initiative came from the German side. The Polish side was fairly enthusiastic as long as the cooperation would also include other parties from Denmark or Sweden. In December 1995, the Euroregion was finally established (later than all the other ones along the German-Polish border), and in February 1998, the Swedish county of Skåne joined in (Kommunalgemeinschaft Europaregion Pomerania 2008). The role of the Swedish side thus seems at least have been to act as a kind of mediator or balance and lessen Polish fears of German dominance.

Overall, however, in the 1990s, Szczecin concentrated on the Baltic space and only more recently on the German-Polish borderland. A transborder orientation towards the Polish-German border region and the Baltic was considered something natural: the spatial hinterland of Szczecin is located on both sides of the German-Polish border, and as a port (and until December 2011, the location of a shipyard), the Baltic connection is inevitable – even if external links were curbed between 1945 and 1990 (Dorsch 2003).

The city experienced a very strong cross-border policy while Bartlomiej Sochanski was mayor, from 1994 to 1998. He concentrated on a strengthened "urban foreign policy" focussing on the borderland. Instead of focussing on the old

shipyard as a motor of growth, he saw Szczecin's long-term future in becoming a regional and even European centre based on services, culture, education and recreation. Despite leaving some imprints on the city's 2002 development strategy (City of Szczecin 2002), after he was voted out of office, cross-border activities were reduced. Subsequent developments reflect the mixed level of support for cross-border cooperation among the city's leadership. In the current (Michalski 2009), no explicit reference is made to the German part of Szczecin's hinterland.

This can be compared to Berlin's "foreign policy" position papers, in which direct references are made to Szczecin and the West Pomeranian Voivodeship in strengthening "Berlin as a part and centre of a cross-border macro-region", particularly through deepening city partnerships and networks, improving rail, road and water connections, as well as common spatial planning strategies (Land Berlin 2003). Explicitly,

> It is the declared goal of Berlin's Senate and economy to develop the space on both sides of the Oder for the long term into an infrastructurally closely linked region, with cooperation in many areas, creating a dynamic economic space with urban pulse generators, or growth poles, consisting of Berlin, Szczecin, Poznań and Wrocław. All of these were once part of Berlin's larger economic and political hinterland. With regard to developing regional economic spaces, the Senate does not question whether there is a common Oder region but asks how opportunities and development possibilities can be shaped and used to the advantage of the entire region. Crucial for cooperation in the Oder region are the related interests of politics and economy, since the strengthening of Berlin's economic power and growth in employment is thought to strongly depend on how the cross-border regional economy develops. The nearby western Polish voivodeships constitute a natural 'cooperation space', especially Szczecin, Poznań and Wrocław" (Land Berlin 2005, 1)
> [the original document refers to them by their German names: Stettin, Posen and Breslau].

A similar rhetoric can be found in Szczecin. For instance, the proclamation of the city as a "Europolis", as a "centre of European integration and a supra-regional centre of the Southern Baltic space", as formulated in various documents as well as statements by the leader of the city's office for international cooperation, makes clear that more recently there has been a reorientation from a Pan-European or even a Baltic orientation to a stronger orientation in the direction of the borderland. Szczecin wants to brand itself as the "centre of a multinational region". On the historical basis of the Pomeranian province, a multinational, cross-border space is to be created, with Szczecin as the urban centre. This historical reference to Pomerania and German Stettin is not without controversies, particularly on the Polish side. However, economic constraints seem to make closer cooperation inevitable for both sides of the border – if they want to escape the peripherality of the past fifty years. With Szczecin being the only large city in the northern border region, it is also the sole bearer of this potential. This stronger orientation is reflected in increasing enthusiasm for concerted action and collaboration within the Polish-German border region as well as by efforts to create a so-called Pommern Forum (Dorsch 2003) (which could not be traced online in late 2009). The Oder partnership is a similarly uneasy undertaking but nevertheless shows some concrete results such as an improved rail connection between Szczecin and Berlin (Rada 2008), although in

2012, it was still necessary to change trains and the total travel time was approximately 2 h, almost twice the pre-1945 time (Deutsche Bahn 2012).

Currently, Szczecin is a leading power on the Polish side of the Euroregion Pomerania. However, initially, the city was not even member of the union of participating municipalities. Dorsch (2003) notes the general lack of support from national governments as a further problem.

Berlin plays an important role for Szczecin and its development into a "Europolis". The Szczecin region does not just aspire to retake its earlier role as the port and recreational area of Berlin but also to create tight economic connections to the German capital. However, concrete steps towards this direction so far are few, as Berlin's interest in Szczecin seems rather limited compared to its interest in Poznań or Warsaw. According to Dorsch (2003), one further problem is that Szczecin lacks engaged experts with sufficient knowledge and skills (arguably, this is valid on both sides of the borderland). Neither is there a greater general willingness than elsewhere in Poland or Germany to learn the language on the opposite side of the border.

Nevertheless, some interesting cross-border developments are taking place. One is a new group of Polish settlers buying family houses on the German side where, thanks in part to inner-German emigration, prices for dwellings are already lower than those in central Szczecin. The majority of these dwellers commute to Szczecin on a daily basis, but some have opened up SMEs in their new hometowns. During 1991–2003, the annual average of Polish citizens in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was stable at about 1,650; by December 2007, the figure had risen to 3,631. Growth was particularly high in Uecker-Randow, the German district closest to Szczecin, which had 109 registered Polish citizens in 1995, 283 in 2003 but 992 in late 2007 (Deutsches Polen-Institut 2009, 9), and by the end of 2010, the population of foreign nationals had reached 2,746 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2012). Clearly, Poland's admission to the EU has contributed to this development, which accelerated after it joined the Schengen Area in 2007. From a temporal perspective, the growth of cross-border commuting is easy to explain, as control-free crossing points allow individuals to travel freely back and forth across the border.

However, the recent wave of Polish immigration has triggered a rise of far-right political extremism, targeted especially against new residents, in a region which is already a stronghold of such movements.

Here, one should note an interesting comment by a former Polish ambassador to Germany. He noted that "people from Szczecin and Poznań are today indeed using Berlin-airports, and the EU gives new impulses to cooperation" but emphasised that "there is no determinism about regional development, which lies in the hands of local actors" (Hensel 2001, 4). This is of course somewhat simplified, as Warsaw still has strong control over cross-border policies, but the statement illustrates the central government's point of view in this question. A member of staff from the Polish interior ministry pointed out that while they "support the Oder partnership, they would rather see this cooperation take place within the German-Polish governmental commission" – in which the government in Warsaw has a stronger role (Rada 2008).

Szczecin's Geo-economic Orientations After 1989

According to an academic Polish regional expert, commentators, especially in Germany, tend to write a lot about cross-border cooperation in the Szczecin region, but there are not that many activities going on (Dutkowski 2009). One reason for this – or effect of this –may be that since the collapse of communist rule, Szczecin has not been a national or European centre of development (Dorsch 2003). It has clearly continued to be lag in comparison with similar-sized western Polish cities like Poznań, Wrocław and Gdańsk, which have experienced a period of strong economic boom, particularly before the current economic crisis. The city usually performs badly in GDP comparisons and liveability surveys (web Bulletinen 2009a). This is also true for the surrounding territory. Out of the 16 Polish Voivodeships, for instance, in December 2003, West Pomerania only ranked ninth with regard to the influx of FDI (Maack et al. 2005). At the same time, on the German side of the border, the nearest counties (*kreis*) are among the poorest ones in the Federal Republic.

In the mid-1990s, Mieszkowska (1996, 111–112) described Szczecin as a provincial capital with 410,000 inhabitants, noting that due to long prevailing political constraints, Szczecin did not continue its pre-war development to the west. She argued that "roads on its western outskirts were highly vulnerable to rapidly increasing traffic from the newly opened frontier and the sudden jump in car ownership". The infrastructure needed to accommodate new cross-border communications was not in place and had not been planned for.

During the years 2000–2003 alone, 40,000 jobs were lost in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, half of them in the industrial sector. But since 2003, growth has been taking place. The main drivers of the economy are the food and furniture industries. Other sectors which are growing include medicine and optical devices, as well as tourism. Until 2003, maritime potentials had no significant effects on growth and labour market. Cooperation in the border region has so far taken place in the areas of construction, engineering, metal and wood processing, textile industry and retailing. But shared value creation chains are few. Most cooperation consists of exports from and imports to Poland. A greater amount of FDI is concentrated on the food, chemical, and furniture industries, but demand for the products of these investments does not stem from the adjacent German borderland (Maack et al. 2005) (even though the latter could benefit from such investment and manufacturing as well).

Despite recognising its structural deficits, some experts from Germany draw attention to the potential on the German side in areas such as the maritime economy, agriculture, renewable energy, enterprise-oriented services and tourism. At the same time, they acknowledge that half of the Vorpommern economy relies on the agricultural sector. They suggest that activating the industrial potential of the more industrially developed northeastern part of Brandenburg could lead to tighter cooperation, for example, in the chemical, paper and wood industries, in agriculture and in renewable energy (Maack et al. 2005).

Szczecin's airport has increasingly developed an international character. Since 2004, there have been flights to the British Isles and Ireland, including London, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Dublin, which received a large influx of migrant workers from Poland after it joined the EU that same year (Airport Szczecin Goleniów 2004). In 2012, there were also flights to Oslo and a range of charter flights to Egypt and Turkey (Port Lotniczy Szczecin Goleniów 2012). The airport handled over 500,000 passengers annually.

Szczecin's shipyard had long been the city's most significant employer. However, in the spring of 2009, the EU ruled that national subsidies to it violated internal market regulations and had to be repaid or else new owners found (Pop 2009). Initially, in summer, 2009, it looked like investors from Qatar were interested, a country with which Poland also signed a contract to import liquefied natural gas (LNG) for 20 years. The deal included the building of an LNG terminal at Świnoujście, planned since 2006. The Qataris withdrew, but construction of the terminal went ahead. In the autumn of 2009, it looked like the city would take over the shipyard and incorporate it into a special economic zone (web Bulletinen 2009b; 2009c), but in December 2011, the shipyard was declared bankrupt, and in early 2012 was undergoing liquidation. In late 2010, it was announced that a new gas pipeline would be built to connect the LNG terminal with the domestic gas pipeline network, enabling the transmission of natural gas throughout the whole of Poland. The project was cofinanced with 50 million euros from the European Energy Programme for Recovery (EEPR) and was intended to contribute to increasing the energy security of the EU member states through the cross-border infrastructural investments aimed at integrating the EU energy market. This was not only the first such port in Poland but the first in its region. In addition, in 2010, it was announced that the Faculty of Maritime Engineering at the Maritime University of Szczecin and the Faculty of Drilling, Oil and Gas at the AGH University of Science and Technology in Krakow would jointly teach a new course, LNG Transportation and Operation of Terminals. The first class graduated in March 2012.

The port of Szczecin-Świnoujście was doing rather well before the current crisis (which hit this sector particularly badly), even though until recently, it was the only large Baltic port to lack a handling plant for containers (Kirchner 2009). In 2006, much of the container traffic consisted of feeder transport from and to Hamburg and Bremerhaven (Kirchner 2009; Klauenberg 2009). Given the Pan-European role of those two ports and of Rotterdam, Szczecin-Świnoujście can at best expect to play a role as a regional distribution centre and even that in competition with Rostock-Warnemünde. There are at the same time strong political forces in centrally ruled Poland that disapprove of Szczecin's port authority turning towards Germany (Kirchner 2009).

The challenges of the shipyard and the port notwithstanding this paper assume that Szczecin's relative backwardness is also related to the city's geographically peripheral location. Typically, most states and political entities try to orient their peripheries towards their centres (Lundén 1997, 2004). One illustrative example of this is that from Szczecin there are more transport options to various distant settlements within Poland, let alone in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, than to much

closer ones on the German side. This can hinder the agglomeration from a more even expansion. At the same time, Szczecin's port suffers because it is distant from Poland's centres of economic growth, which are in the southern and central parts of the country – and nowhere in its borderlands – and are well connected to West European agglomerations by road, particularly in Southern Poland (Klauenberg 2009). This relative locational disadvantage is also observed by Musekamp, who notes that "… Szczecin (German: Stettin) is one of the largest cities in Poland, but at the same time it is one of the most indistinct on most Poles' mental maps. One reason is its location: Szczecin is in the extreme north-western corner of the country, on the border with Germany … Being a highly centralised state after 1945, Poland was not focused on its periphery; in the eyes of many Szczecinians today, the focus has not changed since the fall of Communism" (Musekamp 2009, 305).

A group of German experts have analysed the border region. Their findings are largely in accordance with the priorities of the city of Szczecin master plan. They differ on two points, however. One recommendation from the German side is that "the economic, technologic and human potentials of the German hinterland of the city should be taken more into consideration, together with a stronger, more integrative view of a common region". A second is that "the excellent maritime potential of Szczecin needs to be developed into the basis of the city's economy". The German authors find that today Szczecin is primarily becoming orientated along the axis to Berlin and/or a future corridor along the German border towards the Czech and Slovak Republics, as well as northwards to Skåne/Öresund (Maack et al. 2005, 18). Recently, the port has been taken over by a subdivision of Deutsche Bahn, DB Port Szczecin, which has modernised the port using EU money, and recently opened a new container terminal on 12 March 2012 and markets itself as a leading cold storage port; it describes itself as "the shortest distance from all north continental and Baltic ports to 5 capital cities: Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Bratislava, and also shortest land passage against any other north continental/Baltic Port to main Adriatic ports Trieste and Koper for the Baltic - Adriatic landbridge,…Furthermore, Szczecin is the main hinterland port for Berlin" (DB Port Szczecin 2012).

What they refer to is the so-called Central European Transport Corridor (CETC), which is meant to "provide efficient cargo handling from the north to the south of Europe. It can create an area of economic infrastructure and social links between cities and regions and stimulate economic growth, especially among the new EU Member States" (CETC 2008–2010). The corridor is part of the E65 route connecting the Baltic with the Adriatic Sea but also links Malmö in Sweden with Chaniá in Greece.

Quo Vadis, Szczecin?

With regard to the CETC, officials in Szczecin and Skåne support its development (web Bulletinen 2009d), as do local businesses and the current operator of the Szczecin Port, DB Port Szczecin, though its long-term feasibility does not yet seem

clear. Competing projects are already under construction, such as the Gdańsk-Budapest-Rijeka corridor or the Hamburg-Venice corridor. If the idea is to divert part of this north-south traffic through relatively impoverished, peripheral areas in order to avoid congestion on other corridors, then the development of the CETC might happen, but some experts question whether such transits bring any significant benefits to the areas they cross. According to a regional expert (Dutkowski 2009), the area's future lies rather in health tourism, as well as research and development (rather than as a logistical centre or a transport hub, for instance). There is some cooperation between the universities of Szczecin and Rostock and to a lesser extent Greifswald, but the potentials here are far from exhausted.

When it comes to the port and especially the shipyard, Szczecin's traditional bread givers, as the collapse and liquidation of the shipyard shows, Szczecin may find it difficult to compete with the neighbouring cities in Poland and Germany. After Germany lost Szczecin in 1945, the GDR built up Rostock as the country's main port. In Poland, the Gdańsk agglomeration was developed as the main port city. Today, Hamburg and Lübeck are the dominant ports not only in Germany but beyond, in Central and East Europe. Plans call for them to supply a hinterland which extends all the way to inside Russia. There are also physical geographic barriers to increasing the capacities of Szczecin's port. The river Świna is not deep enough for huge vessels and needs to be dredged regularly. The LNG terminal may to some extent be seen as a reaction to the forthcoming Russian-German Nord Stream pipeline ending up in Lubmin just 50 km west of Świnoujście, but both are the subject of some debate, as they could hamper the development of tourism.

Tourism, particularly health tourism, is growing on both sides of the border and constitutes one of the most significant sectors. Unlike several other above-mentioned industries, there also seems to be little cross-border competition in this field. The Polish side generally targets less affluent visitors. At the same time, customers from Germany are present on both sides of the border (Abraham 2009). Apart from wellness services (such as spas, hairdressing, personal grooming services and similar activities), health tourism is dominated by medical tourism, treatment of the elderly and general healthcare: for example, dentists in Szczecin increasingly receive clients from Germany (Herrick 2007) but also from Scandinavia, due to geographic proximity. There is arguably an additional development potential. The demographic outlook in Europe, not least in Germany and Poland, is that the trend towards an ageing population will continue, while healthcare and the healthcare sector are increasingly liberalised. In some countries and cases, EU patients can go to other member states if they can get treatments faster or cheaper and be reimbursed by their national healthcare providers.

Until recently, services constituted a relatively under-researched field within economic geography. Hermelin and Rusten (2007) have long been exceptions and note that more and more services are deterritorialised due to the spread of ICT. Health- and elderly care are arguably to a certain extent different in this regard, as in most cases physical contact between providers and clients is unavoidable. Polish healthcare practitioners used to emigrate en masse, but this is changing. Wages have increased in Poland, while the main destination countries (UK, Ireland)

are particularly badly hit in the current economic crisis. At the same time, some clients cannot be transported over long distances. When it comes to elderly care, studies and surveys also show the importance of geographic proximity for the clients when choosing their new places of residence.

Conclusion

We have seen that regardless of political considerations, Szczecin's links with the outside world depended on the dominant means of transportation at a given time period. When maritime transport prevailed, contacts with other port cities flourished. When rail and road connections were built, links towards continental Europe became at least as important. More recently, low-cost flights are connecting Szczecin to other European cities. Generally, the leapfrog approach so far seems somewhat more correct in having predicted increased contacts with other metropolitan regions rather than with the direct neighbourhood, especially the German side.

It is clear that the geo-economic orientations of a city like Szczecin, with its rich but difficult history, are a matter of not only political but even theoretical debates. In these debates, path dependencies and historical references are used by commentators and experts. This can be both positive and negative. On the one hand, some necessities for cooperation with Germany exist due to geographic environmental realities (e.g. management of the Oder River and Szczecin Lagoon, new Polish settlers in the region and so on). On the other hand, some commentators may become blind to some realities, such as that the two sides of the former historical region (which has of course not at all always been a coherent piece of territory) have developed within different frameworks and conditions for 67 years and continue to do so today. Nevertheless, increasing cross-border mobility and especially the new group of cross-border settlers – if they become permanent – might contribute to making this still very sharp cultural and mental boundary less rigid.

Discourses around Szczecin's orientations seem to be influenced by the respective commentators' geographic and national background, with a sometimes quite explicit desire in Germany for "reviving the historical Pomeranian region". Some actors, especially in north-western Poland, present a similar line of thinking, but there seems to be a higher level of cautiousness east of the Oder. For example, there are only 4 road border crossings in the immediate Szczecin region (2014), although there were many more before 1945. A conflict of interest is to some extent apparent between the central powers in Warsaw, responsible for cross-border links among other things, and local ones – Szczecin and the Polish Voivodeship along the border – justifying the thesis that states with a liberal economy but regulated foreign trade, surrounded by the same type of states, tend to disfavour locations at the boundary (Lundén 2004). Indeed, the central administration seems, to some extent, to find itself in a dilemma about letting Szczecin go its own way while keeping it loyal to Poland: bad policies can be counterproductive and may result in economic hardship and an even more marginalised border region or one strongly leaning

towards Germany. On the other hand, investment by the private sector, such as DB Port Szczecin, and a response to market forces may lead to further integration.

Szczecin then tends to fit with rescaling theory's suggestion that cities are increasingly "living their own lives" through interurban partnerships, networks, etc. At the same time, the self-manoeuvring capacity of a city in Poland is more limited than in, for example, Germany, due to different legal administrative state structures (which can of course be a fortune or misfortune with, for example, Berlin suffering from huge financial difficulties). The role of such structural differences is perhaps less taken into account by rescaling theory.

Central place theory seems to have considerable relevance in explaining some patterns of spatial relations in our case. Until recently, within Central and East Europe, all planning was the preserve of the states' national government, with little regard to market mechanisms. For the Szczecin area, Berlin is becoming an important transport hub, not least for flying. As well, Poles from Szczecin are suburbanising into Germany, and the city's healthcare practitioners are successfully attracting German and Scandinavian clients.

But this insight should not lead one to reconstruct historical regions. Instead, it is necessary to maintain a focus on analysing concrete areas of potential cooperation. What Szczecin's future foci of orientation ought to be should predominantly depend on which sectors the metropolitan area aspires to concentrate on and on the type of infrastructure preferred to sustain those links. If the health tourism potential is to be further exploited, the links to proximate, large and affluent metropolitan regions, like Hamburg, Öresund and to some extent Berlin and Poznań, need to be advanced. If more resources are to be invested in R&D that requires less local collaboration, as R&D is generally less distance dependent, even if closer cooperation might be necessary between, for instance, environmental research institutes in the region. A lower dependence on geographic proximity is also characteristic of some ICT-based services such as international companies' call centres and back-office financial administration, of which there are more and more in Poland. Thus, while acknowledging the necessity of physical contact in some fields, we should not be blinded by the ways geography and history can be used to legitimise or support various politico-economic contacts. It is with this in mind that one should approach the (re)constructed spaces of a "Pomeranian region", "Baltic region", "Central Europe" and the like.

Further Research

In Western Europe, the phenomenon of agglomerations growing across international borders has been present for several decades. Perhaps the most important milestone was the elimination of border controls through the Schengen Agreement's gradual implementation in the early 1990s. Since then, cities like Strasbourg, Lille, Karlsruhe, Maastricht, etc. have taken on a more cross-border character. More recently, parallel trends can be observed in East-Central Europe, with Trieste,

Oradea and Bratislava being just a few examples. The latter's increasing ties with Vienna are in some aspects similar to Szczecin's with Berlin: Slovak scholars noted the intensified influence of Vienna airport on Bratislava's air traffic after the opening of the border to Austria already in 1997 (Horňák and Kováčiková 2003). With more possibilities for at least local traffic, cities like Uzhhorod, Brest and Hrodna can at least hypothetically experience a similar development.

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