

REVIEW

on the work *Shopping tourism on the Eastern borders of the European Union*, developed by the PhD student **Delia Bar-Kołelis**, under the supervision of Prof. UG dr. hab. Jan A. Wendt from the University of Gdańsk, Poland, in order to obtain the scientific title of Doctor in Geography.

The undersigned, Ilieș Alexandru, Prof. visit. dr. hab. at the Institute of Geography, University of Gdańsk, Poland, as a reviewer, appointed through the decision of the Dean of Faculty of Oceanography and Geography Faculty, from the University of Gdańsk, I drafted a report on the above mentioned PhD thesis.

In the context of the European Union political space enlargement to Eastern and Central European continent and the alternative expansion of Schengen area, the proposed subject by the author is one of current interest. Through the geographical position, Romania and Poland, both EU members, are located at the external border of this super-state structure. In terms of people freedom of movement, there are some differences determined by the inside (Poland) and outside (Romania) positions in the Schengen area of these two countries. In those circumstances, the external border of Poland undertakes a triple role (external border of the European Union, Schengen and state border) and therefore a more rigorous filter to human trans-border mobility. In the case of Romania, the Schengen function is missing, but the border crossing facilities for the citizens from the neighbouring countries are similar to those of Poland. I believe that the chosen topic, position the scientific endeavour is a current one, the title of the work being fully in accordance with the content of scientific work.

The paper under analysis approaches a current issue, combining in a successful synthesis specific elements of geographical analyses (especially from the sphere of social, economical and political geography) and also "borrowed scientific interdisciplinary" elements under methodological aspect, especially from the field of sociology.

It is important that the work outcome is relevant, expressive and useful for a scientific approach of a geographical study with regional impact, in a political, economical and social complex area, as is the trans-border area overlapping the external borders of EU in the Romanian and Polish sectors. The approach of the author is a complex one, based on a broad and thorough bibliographic documentation and a good knowledge field realities. It is noteworthy the effort that the author undertook to gather, select and synthesize the information specific to the chosen topic, related to cross-border shopping undertaken by tourists on the Romanian and Polish border sectors in relation with Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Serbia. Also, the current paper, brings contributions to the geographical literature with recent and real information, presented in a modern and comprehensive manner.

The preamble outlines the theoretical documentation of the author in the context of contemporary knowledge in geography, but also in other fields with interdisciplinary character, containing many references, quotations and examples. The methodological component is outlined by specific means and methods used, as well as through the logic and law-like structural manner of the work. The paper culminates with a territorial reflection, highly suggestive rendered through a graphic and cartographic material, properly conducted and illustrated.

The work under review is structured into 7 major chapters, quantitatively totalling 275 pages that include a total of 211 figures, tables and conclusions, as well as a reference list totalising over 225 titles of general and representative works in the researched field, selected in an accurate manner for modern research. To argue the above mention notes, will continue with an brief analysis of the main chapters which build the reviewed work.

In the first chapter, entitled Shopping tourism in the context of consumption and travel (pp. 6-16) is presented the structure of the work and the applied methodology, being presented: the significance of the works undertaken locally, nationally and internationally in the dynamic of this field of analyses and a synthetic summary of the most important trends; the area and period in which the research took place, as well as the importance and impact of such a study. The second chapter *Research background and methodology* (pp.21-58) highlights the national and international researches and studies in this field, in this case can be noted a potential excess of international literature, in a lesser extent relevant for the countries analysed; *the theoretical and explanatory identified, overlapped and applied models; the motivation for the chosen thematic and methodology as well as the innovation elements resulted from the confrontation with the reality.* The chapter also brings clarifications in regards to the methodology framework and main concepts used: *definitions of tourism specific terms, tourism as phenomenon, tourism as movement, tourism as consumption, tourism in geography, tourism as industry, tourism system components, etc., all anchored in time and space, in the area of research and in the national and international context.* The emphasis is maybe too much on the overall concept and too little on the impact and advantages of the method chosen for the subject under research and the particularities of research area. *The chapter 3, Factors affecting shopping tourism at the Eastern external border of the European Union in Poland and Romania (pp.59-88) refers to the history and development of shopping tourism in Poland and Romania, as well as in the international politico-economic contemporary context. It may be noted also for this chapter, the plentiful graphics, expressive and correctly inserted into the logic of the scientific endeavour.* The quantitative sizing and qualitative impact are greatly influenced by the physical-geographical component, reflected through the orientation, accessibility and cross-border mobility of specific flows. It would have required mentioning the differences between the Polish-Ukrainian border area without natural obstacles and the Romanian-Ukrainian border area, where the morphology and particularities of the natural aspect influence the border flow direction and orientation. *The chapter 4. Description of research (pp. 89-111) is structured in a classical manner, the author mentioning specific aspects analysed for each researched location: Bialystok, Gdansk, Lublin, Iasi, Suceava and Timisoara.* Also in this case, beside the polarizing urban centres, an important role play as well the municipalities from the border proximity. For example, in the north of Romania, the town Sighetu Marmației (45,000 inhabitants) and the surrounding area (120,000 inhabitants) from the Land of Maramures, play a decisive role in trade and cross-border traffic between Romania and Ukraine, in comparison to Baia Mare (county capital, with 120,000 inhabitants). The natural conditions, mainly mountainous barrier, are crucial for sizing the cross-border flows. *It can be also noted for this chapter the graphics inserted into the logic of the scientific endeavour.* In the Chapter 5. *Research results in Poland (pp. 111-162) are presented the research results in Poland, with*

details analysis focusing on the main motivations (economic, leisure and recreation) of the cross-border shopping and its impact. As for Romania it would have been interesting to analyze and compare the weight and role of the black market or the impact of shopping tourism in settlements located in close proximity to the border. *The Chapter 6. Research results in Romania (pp.163-211) brings references over the travel conditions, transport infrastructure, visa and border crossing procedures, as well as customers behaviour.* It should have been mentioned the role of the natural framework in the orientation of transport routes and therefore of cross-border points and traffic flow. Also, it should have been mentioned that at the Romanian-Moldavian border a key role is plaid by the common Romanian language.

Chapter 7. Comparison of cross-border shopping tourism activities in Poland and Romania and main discussion of main thesis and hypotheses (pp. 212-244) enclose the comparison of consumer behaviour level, the conditions in which are taking place the journeys, the transport infrastructure, visa and border crossing procedures for cross-border areas studied. The study could also include a comparative analysis of the sets of problems, including also a report on the relation between the official market/legal and the black market/illegal. Equally, it is likely that according to the responses of those questioned, if the cross-border procedures are the biggest problem, the degree of corruption can be more or less relevant. Also, it would have been relevant an impact assessment over the degree and direction of development of localities from the immediate vicinity of the border crossing points.

To emphasize the assertions, I continue with assessments on the scientific level of the work, and candidate contributions on its theoretical and practical value.

The ***originality and creativity character*** of the work are evidenced thorough: its innovative approach and practical value; the effort to update, analyze and correlate facts and realities developed in time for explaining the present status quo of a complex territorial system overlapping the Romanian border areas in relation with the Moldovan, Serbian and Ukrainian borders and the Polish border area in relation with the Ukrainian, Russian and Belarus borders, in both cases at the external border of EU. The border sectors analyzed suffered over the past 25 years deep structural changes. The innovative character is found throughout the whole work, emphasizing the third chapter where the author successful attempt to define, through the dynamics of economical and political space, the determinant factors in defining shopping tourism. Furthermore, the author analyzes the border schemes on the one side and in the trans-border ones at a integrated superior level, as self-adaptive systems with possibilities of restructuring the area of influence. In this context I note the use of a significant number of elements (statistical, economic and demographic data, etc.) useful in defining the economic interaction between the cross-border points and the main urban areas located in their vicinity with their area of influence. Also, along with the theoretical concept largely explained and identified in the analysed space, it must be noted the cartographic and graphic abundant, punctual, clear and expressive support.

The ***scientific significance*** of the theme proposed by the PhD student lies in the accumulation of a complex theoretical background, with interdisciplinary connections, carefully synthesized and applied to a complex area that has experienced deep structural changes, especially after 1990. Thus, from an economic and trading closed system, typical for the communist era, has gradually evolved towards a system with different degrees of openness, adapted to a market economy, but which is characterized by the strong filter role it has in terms of human mobility and cross-border trade. The versatility of such a border system was applied and verified during the European Football Championship organised by Poland and Ukraine in 2012. All this culminates with the proper use and combination of

methods and tools of analysis, presented at the 2nd chapter carefully and correctly applied throughout the paper. What is interesting is that in the chapters with a deep analytical character 5-7, focused on each state political system and compared at the end, the author has identified the elements generating systematic stability/instability at the levels of the chosen border areas, so that in the end, as a result of the adaptive processes, to propose economic and territorial typologies. All this is supported by: the logic of the structure; the originality of the approach; the assimilation of the conceptual framework through a rich specific scientific literature that allowed the author a deep critical constructive spirit; the plurality of elements systematically analysed, the interdependency relations determined by the "game" and permanent "repositioning" of the components subsystems contiguous border areas, marked by a pronounced territorial dynamics in a short period of time depending on the openness of the external border of the EU/Schengen/states; identifying and analyzing the favourable/unfavourable factors that caused and are causing the permanent "resizing" of inter-systemic, geo-economic etc. relations from the area created by the polarizing centres set in the proximity in the border crossing point and adjoining polarized; the applicative character supported by concrete solutions for adaptation and adaptability in economic interaction between the polarizing center and polarized subsystems; the content of each chapter; the established and updated database, of reference for other future approaches etc. It also highlights the aspect that the author manages with her own arguments, based on a deepening of theoretical component and with a good knowledge of field realities, to define some key elements in addressing the relational between territorial systems undergoing a continuous process of adaptation: the levels of border and trans-border flows in terms of quantitative aspect; the impact over the local territorial systems; the motivations generating the human mobility for shopping tourism; the travel conditions under legal aspect, etc. Going further I identify: systemic adaptability; the special role in shaping the territorial system; limits generating territorial systems and subsystems, etc. I also believe that for the definition of the border systems determined by the shopping tourism, the author outlines factors that determine the vulnerability, adaptability and adaptive capacity underlying on the territorial system individualization and area of influence, of territorial systems respectively, as territorial structures emerging from the border territorial system corresponding to the external border system of EU on the Romanian and Polish territory.

Measuring the ***outcomes potential impact***, results from the logic of the scientific endeavour and choice of the study area in the grounds of the author, starting from the idea that "*the border crossing points and the towns located in their proximity, gathers around them a functional area, which main activity is a commercial one*". The increasing dynamics of the economic and social environment changes, with direct and visible impact on the level of development, reflects "*near in real time*" throughout the whole territory analyzed by the data sets used and interpreted. I believe that identifying, understanding, delimitating and defining the factors and elements underlining the continuous territorial systems adjustment processes, play a key role in defining the development strategies and policies by local and regional actors, especially in the cross-border and trans-border context.

The result of this scientific endeavour with significant impact over the analysed trans-border territorial system identifies the adaptive abilities of each components (Polish and Romanian border systems) in relation to the dynamics and restructuring of the neighbouring one (Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian and Serbian) on the one hand and by comparison

between the two political subsystems analyzed on the other hand, the approach developed in chapter 7. Thus, I can assess that through the conceptual-theoretical component deeply rooted in the recent literature, the analyse of various elements and their connection, the analytical component strongly anchored in the field reality, the substantial amount of economic and social indicators used and the creation of typologies and scenarios of their territorial development, ***the paper brings a substantial contribution to the scientific knowledge.***

Through foray into specialised literature reflected by the abundance of references and citations, the author proves that she has acquired the essential abilities, specific to a complex results-giver approach, applicable and connected to territorial reality. In this context, I can appreciate from that the work is approached conceptually and methodologically, that the author ***has mastered the methods and field research methodologies, typical for the research environment.***

As it was mentioned above, the 225 citations increase the value of the scientific endeavour proposed by the author not so much by the number, but by their usefulness in the theoretical construction, especially of the first two chapters. I note the adaptability of the author towards the dynamic of specific scientific literature and its usage through the correct insertion of references and citations in the content of the whole work. The abundance of specialized work is complemented by a good knowledge of the works approaching the studied phenomenon in Romania and Poland, as well as internationally. I note the ability with which the author uses the terminology, its understanding and the insertion of literature into the base structure of the paper, as a fundamental basis in its construction. In the same context I appreciate the respect of professional ethics by the correct way of inserting other authors' contributions through references, citations or presenting the data collected sources. This ***highlights by a large extent that the author demonstrated the understanding of the relevant literature in this field of research and its familiarity with it.***

In each chapter and subchapter, after an objective and well-reasoned presentation of phenomena, the author is credited for inserting her own judgments through which she demonstrated ***abilities of critical and independent thinking.***

The theoretical foundation of this scientific endeavour is supported by a diversified database, here the author proving the skills of gathering, selecting and reproducing in a rigorous manner statistical data, particularly economic, evidenced mainly in chapters 5-7. The effort of such an approach is admirable given that, surely, much of the socio-economic information are "confidential" and the "official" statistical data not always correspond to the reality of the studied topic, especially in the EU border contiguous space. Thus, I can state that the author ***presented in an appropriate manner the information,*** considering that the studied area undergone an extensive post-socialist economic restructuring, which in turn has generated deep changes in the functional, occupational and social structure.

The ***iconography*** supports the script part of the work through the 211 figures and maps correctly and expressively realised for each element and phenomenon represented. For a better territorial relevance, with impact over the orientation and sizing of border flows, the representation of the relief added to the maps, would have brought a better understanding of the systematic cross-border operations. I note also a large number of analytical materials and a significant share of the representative synthetic materials, which considerably increases the value of a geographical approach.

From the 225 citations, I note the author contribution (individual and in team) in 5 cases, through the titles published in foreign reference journals. A closer attention should have been paid to specialised research from countries included in the analyses, particularly those from outside the EU borders (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia and Serbia). Starting from the way of approach, the structure of the work and the territorial complexity of the trans-border territorial systems analysed, I can appreciate that the author has successfully completed the proposed scientific endeavour and has successfully managed to answer to the triple questions specific to a geographical approach where? why? and how? The presentation in a modern manner of this geographic endeavour with relevance for the literature and especially for practical use, ***allows authors to investigate new directions with high potential for publication.***

In **conclusion**, I can state that the author has succeeded to achieve a scientific, comprehensive and relevant endeavour in geographical literature through the work structure, and especially by the field documentation, the used bibliography, the relevant and critical analyzes accomplished, the suggestive graphic material, the creation of a specific database, the wide and synthetic coverage, the logic of the whole complex of issues involved in the analyzed subject and the relationships between elements.

Accordingly to the presented above review this dissertation meets the substantive and legal requirements of the doctoral dissertations. Therefore, I propose to the Scientific Council of the Faculty of Oceanography and Geography, University of Gdańsk, for admission Delia M. Bar-Kołelis, through the work *Shopping tourism on the Eastern borders of the European Union*, to further stages of a doctorate.

5 January, 2016
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