

TALES FROM THE PERIPHERY – HOW THE EU BORDER FACILITATES COHESION IN PERIPHERAL REGIONS

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Abstract

Overcoming the periphery disadvantages is currently the official spatial policy of the European Union. The concepts of a cohesive community and a Europe of the regions are political priorities. However, the success of regional development depends primarily on local practices. This is specifically relevant in border regions, which generally had been contested in the past, leaving a landscape of historical scarves, conflicts and fault-lines. In order to understand if border regions use the demarcation as a resource, it is important to understand how local strategies are implemented, discussed and modified in order to achieve a sustainable development.

The paper will provide a short overview on indicators for periphery, it will present local strategies toward the border in the Polish border town Przemyśl and discuss if the development of a peripheral region can be positive influenced, when the border is understood as a regional resource. The paper is based on fieldworkers to the region in 2007 and 2014, during which in-depth expert interviews with local stakeholders had been carried out. The results had been further verified with a complimentary analysis of relevant literature, media and local planning documents.

Keywords: Cohesion, Border, Poland, Ukraine, Regional Development

Introduction

Core-periphery disparities are among the most discussed phenomena in spatial science. In Geography the periphery had been seen as the weak obstacles in organizing of a wealthy and economic successful state. Overcoming the periphery disadvantages is the official spatial policy of the European Union, where the ideas of cohesion and a Europe of the regions are political priorities. The European Commission declared in their Europe 2020 strategy the ideas of cohesion and a

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Europe with strong regions to one of their main political priorities. Cohesion is seen by the European Union as a strategy to strengthen the development of all European regions. The cohesion policy is aimed to minimize territorial disparities by aspiring to make the regions within the EU more economic competitive. The implementation is understood as a bottom-up approach. Individual regions develop and implement their own strategies, which is orchestrated by particular funding instruments. Special attention is drawn on geographic or economic peripheries. In the current funding period 2014 - 2020 regions are divided economically in those 'more developed' (up to 90% of EU average GDP per capita), in 'transition' (75-90%) and 'less developed' (less than 75%), offering substantial support on peripheral regions. An additional objective aims on border regions, situated in the geographical periphery of the EU. With the instrument of the 'European territorial cooperation' regions are encouraged to cooperate with each other across borders and transnational (European Commission, 2010).

The development of the European periphery in general and border regions in particular receive a high priority from the EU. Still, while EU funds step in, those regions are often a neglected aspect of domestic territorial development policies due to cultural, legal, governmental and institutional aspects inherent in those policies (Bachtler & Taylor, 2003). For a successful cohesion policy the involvement of regional and local stakeholders is thus crucial.

Scholars like Brand and Bhatti (2006) claim that border regions are often suffering from socio-economic disparities, insufficient infrastructure and lacking social capita and thus are rather depending on external financial support. Other scholars stress that the border itself can be used as a regional resource to overcome regional disadvantages. Van Houtum and Eker (2015) argue that the opening of border foster among other cross-border cooperation (CBC). Through CBC intra-regional activities are launched which have positive impact on the regional development; turning the periphery in a kind of trans-national laboratory. The border gains the function of a resource. O'Dowd (2001) states that the border as a resources requires a quite open border regime. The EU supports this thinking by providing specific instruments to foster CBC in their Interreg Program. Using the peripheral disadvantage at the border for economic growth could launch a real bottom-up initiative in accordance with the EU cohesion policy aims.

However, the success of regional development depends most of all on local practices. This is specifically relevant in border regions, which generally had been contested in the past, leaving a landscape of historical scarves, conflicts and fault-

lines. In order to understand if border regions use the demarcation as a resource, it is important to understand how local strategies are implemented, discussed and modified. As cohesion is seen by the European Union as a bottom-up approach, each region develops and implements their own strategies. Those strategies are negotiated in local discourses, in which the attitudes toward borders and CBC are decided. A positive attitude towards the border will help to embed cohesion goals into local development strategies, a negative or even totally missing discourses can turn into a major thread for regional development and undermine the cohesion policy aims.

The paper will provide a short overview on indicators for periphery, it will present local strategies toward the border in the Polish border town Przemyśl and discuss if the development of a peripheral region can be positive influenced, when the border is understood as a regional resource. The paper is based on fieldworkers to the region in 2007 and 2014, during which in-depth expert interviews with local stakeholders had been carried out. The results had been further verified with a complimentary analysis of relevant literature, media and local planning documents.

Periphery and cohesion - a set of indicators

The significance, problems and chances of periphery and its relation to the core are among the most discussed topics in Geography and spatial planning. The core and periphery theory is usually based on the basic principle that economic growth is enjoyed by a core, while the periphery is neglected. Depending on the number of geographic cores (regional, national, transnational, global) a region can be in various geographic peripheries, while being a core at the same time (Bachtler & Taylor, 2003). In the period of the geographic deterministic dogma, periphery regions had been seen by scholar like Ratzel and Haushofer as dysfunctional parts of the nation states. In order to strengthen the state, it was seen as necessary to develop the periphery. Border regions had been viewed as the part of the state body which had to be kept 'healthy' or 'natural'. Border regions thus had been seen as the place of 'natural' struggle between nations, where the 'healthier' prevails (van Houtum & Scott, 2005; Natter, 2005; Laine, 2013)

The almost organic definition of periphery and border regions lost its dominance in the aftermath of World War Two. Periphery was not any more exclusively defined by one indicator but by a whole set of them. The OECD identify three sets of categories - geography, economy and demography, breaking the exclusive notion of periphery determined by Geography (OECD, 2008, 77). In the European ESPON program, which was adopted by the European Commission, socio-economic factors (including demographics and local identity), political (including

creation of borders or economical losses due to political transformation) and geophysical (including the location) characteristics had been used to describe periphery (ESPON, 2013). The new established categories allow to define regions inside a territory as economic or demographic peripheral. In this understanding regions can be placed in single, double or triple periphery regarding their geographic relation to a core, but as well regarding their economic or demographic development. This multiple periphery has tremendous impact on local regional planning strategies.

In order to identify a periphery and to understand the strategies used to overcome the disparity, the whole set of indicators, consisting out of geographic, political and socio-economic sets, has to be taken into consideration.

Przemyśl - triple periphery

Przemyśl, a Polish border town situated at the Polish-Ukrainian border is a prime location for analyzing discourses on periphery and cohesion. The city is in the triple periphery by classical indicators of geographical position but as well regarding economy, politics and demography. The town is situated at the eastern border of the voivodship Podkarpackie, Poland and the European Union. Przemyśl is in a triple economic periphery. Poland itself belongs to the economic periphery of the European Union. The GDP reaches regarding Eurostat in 2013 67% of the EU average. Inside Poland the Voivodship Podkarpackie has the lowest GDP per head, earning in 2011 just 44% of the EU average (Eurostat, 2016). Inside the Voivodship the region of Przemyśl is by economic indicators the periphery. The county attracted in 2012 9% less investment than the voivodship average and had with 18,9% one of the highest regional unemployment rates.

Those unfavorable economic indicators are accompanied by tremendous demographic problems. The city lost just between 2010 and 2012 4,9% of the population. While the town had regarding the statistical office in Rzeszów in 2006 67.127 inhabitants, the number dropped to 63.467 in 2014 (UStat, 2016). Due to the lack of higher education institutions, the poor economic development and insufficient connections to the rest of Poland, especially young and good educated leave, causing a notable brain drain and migration loss. The demographic prognosis forecast a further drop to 49.000 in 2040 (UStat, 2016).

The town is additionally suffering from the distance to the political-administrative centers. Interviews during the fieldwork underline that local decision

makers feel left behind and neglected by all three administrative levels. The feeling was intensified after the town lost the status of a voivodship Capital in 1998.

Reflecting the categories Geography, Administration, Economy and Demography, it is visible that all indicators proof the peripherality of the town.

The local perception of the border

A specific impact has the location of the city at the outer border of the European Union. Since border regions are often peripheral, a permeable border, which allows a flow of people and goods, might have positive effects. (Martinez, 1994; O'Dowd, 2001; van Houtum & Eker, 2015). The border to Ukraine is at the moment semi-permeable. While Polish citizens need no visa to travel to Ukraine, the reverse traffic is more complicated. Ukrainian citizens need either a visa or can use in a 20 kilometer zone a special card for the so called '*Mały ruch graniczny*' (MRG – small border traffic), which was established in 2009 (Rosik, 2012, 79). The border procedures are intensive and time consuming and the free flow of persons and goods is blocked by the duration of the waiting time and custom clearance checks. The border can be felt as an obstacle, blocking cross-border interaction (Byrska-Szklarczyk, 2012).

Alas those obstacles and negative effects of the border, the interviews and the analysis of local development strategies revealed that the border is not purely perceived as a barrier. Local stakeholder groups such as local and regional administrative bodies, civil society actors, entrepreneurs and journalists have a rather positive perspective on the divide. They are particular aware of the peripheral location and its disadvantages, but still identified advantages.

The close proximity to Ukraine in general and Lviv in particular are seen as a chance for tourism and business. Those emphasizes are aligned with results of other researchers like Stokłosa (2012; 2013), Buraczyński (2015) or Byrska-Szklarczyk (2012). Krzysztof Mrozek claimed that the establishment of the Medyka pedestrian crossing resulted in increased chances for cross-border tourism. (Mrozek, 2015, 5)

The city council of Przemyśl created in 2004 a key document for its regional development. The *Strategia Sukcesu Miasta Przemyśla na lata 2014–2024* (the success strategy for the city of Przemyśl for the years 2014-2024) was regularly reviewed and updated. Beside a state-of-the-art description of the level of regional development. The strategy contains a SWOT analysis in which recommendations for

the future development of the town are stated. In the 2014 version, the city identified the cross border connections of the city, the emerging cross-border trade with Ukraine and the connected service activities as the most important chances. The city council mentioned as well the geopolitical location of the city at the EU border and the increasing local connections in the cross-border zone Przemyśl - Lviv and Ushgorod as border related benefits. The city council expresses in their vision, that the town will become a *'Brama na wschód'*, a gate to the east, where European companies can base ventures towards Ukraine. (Rada Miejska w Przemyślu, 2014) Further visions understand that the untouched environment and historical past (more or less connected to the border) are used for the development of tourism and that the border crossing in Medyka might be turned in a logistic and transport hub or as Voznyak describes it into an 'overland harbor' (Voznyak, 2000).

The chances identified in the Strategia Sukcesu are almost comparative to the statements of the local stakeholders. The dominant local discourse is understanding the border rather as a resource than a barrier. Still, the barrier effects frustrate local stakeholders and are perceived as external disturber (similar as described by Byrska-Szklarczyk on the petty trader) but the chances are overweight the threats. The border serves for the region as a resource, especially through border trade and smuggling and lately particular strategies are developed in order to use the border for regional development.

Pathway to 'success'? - Cross-border tourism and trade

Despite the characteristic problems and threats of the periphery as brain-drain, over-aging, weak infrastructure, high unemployment and lack of investment, the Strategia Sukcesu identifies two sectors of potential growth and development: Tourism and Cross-border trade. The city seeks to benefit from tourism in four ways:

1. Establishing eco- and cycling tourism in the closer surrounding
2. Establishing Przemyśl as a hub for Ukraine
3. Facilitating the multi-cultural past and the heritage of division, borders and wars
4. Increasing the shopping tourism from nearby Ukraine.

The cross-border trade should be increased through investment in infrastructure, lobbying for a second border crossing, facilitating the role of shopping

and the bazars and the creation of special cross-border economic zones (Rada Miejska w Przemyślu, 2014). The city council includes those scenario as specific principles into their development plans. In this way the border is turned into a key element for regional development.

This scenario is typical for the Polish border regions. Scholars like Mrozek (2015) or Wieckowski (2010) underline that the development of border regions in Poland are hugely determined by tourism. Just like in the case of Przemyśl, eco-tourism, shopping, transit and attractions connected to the multi-cultural and contested past are considered as suitable development strategies. However, practical activities in the Polish border regions are highly depended on EU funding (Mrozek, 2015; Wieckowski, 2010) and are often locally perceived as elite projects, disconnected from the individual everyday life, which is limiting the impact on regional development. (Stokłosa, 2012)

In order to understand if the strategy is built on local embeddedness or if it reflects a pure elite project of local decision makers, the implementation of the Strategia Sukcesu will be shortly examined.

Local tourism development strategies in Przemyśl

As before mentioned, the strategy envisioned four fields helping to develop the tourism in peripheral Przemyśl.

Eco-tourism – utilizing the consequences of the Soviet border system.

The town was until 1945 functional connected to its natural Centre Lviv. The region experienced a limited amount of suburbanization and belonged 1919-1939 to the heartland of Poland. When the border was created and almost hermetical sealed, the development came to a hold. (Stokłosa, 2013) With the postwar resettlement of parts of the population, any economic or agricultural activities became hindered. The untouched environment had been preserved since then, enabling nowadays eco-tourism (Mrozek, 2015). Wieckowski (2010) describes the chances and potentials of the eco-tourism on the Polish borderlands. Cross-border hiking and cycling patches are opened, national parks established and the natural potential is used by the city but as well private companies in order to promote ‘exotic’ hikes through Ukraine or to follow ‘soldier Swejk’ on his paths. It is understood as positive effect for the periphery region, which would not be possible without having the border. The relevance is underlined by the fact, that scholars like Mrozek or Wieckowski

advocate the opening of additional border crossings with the argument of increased eco-tourism.

Transit - Hub to Ukraine or the last city in the EU. Transferring the border crossing from bazaar to terminal.

The city, as interviews during the fieldwork revealed, understands itself as the first or last city of the EU. This understanding aspires the town to become for western tourist a base inside the ‘safe’ and ‘familiar’ EU with western standards from where excursions are made to the other side - Ukraine. The strategy is based on the vision to transfer Przemyśl into a transport hub. Mrozek (2015) stressed that transit is favoring the development of tourism in the Polish border regions. Border crossings, as Voznyak (2000) noted, should be understood as terminals, connecting two regions and offering, just like airport terminals, service for travelers. He claimed that the border crossing in Medyka with its transit and logistical potential turned Przemyśl into one of Poland’s most important ‘overland harbors’. At the same time Wieckowski (2010) states, that the other side is attractive for tourists. The unknown, slightly dangerous on ‘the other side’ becomes an attraction for the traveler (Timothy, 2000).

The city of Przemyśl implemented a huge marketing campaign during the UEFA 2012 football championship. With the claim ‘become a fan’ the city created a fan zone for all the tourists on the way to games in Lviv and Kiev, even so no matches were hosted. The local brochure clearly stated: “*Are you going to the EURO 2012? Are you a football fan? So are we. We would like to invite you to picturesque Przemyśl, which ... is situated ... on the main road to Lviv on the EU border.*” (Urząd Miejskie w Przemyślu, 2012). The campaign clearly focused on underlining the position on the EU border, claiming to offer a not defined ‘European standards’. Alas the campaign was not as successful, as the administration hoped and that since then the number of tourist enterprises in the town actually dropped (UStat Rzeszów, 2016), the city still includes the border and the proximity to Ukraine in their marketing. The city is full with advertisements for excursions to various destinations in Ukraine, promoting day trips to the ‘other side’ and promoting its historic hinterland. Stokłosa (2013) described the phenomena as a positive process, which helps to reconnect with the historical cultural Centre of the region – Lviv. As a result the border crossing in Medyka is changing from a market place, with a vivid bazaar to a terminal for travelers – arriving from Przemyśl by minibus, crossing the border on foot and continue with buses on the Ukrainian side towards Lviv. Thus a number of bars, restaurants and hotels opened in the vicinity, offering services tailored for

travelers. A professionalization of the enterprises at the crossing and an increase of work places in the private sector can be observed.

Dark tourism - exploiting the history of the borderscape.

Borders are described by Timothy as ‘unlikely tourist destinations’ which are often connected to suffer and grief (Timothy, 2000). Lennon emphasized that borders might turn into tourist attraction by themselves, offering the stage for so called dark tourism. Lennon defined dark tourism as travel to places historically associated with tragedy (Lennon & Foley, 2006). Recent discussion however focus rather on the reasons why tourists come to such places. The motivation is rather to witness places of historical events than purely grief, death and tragedy (Isaac & Cakmak, 2013). Nevertheless those forms of tourism have to be performed and promoted with great care, as locals might respond negative, if, as Lennon phrase it, the macabre is ‘milked’ too much (Lennon & Foley, 2006).

Przemyśl was influenced by the drawing and redrawing of borders in the last one hundred years dramatically. The Curzon line, defining the eastern border of Poland in 1918 was drawn 20 kilometers east of the town, the Rippentrop-Molotov line divided 1939-1941 the city in two halves and is nowadays situated at the EU outer border. The process of de- and re-marcation of territory produced a landscape of borders and memories, having a lasting mental and physical impact on the town and the region. The remains of the Molotov left a line of bunkers in the inner city, battles of the First and the Second World War are regularly reenacted and monuments ensuring the eternal Polish character of the town. The reminders of the contested past and the last traces of the vanished multiculturalism in the cityscape create a touristic attractiveness, which is exploited. The city government is promoting and supporting this attractiveness by creating tourist routes following the Molotov line (Urząd Miejskie w Przemyślu, 2008) or exploring the the relics of the military defense lines. The museum of the Przemyśl fortress belongs to one of the most visited attractions in South-east Poland. It can be summarized that the potential for dark tourism due to the location on the border is realized, still a brand has to be developed in order to attract international tourists.

Fig. 1. Example of the exploitation of the border – brochure on visiting the Molotov-Line



Source: Photo by the author 2014, Brochure: City of Przemysł

Shopping Tourism

Shopping is one of the classical forms of tourism at borders. (Timothy, 2005) Shopping tourism is usually understood as the motivation to travel across borders in order to purchase products for personal use. Shopping tourism generally is depending on different price levels, variety of goods, quality or legislation on two sides of a border. Typically shopping tourism is combined with classical sightseeing or leisure activities (Timothy, 2005; 2013).

By statistic the vast majority of border crosser at the Medyka check point claim touristic reasons for their trip. Still it is understood that most trips are rather intended for trade and commercial activities, using the touristic claim to speed up procedures at the border (Mrozek, 2015; Byrska-Szklarczyk, 2012). Therefore the author understands the shopping tourism at the Polish-Ukrainian border as part of the border trade, which will be examined in the following chapter.

Evolution of cross-border trade and shopping

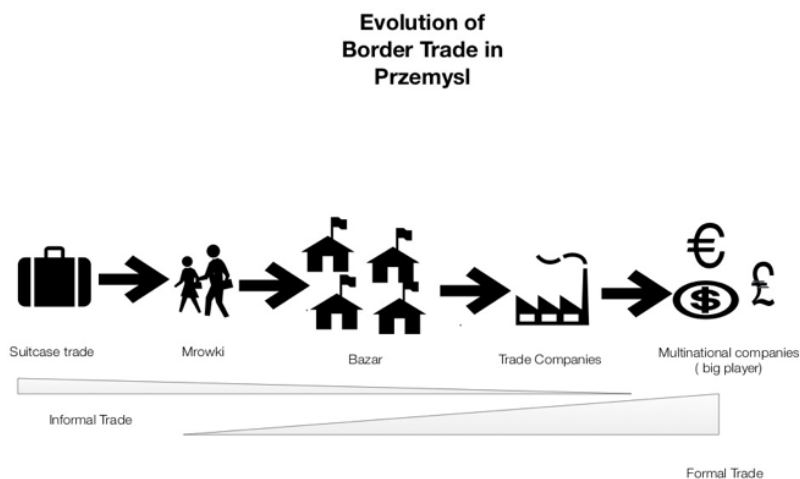
However, tourism has a rather small share in the local economy and the role of cross-border trade is much more significant. Voznyak characterized Przemysł as the most important 'inland harbor' of Poland. He illustrated the important role of the Medyka crossing point for the rail traffic. He understands Medyka as a nucleus for a cluster for trade, transit and logistics for the exchange between Ukraine and the EU (Voznyak, 2000).

Nonetheless, Przemyśl benefits to a larger extent since the 1990s from the formal and informal border trade. The trade was mostly facilitated through the border crossing point in Medyka. In 2012 roughly 4,5 million people crossed the border here and regarding an governmental spend in average 700 Zloty per person in Przemyśl or Medyka (Mrozek, 2015, 5). An earlier survey done by the Polish newspaper *'Gazeta Wyborca'* (2013) estimated that Ukrainians spend 2013 1,46 Billion Zloty during 'shopping trips' in Poland.

The border trade is often connected with smuggling or the so called 'ant trade' ('Mrówki'). Hence observation and interviews in the region revealed a certain evolution of border trade – which could be described as a process of professionalization and legalization. While at the beginning in the eighties the trade activities connected to the border had been rather small scaled, either suited for personal use or substitution, the economic activities increased resulting in the establishment of small and medium sized enterprises (SME) and lately to the appearances of multinational companies, trying to benefit from the trade with Ukraine.

The first border trade activities at the Polish-Soviet border started in the late eighties, when the border to the Soviet Union became slightly open. During so called 'friendship trips' by bus or train, Polish traders bought products in Poland which were either cheaper or not available in the Soviet Union and bought in exchange products not available in Poland back from their trip. This trade was limited to the suitcases they took and is locally referred to as 'suitcase trade' (Stokłosa, 2013). With the opening of the border in 1991 and the economic impact of the early transformation, smuggling and the so called 'ant trade' appeared. Borderlanders used the price differences in order to buy alcohol and cigarettes on the Ukrainian side, sell them on the Polish and returning with groceries to the Ukrainian side (Haase, Wust & Knappe, 2004; Byrska-Szklarczyk, 2012). This kind of trade was often accompanied with smuggling. The ant trade resulted in the establishing of bazaars, where former ants bought stands and started to sell clothes and groceries to Ukrainians. In a survey performed in 2004 it was examined that the bazaars covered 50% of the retail areas in the town (Barthel, 2010).

Fig. 2. The Evolution of Border Trade in Przemysł



In an interview with the regional chamber of commerce it was stated that the bazars had been the nucleus for the development of bigger, legal trade companies, creating a cluster of SMEs from which the city is more and more benefiting concerning investment, employment and taxes. The companies are specialized in furniture; most of them are established in special economic zones along the border and in the city. Nowadays all three forms, the ant trade, the bazar and the SMEs exists parallel. Still most of the SMEs evolved in this way and most of the bazar trader have a past as Ants. There is still ant trade happening at the border, but the amount decreased. In the years after 2006 a further step of evolution took place, challenging especially the bazars. Due to the increasing cross-border shopping, trade and the proximity to Medyka and Lviv, huge international companies opened outlets in Przemysł. Retail chains like Tesco, Carrefour, Mediamarkt and Castorama opened huge outlets on the road to Medyka. In the city center the huge shopping mall 'Galeria Sanowa', containing a huge supermarket and a number of big cloth retailers, opened. The products and services are oriented towards Ukrainian customers and the products compete directly with the bazars, resulting in a decline of their importance for the local economy. It still has to be examined if the new jobs created by the SMEs and the big retailers will substitute the losses in the bazars.

Fig. 3. Location of the biggest commercial outlets in Przemyśl in 2014



Source: mapping by the author

It can be further concluded that the professionalization of trade created a SMEs cluster of companies, specialized and experienced on the Ukrainian market, an influx of additional work places due to the retail chains and permanent substitution of transformation disadvantages through ant trade, which would have not been possible without the peripheral location at the border.

Fig. 4-7. The four forms of border trade in Przemyśl (Ant Trade, Bazar, SME's, Shopping Malls)



Photos by the author, 2014

Conclusion - exploiting the potential of the periphery

The case study from the Polish-Ukrainian border underlines the challenges of peripherally in the European Union. Locations at the border can find themselves in a triple periphery, based on their Geographic, Demographic and economic situation. Still in bottom-up development strategies, as favored by the cohesion strategy of the EU, the border is understood rather as a resource than a barrier.

The Strategia Sukcesu developed by the city of Przemyśl and the interviews with stakeholder reveal that the peripheral location at the border plays a crucial role in regional development strategies. The administration accepted the challenges and aspires to exploit the divide for stimulating regional growth. The location at the

border is facilitated for tourism, trade and logistics. Consequently those fields of activities are seen as opportunities for the town.

The border is perceived by the city administration and by the interviewed stakeholders as a determination of the regional development. Thus the local attitudes are favoring a border, which is as fast and easy to cross as possible. The stakeholders support visa free travel, advocate for additional crossings and demand a better infrastructure towards Lviv. The local administration is tolerating to a certain amount the grey economic activities at the border, since the additional earnings relief locals with lower or no income by providing an additional source for economic activities.

However, a total disappearance of the border, like it happened on the Schengen border with Germany, is received as a threat. It is feared that the most important location factor would disappear and the city would find itself further neglected in an 'ordinary periphery'. This notion underlines the high dependency of Przemyśl on the border. For Przemyśl the peripheral location is an accepted truth. The city seeks to economize the periphery in order to foster its development.

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