

HUMAN SECURITY IN THE TOWN AT THE BORDER*

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Abstract: The beginning of the 21st century brought two very important political changes to Poland: accession to the European Union and joining the Schengen area. Both of them have had implications in many fields, including security. Political changes in particular had an effect on the safety of the Polish border area. Changes in the law, especially the free movement of people between Schengen member countries, affected the permeability of the internal European Union border.

The aim of this article is to present people's opinions on security issues related to the border. The emphasis is placed on the consequences of the recent political changes, as they may possibly have affected people's sense of security. Research was carried out among residents of Słubice, a medium-sized Polish town lying on the border with Germany. The following issues are discussed in the paper: the respondents' sense of security, the influence of the town's location on the border on security, and the influence of political changes on security.

Keywords: security, border town, Słubice

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 21st century brought two very important political changes to Poland: accession to the European Union and joining the Schengen area. Both of them have had a range of implications in many fields, including security.

Poland, as a member of the European Union since 1st May 2004, has been getting more institutional support on the issues of justice, freedom and security as one of the policy areas of the European Union. The policy covers the following issues: guaranteeing fundamental rights, cooperation between judicial authorities, managing asylum and immigration, and fighting crime throughout the European Union. Security issues, especially police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, are covered by several institutions, in which the most important are the following: the European Police Office (EUROPOL), The European

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Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit (EUROJUST) and European Police College (CEPOL).

The second important political change, joining the Schengen zone on 21st December 2007¹, allowed free movement of people between Schengen member countries (mainly European Union members). This change influenced permeability of internal European Union borders. As a result, there is no movement control on the former Polish border crossings with Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Lithuania.

These political changes had an effect particularly on the safety of border areas, as it is believed that 'Political borders and areas close to them are unique places for criminal activities' (Ceccato and Haining 2004). On the basis of the literature, several factors that make border regions susceptible to crime can be distinguished (Ceccato and Haining 2004): (1) related to location and geography: a border's regional position, border type (length, landscape, type of adjacency whether land, sea or bridge); (2) related to societal structures and organizational differences: economic inequality and relative deprivation between neighboring countries; cultural differences and gender inequality; weakened state apparatus and political and social instability; differences in taxation, tariffs and regulations; differences in law and law enforcement and lack of harmonization of criminal justice/legislation; (3) related to conditions for criminal activity: symbiosis between cross-border and other forms of crime; offender's knowledge and perception of the border.

There are several studies on crime between countries in the literature: Hongkong and China (Gaylord 1999), Canada and USA (Jamieson 1999), England and USA (Fisher and Wilkes 2003), England, The Netherlands, Wales and USA (Tseloni at al. 2004), Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania (Ceccato 2008, Kerry at al. 2010, Ceccato and Haining 2008). There are also a few publications that consider the problem of crime on the border areas: Mexico and USA (Guerette and Clarke 2005; Orrenius and Coronado 2005; Albuquerque 2007), Denmark and Sweden (Ceccato and Haining 2004). It is worth highlighting that mainly official statistical data are used in the articles mentioned, whereas studies concentrating on people's sense of security are very infrequent in the literature considering the problem of crime between countries, especially in border regions. Most importantly, crime comparisons between countries are one of the most significant, as yet unsolved, criminological problems. It is widely discussed by Barclay (2000), Killias and Aebi (2000), Killias and Rau (2000), Hołyst (2007) and Alvazzi del Frate (2008). According to this, studies concerning 'subjective' opinions about the problem of crime might form a partial solution to the problem.

The aim of this article is to present people's opinions on security issues related to a border, using the example of a town on the border of Poland and Germany, namely Słubice. This article is structured as follows: section two contains

¹Air and sea border crossings were opened on 30th of March 2008.

a brief description of the town under analysis, taking into consideration the problem of crime and the methodology used in the article. The next section presents the results of a survey which was carried out in Słubice among its residents. The emphasis is placed on the consequences of the recent political changes, as they may possibly have affected people's sense of security. The following issues are introduced in this part: the respondents' sense of security, the influence of the location of the town on the border on security and the influence of the two political changes, accession to the European Union and joining the Schengen zone, on security. Finally, section four presents the conclusions and a discussion.

RESEARCH AREA AND METHOD

The research area is Słubice, a town located on the border in the Lubuskie region. Słubice is a small-sized town, with 16 479 inhabitants (in 2009), located on the east bank of the Odra river. The town is situated along main European roads – 70 km from Berlin, 180 km from Poznań and 480 km from Warsaw. One of 27 Polish former border crossing points with Germany was located in Słubice (Słubice–Frankfurt/Oder).

The number of recorded crimes in Słubice district² in the decade 2000–2009 decreased by 17% (Tab. 1). Two of the three largest decreases in the number of recorded crimes (in comparison to the year 2000) occurred in the years 2005 and 2008, the years directly after the two most important recent political changes for Poland. The crime detectability rate increased significantly, by 27%. The number of suspects increased by 34%. It is worth stressing, that not many suspects were foreigners.

The article is based on the results of a survey (382 questionnaires) which was carried out in Słubice in June 2010 among its residents³. The survey consisted of 13 questions about the perception of crime and feeling of safety addressed only to the inhabitants of the town. The answers to five questions are analyzed in the article: (1) Do you think that your feeling of security in the town is sufficient?, (2) Do you think that the location of the town on the border influences security?, (3) Do you think that Poland's accession to the European Union has influenced the towns' security?, (4) Do you think that Poland joining the Schengen zone influenced the towns' security?, (5) What is the most important source of opinions about crime and dangerous places for you?

²Police statistics for the town of Słubice are unavailable due to the system of data collection, which takes into consideration only areas under the control of a single police headquarters in its entirety. The District Police Headquarters is located in Słubice, and so only figures for the entire district are available.

³The author would like to thank students of Faculty of Geosciences from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, for carrying out the survey during their study practice in Słubice.

Table 1. Number of recorded crimes, detectability rate and number of suspects in Słubice district 2000–2009

Year	Recorded crimes		Detectability rate (in %)	Suspects	
	Number	Dynamics rate (2000 = 100)		Number	% of foreigners
2000	3014	100.0	50.4	1147	6.3
2001	2754	91.4	63.9	1490	7.6
2002	2977	98.8	70.8	1598	6.6
2003	2900	96.2	63.3	1426	5.7
2004	2711	89.9	68.2	1378	4.5
2005	2449	81.3	74.2	1462	2.2
2006	2062	68.4	74.3	1280	2.0
2007	2314	76.8	77.4	1405	1.6
2008	2136	70.9	71.6	1301	4.1
2009	2501	83.0	77.7	1538	3.1

Source: on the basis of statistics from Regional Police Headquarters in Gorzów Wielkopolski

SECURITY IN SŁUBICE IN THE LIGHT OF INHABITANTS' OPINIONS

It is believed that crime and feelings of security have a considerable influence on the level and quality of life, and in this case on people's image of crime and its distribution has more substantial meaning than the actual state (Guzik 2000a). Due to this, it is essential, when discussing the problem of crime, to take into consideration not only the official statistics for this phenomenon, but also people's opinions about it.

Generally, Słubice inhabitants have a positive sense of security (Fig. 1). At the same time, both a negative sense of security and lack of an opinion received more or less the same support from respondents.

Border regions are generally presented in the literature as regions prone to crime (Ceccato and Haining 2004; Guerette and Clarke 2005; Orrenius and Coronado 2005; Albuquerque 2007). For this reason Słubice inhabitants were asked if they thought that the location of Słubice on the border influenced its security. According to the survey results, the biggest share of respondents believe that the influence of Słubice's location at the border has no impact on security (Fig. 2). Meanwhile, a large share think that the influence is positive.

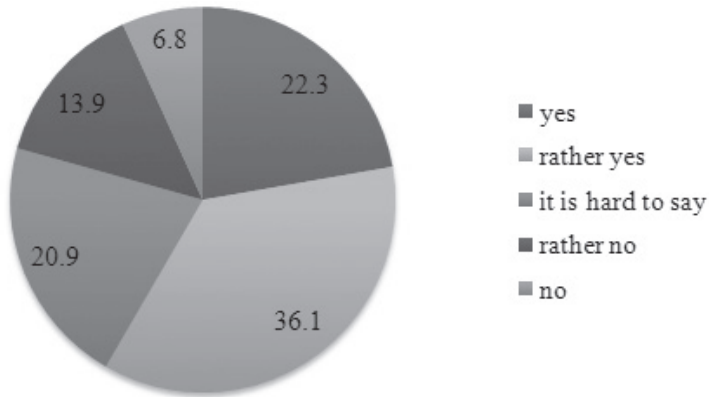


Fig. 1. Structure of respondents' answers on feeling of security in Słubice
Source: based on survey results

For almost 20% of the respondents the location on the border has a negative impact on security.

As the emphasis of this article is placed on the consequences of the recent political changes, because they may possibly have affected people's sense of security, it is worth knowing if the town inhabitants have noticed any difference in their sense of security following Poland's accession to the European Union and joining the Schengen zone. The structure of respondents' answers in these two cases is very similar (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). More than half believe that the two political changes did not influence Słubice's security. About 40% of the answers show that the inhabitants have noticed an improvement in security. Few

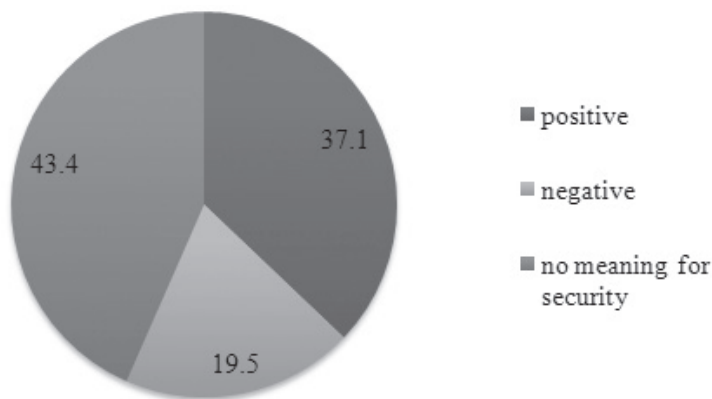


Fig. 2. The influence of the location of Słubice at the border for security – structure of respondents' answers
Source: based on survey results

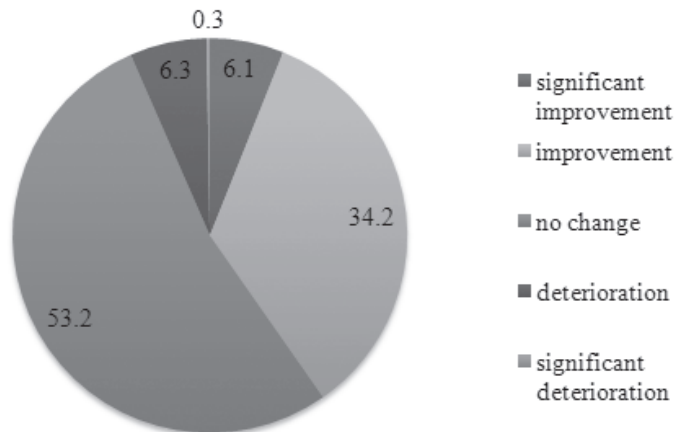


Fig. 3. The influence of Poland's accession to the European Union on Slubice's security – structure of respondents' answers

Source: based on survey results

respondents indicate a deterioration in security because of the recent political changes.

Research on people's sense of security often include a question about the sources of opinions on crime and dangerous places. Friends' opinions, own experience and the mass media are considered the most common sources of opinions on crime and dangerous places (Fig. 5). Only police reports are not a popular source of information.

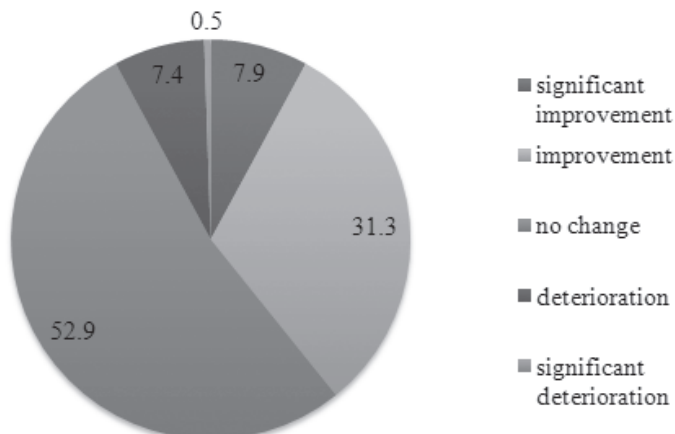


Fig. 4. The influence of Poland joining the Schengen zone on Slubice's security – structure of respondents' answers

Source: based on survey results

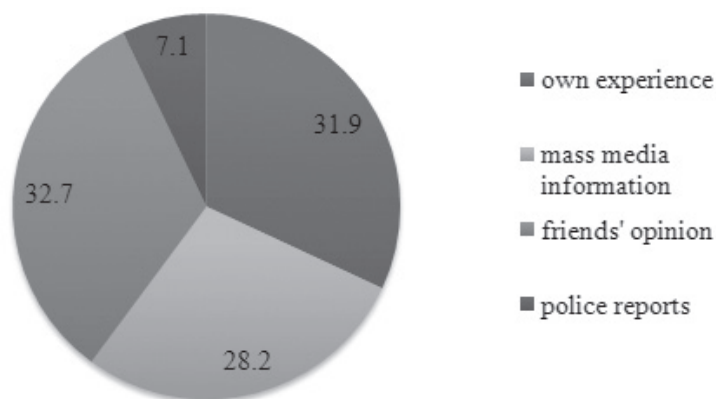


Fig. 5. Sources of opinions on crime and dangerous places
– structure of respondents' answers

Source: based on survey results

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The opinions presented here on security issues related to borders, using the example of Słubice, a town on the border of Poland and Germany, lead to the following conclusions:

1. The majority of respondents have a positive sense of security in Słubice

It has been demonstrated in a lot of research on Polish towns or cities that people usually consider the place of residence as safe (Dolata and Kotus 2004, 2006; Jabkowski 2005; Kotus 2005; Rydz and Szymańska 2007). Of course the exact place makes a difference – the greatest sense of security is at home and near home, or in public spaces, especially during the day (Dolata and Kotus 2006). The sense of security of Słubice inhabitants follows a similar pattern to the main findings of the research carried out in the past in many cities and towns.

2. Not many respondents believe that the location of Słubice on the border has a negative influence on security

In fact the biggest share of respondents consider that the border location of the town has no significance for their security. The reason for this might be that they simply treat the town as a place to live, work and spend time, not noticing its border location in their everyday life, or they have had no opportunity to compare their sense of security to other places. It is worth mentioning that a large proportion of respondents also think that the influence of Słubice's location on the border has a positive meaning for security. This might be partly explained by the increased level of controls

in the border area – previously by border guards and currently by European Union agencies. Nevertheless, the complete answer to this question requires further research.

3. Accession to the European Union and joining the Schengen zone did not influence security in Słubice

It is believed that, ‘The elimination of borders between European Union Member States facilitates [...] the activities of criminal organizations in Europe’ (Special Eurobarometer 245, 2006). It must be pointed out clearly that accepting the rules of the Schengen Agreement, which opens the borders between member countries, is one of the legal requirements of membership in the European Union. Generally, for Europeans, the European Union means not only the freedom to travel and work anywhere in the European Union (45% of all respondents in Europe, 57% of Polish respondents – rated the most important benefit by respondents from every country), but, at the same time, more crime (14% and 5% respectively) and inadequate controls of external borders (15% and 5% respectively) (Standard Eurobarometer 73, 2010). It is visible that Poles consider the European Union brings more benefits than threats. Taking into consideration the possibility of free movement and the threats related to it, respondents were asked about the influence of two political changes, accession to the European Union and joining the Schengen zone, on security. The highly similar answers for these separate questions are noticeable. In the author’s opinion, the respondents did not differentiate between accession to the European Union and joining the Schengen zone, although the exact dates of those two political changes were given, as well as the explanation in the questionnaire that joining the Schengen zone eliminated movement controls on the Polish-German border. It is worth emphasizing that a large proportion of respondents have noticed an improvement in security, which has in fact occurred in this region recently – the crime rate has decreased significantly.

4. Respondents opinions on crime and dangerous places in Słubice is based predominantly on ‘subjective’ sources

Sources of opinion on crime and dangerous places might be divided into ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’. For the author, an ‘objective’ source is an official police report, with committed and recorded crimes, detectability rates, numbers of suspects, and so on. Of course, there might be a ‘dark number’ of crimes, not included in a report, but generally this is the source of information closest to reality. By a ‘subjective’ source of opinion on crime and dangerous places the author understands all sources of unofficial information in which reality might be distorted: mass media, friends’ opinions and the respondents’ own experiences. People tend to build their sense of security on ‘subjective’ sources, as in the case of Kraków: radio and TV, press, friends’

opinions and own experiences (Guzik 2000b) and in the case of Poznań: mass media information, friends' opinions and own experiences (Dolata and Kotus 2004). Police reports are the least important source of opinion on crime and dangerous places for people (Dolata and Kotus 2004). The results for Słubice are similar – people much more frequently choose 'subjective' sources of opinion on crime and dangerous places (more than 90%).

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