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## Socio-cultural proximity, daily life and shopping tourism in the Dutch–German border region

Bianca B. Szytniewski<sup>a,b</sup>, Bas Spierings<sup>a</sup> and Martin van der Velde<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Urban and Regional Research Centre Utrecht, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands; <sup>b</sup>Nijmegen Centre for Border Research, Radboud University Nijmegen, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

### ABSTRACT

This paper analyses feelings of socio-cultural proximity and distance with a specific focus on the tourist experience in cross-border shopping and everyday life practices in border regions. We examined shopping practices of Dutch border crossers who visit the German town Kleve in the Dutch–German border region. This particular border context has allowed us not only to reflect on a multidimensional approach towards socio-cultural proximity and distance, but also to examine how these different dimensions express themselves in the tourist experience when it comes to people and places that are geographically ‘close’ but assumingly socially and culturally ‘distant’ from home. Although some differences prompted feelings of discomfort, in particular, differences in social engagement, feelings of comfort stand out in our analysis of cross-border shopping tourism. Furthermore, our study shows that shopping tourism and exoticism, on the one hand, and everyday routines and the mundane, on the other hand, are closely intertwined in the lives of people living in a border region, resulting in a fluid interpretation of the exotic and the mundane in the cross-border context.

### 摘要

本文分析了人们对社会文化相近与疏远的感觉，特别关注跨境购物中的旅游体验以及边境地区人们的日常生活实践。在本研究中，我们考察了荷兰越境者的购物体验，他们参访荷德边境地区的德国克莱沃小镇并且购物。这个特殊的边境背景让我们不但可以反思社会文化相近与疏远的多重方法，针对地理邻近但假想社会文化与家乡疏远的人与地方，还可以考察这些不同方法在旅游体验中的表达方式。边境地区尽管有些差别，特别是社会规定方面的差别，会引发的不舒服的感觉，但是在我们的跨境购物旅游体验分析中舒服感特别突出。另外，我们的研究表明，在边境地区人们生活中，新奇的购物旅游与规律化的生活紧密地交织在一起，产生了一种跨境背景下对新奇与平淡体验的流动性解释。

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### 关键词

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## Introduction

Nowadays, more and more people travel around the world and engage in a variety of tourist activities, experiencing many places different from home. Tourist destinations,

however, do not always have to be situated far away 'on the other side of the world', but can also lie within geographical proximity and still be seen as an attractive place to visit. Cross-border tourism and intraregional mobility in particular have increasingly come to the attention in research on tourism (Barbini & Presutti, 2014; Díaz-Sauceda, Palau-Saumell, Forgas-Coll, & Sánchez-García, 2015; Honkanen, Pitkänen, & Hall, 2015; Prokkola, 2010; Rogerson, 2015; Sofield, 2006; Wachowiak, 2012). As stated by McCabe (2002), everyday life worlds also influence how people experience their tourist activities and vice versa. Within a cross-border context, the relationship between home and away comes even more to the foreground as tourists face geographically 'close' but assumingly socially and culturally 'distant' people and places. An analysis of feelings of proximity and distance in relation to a destination could therefore contribute to a better understanding of the tourist practices (Ahn & McKercher, 2013; Kastenholz, 2010; Tasci, 2009). By focusing on how distant or close something, someone or someplace *feels* (Wilson, Boyer O'Leary, Metiu, & Jett, 2008), we want to draw attention to social and cultural characteristics of proximity and distance in relation to intraregional tourism.

Following Amin (2002, p. 976) in his argument that coming to terms with differences 'is a matter of everyday practices', we have chosen in this study to focus on shopping tourism in a cross-border context. Shopping involves the experience of walking through a shopping street, seeing, hearing and meeting different people, browsing and rummaging through different shops, coming across different restaurants, food corners and bars – temporary but also recurring experiences that reflect 'fluid, brief, incidental encounters' (Blokland & Nast, 2014, p. 1146). Not only can regular cross-border shopping practices involve encounters with differences in shopping facilities and surroundings, but they may also include interactions between people with different social and cultural backgrounds, who often live in relative geographical proximity. What is more, these differences can be important drivers for cross-border practices. Shopping tourists, for instance, not only expect to find intercultural encounters and unfamiliar physical surroundings, but also different products, prices and atmosphere – differences that may attract cross-border shopping tourism and intraregional mobility (see, for instance, Bygvrå, 1998; Spierings & Van der Velde, 2008, 2013; Timothy & Butler, 1995). Within this context, the life worlds of cross-border shoppers are also influenced by local narratives, regional histories and border experiences, which in turn play an important role in the dynamics of everyday life, and perceptions on encounters with differences and cross-border mobility (O'Donoghue, 2013; Radu, 2013).

This study examines two research questions. First, how do people who live in a border region experience and reflect on feelings of proximity and distance with regard to places that are assumingly socially and culturally 'distant' but geographically 'close' to home? And related to this, in what way are these feelings expressed in cross-border shopping experiences within this intraregional context? Following Edensor (2007), who questions the exoticism of tourism as such and considers these touristscapes in the realm of mundane routines and sensations, we would like to argue that the distinction between the exotic and mundane in cross-border shopping tourism may be much more fluid than it initially appears.

## A theoretical approach towards socio-cultural proximity

Feelings of proximity and distance reflect a subjective understanding of a relationship with something, someone or someplace that is perceived as being 'close or far away from the self, here and now' (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440; see also O'Donoghue, 2013). These feelings may be related to physical distance or closeness, but mostly they encompass an affective feeling towards otherness. As Radu (2013, p. 172) suggests, feelings of proximity and distance are 'sensed, rather than known, for proximity is not understood as a way of knowing, but as a sensibility'. In this paragraph, we will place proximity and distance in a socio-cultural context, where we distinguish between an *affective*, *normative* and *interactive* understanding of the concept (see Lewandowski & Lisk, 2012 for an overview on social distance). These different dimensions of proximity and distance are inter-linked and can be simultaneously present and interact with one another. As suggested by O'Donoghue (2013, p. 406), 'proximity is not about being fixed, neither is it solely about movement ... it is about recognising the positioning of ideas, concepts, and selves as they come into being through interaction with or alongside other beings'. Although *cultural* proximity is sometimes regarded as a separate feature when speaking about proximity and distance (Karakayali, 2009; Kastenholz, 2010; Ng, Lee, & Soutar, 2007), we would like to argue that the cultural dimension is interwoven in the affective, normative and interactive understanding of proximity and distance. The cultural background always plays a role, as people consciously or unconsciously use their cultural baggage when being in places different from home (Kastenholz, 2010).

First of all, feelings of proximity and distance consist of an *affective* aspect, in which 'those who are socially close to us are those we feel close to, and vice versa' (Karakayali, 2009, p. 540; see also Magee & Smith, 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Here, affective feelings of distance and closeness can influence the level of comfort with regard to people and places different from home. Following Blokland and Nast (2014, p. 1147), 'comfort is associated with ease'. As explained by the authors, '[w]e know the rules of conduct because the setting occurs predictably and is understandable to us'. Consequently, frequent social and cultural encounters can generate feelings of familiarity, recognition and security (Van Houtum, 1999; Wilson et al., 2008). However, when cultural differences are too great, people may not be able to make sense of them when using existing knowledge and representations of otherness (Moscovici, 1988; Tajfel & Billig, 1974), and eventually experience discomfort.

People, consciously or unconsciously, differentiate between the self and the other, us and them, and in a spatial sense, the 'here' and the 'there'. In this process, *normative* proximity centres on group membership and collectively recognised norms and values, and cultural identity of a specific group (Karakayali, 2009; Kristeva, 1991; Petersoo, 2007; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982). It must be noted, though, that when it comes to differences, it is largely assumed that there are more differences between than within countries. However, sometimes, regional differences within a country can be stronger than the international ones. As a result, social and cultural adaptation to otherness may occur not only at the international but also at the regional or local level (Ng et al., 2007).

Representations of otherness that follow from encounters with different people and places are subjective understandings, based on past experiences and acquired knowledge, but often also on assumptions and stereotypes which are based on generalised

attributes concerning the other (Brislin, 1999). Moreover, '[t]he abstract nature of stereotypes makes it possible for people to impute them to individual members of social groups and to interpret a wide array of behaviours as consistent with the stereotypes of an individual's group' (Magee & Smith, 2013, p. 168). Stereotypes often include performative associations in which people differentiate between one group and another, not only influencing their interpretations of a place, but also their practices in future encounters (Cresswell, 1996). In addition to these internal interpretation processes, external factors also play a role. As already noted by Simmel (1908, p. 143), even if the other, a stranger, is regarded as an outsider or external actor, he or she still influences the self or group by bringing 'qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it'. What is more, the presence of otherness in our daily lives influences the meaning we give to ourselves and others (Geertz, 2000; Riggins, 1997). This may occur through co-presence, but also through active participation and interaction.

Another feature of proximity and distance has been recognised by Karakayali (2009) as *interactive*. The more a person needs to adapt, the less culturally, but also socially proximate the person may feel. Molinsky (2007, p. 623) refers to this form of adaptation as 'cross-cultural code-switching', which he describes as 'the act of purposefully modifying one's behaviour, in a specific interaction in a foreign setting, to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behaviour'. Here, we recognise a normative distinction as a result of differences in norms and behaviour between one group and another, but also affective proximity and distance following interactions and the effort people need to make to adapt in a setting different from home. As suggested by Blokland (2014, p. 1147), everyday routes, but also recurring visits to a place, 'bring about encounters with others who differ from themselves, and whilst people come with their own cultural baggage, the inevitability of passing each other produces codes of conduct in the street that repeat and conform with expectations of the next encounter' (see also Cresswell, 1996). Not only the frequency and length of interactions between disparate groups may influence feelings of proximity and distance, but also different forms of interaction, in particular verbal communication in the form of language, and also non-verbal communications such as body language, bodily contact and gestures. In addition, perceived social rules and conventions can also play a role in the ways social interactions are perceived and experienced (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). What is more, people develop a sense of place as a result of repetition and routine (Edensor, 2007, see also Cresswell, 2010). These encounters with differences may be experienced consciously or unconsciously and even become part of daily life, shaping 'the very nature and experience of our being-in-the-world' (Davidson & Milligan, 2004, p. 524).

Following Radu (2013, p. 189), we recognise that experiences with differences are 'realised in physical absence, as virtual co-presence [formed by individual perceptions and life worlds]; other times it is based on real co-presence [and actual practices and encounters]'. This interplay between what people feel and know as part of their personal life worlds, on the one hand, and how they perceive and experience encounters with differences, on the other hand, will be at the centre of the following case study. We aim to reach a further understanding of how the abovementioned *affective*, *normative* and *interactive* dimensions of socio-cultural proximity and distance are related to practices of border crossers who are engaged in cross-border shopping mobility within the context of intraregional tourism.

## Kleve as a case-study: context and methods

In line with our aim to examine the multidimensionality of socio-cultural proximity and distance, on the one hand, and daily practices and lived experiences of shopping tourists in an intraregional context, on the other hand, we have selected the relatively small German border town, Kleve, as a shopping destination for our case study (Figure 1). Kleve has approximately 50,000 inhabitants and is situated about 18 kilometres from the Dutch–German state border, close to the Dutch city Nijmegen. Kleve is chosen because it is not a major tourist attraction as opposed to some of the near German cities such as Düsseldorf, but it does have a major shopping street with a wide variety of shopping facilities, attracting Dutch day-visitors. According to the most recent regional study on cross-border shopping tourism in this specific border region (Nijmegen, 2009), Kleve was the most popular shopping destination for people living in the Arnhem–Nijmegen area. Forty-one percent of the respondents had undertaken at least one cross-border shopping visit to the German border region in the year prior to the study, almost half of which chose Kleve as their shopping destination. Both leisure and functional shopping were the main incentives to engage in these cross-border shopping practices.

The Dutch–German border region has a long tradition of institutional cooperation, which has contributed to stable and open borders and everyday cross-border practices. Especially, the way these practices are perceived and experienced can give interesting insights on how people reflect on feelings of proximity and distance in a border region. What is more, because of this intraregional context, we consider the geographical dimension of proximity and distance as given and were able to focus on the socio-cultural aspects of the concept in particular.

In the first phase of data gathering in the summer of 2013, street interviews were conducted with Dutch visitors in and around the high street of Kleve. Eighteen interviews took place during weekdays on a next-to-pass basis. These interviews were of an average length of 20 minutes and people were shortly informed about the theme of research. The aim of the interviews was not only to gain information about people's reasons for visiting Kleve, but also to explore people's experiences of seeing, hearing and meeting different



**Figure 1.** Case study area in the Dutch–German border region. Source: C&M Department, Faculty of Geosciences at Utrecht University.

people and coming across differences and similarities in the shopping street. The interview guide included two pictures, illustrating explicitly an image of a 'Dutch' symbol in the shopping street of Kleve, in the form of a Dutch fish shop, and a 'German' symbol, in the form of a selling point for typical German sausages called *Bratwurst*. These images were shown at the end of the interviews and were used to trigger additional reactions on cultural differences with regard to the normative dimension of socio-cultural proximity and distance.

Emergent themes from the first set of interviews were used to operationalise the theoretical framework further, in particular the socio-cultural attributes of feelings of proximity and distance, and develop a deeper focus for the second phase of data gathering, that is in-depth interviews in the spring of 2014. While the street interviews mostly focused on perceived differences concerning places, people, products, the shopping street in Kleve and the surrounding area, the in-depth interviews included topics such as feelings of home and belonging, and differences in social-cultural backgrounds, interactions, language issues, adjustments in behaviour and awareness of social rules.

In this second phase, ten cross-border shoppers were selected through four independent informants from our personal network who did not take part in the study themselves. This approach contributed not only to a diverse sample of respondents, but also helped to build a relationship of trust and a more personal dialogue with the respondents prior to the interview. Interview partners were informed in advance about our study on the Dutch–German border region, and we particularly expressed our interest in personal dialogue about people's daily experiences with regard to cross-border shopping visits to Kleve. Our relationship of trust developed further after explaining that the researcher also worked in the Nijmegen area.

When selecting our interview partners, the main criterion was that the respondents were Dutch nationals, living in the Netherlands in the border region, and visitors of Kleve. We interviewed five men and five women, ranging in age from 18 to 66 years, living in Nijmegen, Renkum, Mook, Gennep, Beek-Ubbergen or Groesbeek. The interviews took place in an informal setting, at people's home or at a coffee place. Similar to the first phase of interviewing, the same pictures of a Dutch and German symbol were used once again at the end of the interview to trigger further reactions on cultural differences and similarities in the shopping street of Kleve.

All interviews, which were held in Dutch, were fully transcribed and coded thematically. We have used multiple rounds of open and axial coding – breaking down, comparing and categorising data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) – to determine the relative strength of the themes in connection to the different theoretical dimensions of proximity and distance. As a result, our analysis revealed multiple expressions of feelings of proximity and distance in relation to everyday life and shopping tourism in Kleve. What is more, different ways of placing and understanding encounters with differences came to the surface, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. First, we will cover affective feelings concerning practices in this specific border region by reflecting on feelings of familiarity and unfamiliarity; second, we will discuss normative differences perceived by the respondents; and finally, we will focus on interactions and cultural code switching in everyday encounters with different others in the border region.

## Everyday life and shopping tourism in the Dutch–German border region

### *Affective proximity and distance: practices, familiarity and unfamiliarity*

Most Dutch respondents who took part in the field study grew up in the region and had developed an affective feeling towards Kleve and its surroundings. They visited the town regularly, ranging from every week to a couple of times a year.

When discussing Kleve and its shopping facilities, different respondents noted feelings of both familiarity and unfamiliarity in their cross-border practices. Overall, people felt familiar and appreciated the familiarity with the shopping street and the shops they regularly visited. Respondents admitted that exploring the town is only occasionally part of the visit and that they often keep to fixed routes, places and patterns when visiting Kleve:

We do have a fixed route actually, one that we usually walk. We park the car 'at the bottom of Kleve' as we call it ... And when it's time for coffee, we take the street on the right. There is a café-restaurant at the corner... there are various small shops on the left and the right [of the street] where we stop at... And then you end up at the Neue Mitte... but often we don't get that far... and we walk back down. By then, it's time for lunch and we walk back to that first restaurant to have lunch... (female, 1975, Mook).

Even when arriving from a different side of the town, or taking another route, people noted that they are able to find their way as a result of being to some extent familiar with the town, having developed a sense of place through previous visits.

Differences in facilities, products and atmosphere were considered one of the main reasons to go shopping in Kleve. With regard to products, differences in price, but more often than not, differences in quality and assortment of foods, clothing and other non-foods are important. The following respondents visit Kleve on a regular basis:

I am not going there for my daily groceries... but to buy special things you cannot buy in the Netherlands, [things] I can for instance experiment with or that I know I like to use beforehand... (male, 1968, Nijmegen).

It's becoming more normal. I feel it fits easier into my rhythm. But you don't go that often that it feels as being in Nijmegen; for me it's still different. That's why I am still going, otherwise I would stay in Nijmegen... (male, 1983, Nijmegen).

As illustrated by these last two quotes, familiarity with cross-border differences may contribute to feelings of ease and comfort, while expected but sometimes also unexpected differences can lead to a sense of unfamiliarity. Spierings and Van der Velde (2013) recognise this as the presence of both comfortable familiarity, which is found here in the repetition and routine of the everyday, and attractive unfamiliarity, which is related to the exoticism of facilities, products and atmosphere in Kleve and its surroundings. Not only do these notions of familiarity and unfamiliarity contribute to feelings of affective proximity, but they are also a reason for cross-border mobility.

In addition, most respondents visited Kleve for both leisure and functional shopping, and often alternated their purpose during and between visits. When functional shopping is combined with leisure, the shopping experience also encompasses more time for browsing and rummaging through different shops and consuming food and beverages at the local facilities in town. Experiences can thus vary as a result of both 'discovery' and leisure shopping, and goal-oriented functional shopping. This change in mindset and

motivation may not only influence the way differences and similarities are perceived, but also the degree of felt proximity and distance. Here, we can recognise a mixture of the mundane of the exotic and the exotic of the everyday. On the one hand, crossing the state border has become an everyday or routine-like experience, while, on the other hand, differences found in Kleve contribute to the attractiveness of these cross-border shopping practices.

### ***Normative proximity and distance: differences and similarities in the border region***

How feelings of socio-cultural proximity and distance are perceived depends very much on the way normative differences between us and them and the 'here' and the 'there' are noted and experienced. Here, proximity is construed through feelings of comfort, ease and familiarity when being in Kleve, but also by comparing the areas around Nijmegen and Kleve with the western parts of the Netherlands:

I think we are quite similar. Also because I have lived my whole live in the east of the Netherlands. The differences with people from the western parts of the Netherlands might be even bigger, now I think of it... (female, 1973, Renkum).

A day or so [in Amsterdam] is nice, but I am happy when I am back in the east of the Netherlands, because it's much quieter and more convivial... (male, 1949, Groesbeek).

Not only did people speak of a certain form of regional attachment in relation to the eastern parts of the Netherlands, attachment towards Kleve was also noted when reflecting on a long tradition of extending daily life practices across the state border, for instance, through family and friends who live across the state border, and as a result of regular cross-border practices in Kleve and its surroundings.

Regional differences and similarities were, for instance, noted when discussing symbols in the shopping street. As mentioned before, the shopping street consists of some 'Dutch' symbols, such as a 'Dutch' fish and cheese shop and a snack bar. Although a number of respondents considered the presence of these shops as somewhat odd, they explained it by noting that the Dutch and German borderlands are more interlinked than they appear:

Well it is a bit of an outsider, isn't it? But I don't have any problems with it. No, I don't really have problems with it. Well, Kleve and the Netherlands are quite intertwined with one another... (male, 1949, Groesbeek).

At the same time, however, people also emphasised the importance of normative differences, arguing that there should not be more 'Dutchification' of Kleve, as their incentive to visit the town was not based upon Dutch supply and demand, but on differences in products and even a kind of exoticism:

Well then I might as well go to Nijmegen. I visit Kleve for the differences and not for the Dutch ... (male, 1947, Beek-Ubbergen).

There is a little bit of exoticism going on in the sense that I would like to see something different. I am not visiting Kleve because it's the same as in the Netherlands... (male, 1968, Nijmegen).

In addition to the 'Dutch' symbols in the shopping street of Kleve, the ultimate 'German' association is found at one stand in the street selling *Bratwurst*, the typical German sausage. Although the stand was not necessarily part of the visit for most respondents, it was considered as something belonging in a German shopping street:

... those stands with *Bratwurst* ... those you can find everywhere in Germany. Yeah, that's just part of it, yeah... (male, 1983, Nijmegen).

Here normative differences are strengthened, following a positive and somewhat stereotypical association. These associations are explained by the respondents in light of differences, but at the same time they trigger feelings of recognition and familiarity.

Even though many social and cultural differences are noticed, people stated that there are probably more similarities than differences, which may also contribute to an affective feeling towards the border region:

In fact the Netherlands and Germany are quite similar, even if we don't really want it, I think we are only all too similar actually... (male, 1983, Nijmegen).

These feelings of affective proximity with regard to normative differences were especially found when people compared their own social and cultural background to Germany and other European countries:

In that respect, I think that the distance is larger between the Netherlands and England or France. More language differences [and] differences in culture. In that respect, I think Germany and Belgium... they are literally nearby, but they are also closer with regard to the nature of the people... (female, 1973, Renkum).

The state border, however, was not totally discarded by everyone. Although most respondents associated Kleve with a local and familiar feeling, the presence of the state border continued to play a role in the way people approached cross-border differences:

Yes maybe you feel you are crossing the border... although it is not *that* different. But maybe [it is about] this feeling: right, now I am crossing the border and I will have to speak German... (male, 1949, Groesbeek).

I do think, well, I am Dutch and I am now in Germany. This also means that I behave as a guest. That's the way I am raised I guess... (male, 1975, Beek-Ubbergen).

This last quote expresses a strong normative distance as a result of recognising the state border in this particular way and illustrates a continuous differentiation process between one group and the other, and spatially between the 'here' and the 'there'. These perceptions may have developed as part of actual encounters with otherness, but may also be part of people's individual perceptions and life worlds, as is the case here. In addition, when discussing living in the Kleve area, for instance, many respondents considered a possible move across the state border a step too far. Arguments ranged from normative feelings of being too Dutch, to affective feelings concerning the overly quiet surroundings of Kleve. When looking at Kleve from this perspective, a certain affective distance remains to Kleve and the German border region, or to put it the other way around, a certain degree of proximity is felt towards Nijmegen or the Netherlands as a result of a normative feeling:

One way or the other, it is different over there and that appeals to me. But, in any case I would not want to live there and only profit from the good house prices and keep further everything

in the Netherlands... in that case I would also have to put my children to school [in Germany] ... I don't know if that is something I would want... (female, 1974, Beek-Ubbergen).

### ***Interactive proximity and distance: everyday encounters***

Many people living in the Nijmegen area grew up in the area and as a result of open and stable state borders experienced an organic way of meeting each other. People had time to get used to one another, to meet, connect and exchange as part of daily life practices, and also to become accustomed to the differences and similarities found in this particular Dutch–German border region; something that may not be the case in other border regions, or at other levels of cross-border practices, as a result of different border restrictions and policies.

This organic way of meeting has led to a certain notion of 'contact zones' (Yeoh & Willis, 2005) not only in terms of co-presence, interactions and understanding, but also mutual awareness and feelings of comfort. When visiting places that are different from home, however, people to some extent negotiate appropriate behaviour by adapting themselves socially and culturally to the place and people around them. Feelings of interactive proximity and distance are then closely related to normative and affective associations regarding otherness.

In a shopping street, people see, hear, meet different others and engage in what Valentine and Sadgrove (2012) call 'fleeting encounters' with otherness. Even though people felt comfortable in Kleve and its surroundings, there were moments where cultural code-switching mechanisms (Molinsky, 2007) were applied to accommodate differences in cultural norms. Language in particular plays an important role in understanding feelings of interactive and cultural proximity in the region. Respondents noted that the language spoken in Kleve lies closely to the Dutch language spoken in the region:

German spoken in this region lies closely to the Dutch language, because when you have trouble communicating you can switch to Dutch to find the right word, whereas this will not be possible in Berlin... (female, 1975, Mook).

Moreover, many people from the border region grew up with German television, as the German channels had better reception than Dutch ones. When speaking to the respondents, they associated old German programmes with positive memories – even nostalgia – and realised that these programmes had contributed to their language skills and maybe even to their interest and feelings of affective proximity regarding the German culture. These notions with regard to language reflect a general sense of comfort in the border region, where state borders do not necessarily matter:

You know it is a bit different, but at the same time it is so well-known and familiar, not because you go there that often, but just because... well maybe because of this local feeling (male, 1968, Nijmegen).

This last quote also illustrates a connection between what people know and feel about a place, showing that emotions with regard to a travel destination are intertwined with people's stock of knowledge, representations of otherness and past experiences, indicating a personal sense of place.

Adaptation in language was mentioned by the respondents, but not considered as something causing negative feelings. It was mostly regarded as a given and as part of visiting Kleve that happens to lie across a state border. At the same time, it was also felt as the strongest point of adaptation of the self when visiting Kleve, resulting in some affective distance in some situations:

It's always a little bit more uncomfortable than in your own language of course... It does not bother me a lot, but now you ask me about it, you do feel a little bit of restraint to ask something in a shop... (male, 1983, Nijmegen).

Social interactions with the German others were mostly perceived in a positive way. People in shops and on the street were regarded as polite and helpful, contributing to a feeling of ease and comfort. Differences were noted when relating social experiences in Kleve to the ones in Nijmegen. They revealed characteristics that belong to one group but not to the other and vice versa. In the context of social experiences, German nationals were considered more formal and restrained, whereas people in Nijmegen and surroundings appeared more outward looking and open. People noticed differences in social engagement, such as politeness or people being more obliging. Some of these differences found in traditions and habits were regarded in a way of positive stereotyping, in particular when discussing the German tradition of *Kaffee und Kuchen*:

Yeah those Germans on Sunday... here you don't see that anymore, in the past you saw it too, but over there, Sunday is sacred, meaning coffee and cake. But that's something, I also learned from my [German] grandmother. Everything needs to be precise and tidy... that's something they do over there. Here we don't do that anymore... (female, 1969, Gennepe).

These stereotypes are socially constructed and remain part of people's perceptions of the town, but are also a reason for visiting Kleve. Differences in social rules, habits and traditions, however, were not only noticed, but also contributed to self-awareness and differentiation between the self and the other, varying feelings of normative and affective proximity and distance. At times, these different rules of engagement were recognised as positive, for instance, when considering the strict work ethics which people associated with Germany, whereas other perceived rules of engagement felt constrictive, prompting some discomfort. One couple with children reflected on the difference in upbringing by mentioning that they felt they had to be stricter with their children when visiting Kleve and its surroundings, while another respondent mentioned a feeling of distrust when coming across associations with traditional festivities and clothing which he associated with nationalism. Consequently, positive associations with regard to the other can lead to feelings of normative proximity, whereas negative ones often increase normative distance between one group of people and another. This can, subsequently, influence the way encounters with differences are perceived and experienced.

## Conclusion

Our findings reveal interesting insights for understanding socio-cultural proximity and distance with regard to cross-border shopping tourism and encounters with differences in daily life practices. In this study, we paid particular attention to the relationship between socio-cultural proximity and distance and cross-border shopping practices of Dutch

border crossers who visit the German town Kleve in the Dutch–German border region – a region which can be characterised by open and stable borders, allowing people to move freely across the state border. This, however, does not mean that borders have disappeared entirely from people’s minds. As stated by Newman (2006, p. 172), ‘[m]any of the borders which order our lives are invisible to the human eye but they nevertheless impact strongly on our daily life practices’. For most respondents who took part in the case study, the state border has to a large extent worn off in an institutional and physical sense. The border is mostly considered as a symbolic line rather than a physical one. Although this is the case, the state border continues to represent differences between Nijmegen and Kleve, not only producing a division between us and them as well as the ‘here’ and the ‘there’, but also contributing to cross-border practices, such as shopping tourism, in this specific intraregional context.

Following Edensor (2007), who questions the notion of exoticism in tourism and places tourism in the realm of mundane routines and sensations, it appears that shopping tourism and exoticism, on the one hand, and everyday life, on the other hand, are closely intertwined. From our study, we found that cross-border shopping visits to Kleve as part of the everyday resulted in feelings of regional attachment and comfortable familiarity concerning Kleve and its surroundings, whereas differences in facilities, products and atmosphere contributed to a sense of exoticism and feelings of attractive unfamiliarity. These feelings of comfortable familiarity and attractive unfamiliarity show a degree of fluidity when interpreting the mundane and the exotic in this specific Dutch–German cross-border context. We recognise these perspectives in expressions as ‘it’s in our system and part of our daily life to go to Kleve’ and ‘we are going there for the differences’, which both turned out to be important drivers for intraregional mobility.

The particular border context discussed in this study has allowed us to reflect on a multidimensional approach towards socio-cultural proximity and distance. By distinguishing between an affective, normative and interactive dimension of the concept, we were able to examine how these different dimensions are simultaneously at play and interact with one another when it comes to the tourist experience of cross-border shoppers in the Dutch–German border region. As people use their cultural baggage to make sense of otherness, normative cultural aspects, in particular, can influence the way encounters with differences are perceived and experienced. In our study, interactions resulting from cross-border shopping practices and encounters with different others contributed to reflections on otherness and feelings of affective proximity and distance. These affective feelings were, for instance, found in the examples discussing the German tradition of *Kaffee und Kuchen* and the differences regarding the upbringing of children in the Netherlands and in Germany. Although respondents sought appropriate behaviour and a degree of adaptation in both examples, normative differences led to feelings of interactive proximity and distance, respectively. These dynamics of everyday life and actual practices and encounters with differences are not only at play when feelings of socio-cultural proximity and distance come to the surface, but they also shape the tourist experience.

When it comes to Kleve as part of people’s everyday life worlds, cross-border practices and the organic way of meeting one another over time had contributed to feelings of both affective and interactive proximity. Respondents had become accustomed to the differences and similarities across the state border and spoke of regional attachment. They noted a stronger attachment towards Kleve and its surrounding, regardless of the state border and

the assumed normative differentiation between the 'here' and the 'there', than to, for instance, western parts of the Netherlands. This notion of regional attachment, which is also based on the earlier mentioned balance between comfortable familiarity and attractive unfamiliarity, appeared to play an important role in cross-border shopping practices, as it contributed to feelings of comfort, ease and recognition in the border region.

What is more, our study has proven an interesting case in examining socio-cultural proximity and distance in relation to shopping tourism in a border region with open and stable borders. As not all border regions are characterised by stable borders and a long history of institutional cooperation, further research should also focus on differences in shopping tourism between different types of border regions. Social and cultural adaptation to otherness in particular may be very different in border regions without a tradition of extended daily life practices across the state border. Furthermore, a longitudinal study on cross-border shopping could give additional insights into not only the development of local narratives and border experiences when it comes to cross-border shopping tourism, but also the multidimensional and dynamic character of the concept of socio-cultural proximity and distance.

Related to this, the attractiveness for cross-border shopping practices in Kleve and its surroundings appears to lie in the reciprocal relationship between the mundane of the exotic and the exotic of the everyday. As mobility in general, and shopping in particular, are important issues in cross-border shopping policies, this observation is of particular interest for developing new strategies for retail and tourism promotion in border regions. Regional and tourist policies could not only promote intraregional mobility and shopping tourism, but also have the potential for further strengthening cross-border cohesion and regional attachment.

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## Notes on contributors

**Bianca B. Szytniewski** works as a Ph.D. researcher in human geography at Utrecht University and Radboud University Nijmegen. She holds an MA in International relations and European Union studies. Her research interests include shopping tourism, border networks and practices, cross-border mobility, encounters with differences and everyday life experiences.

**Bas Spierings** is an assistant professor in urban geography at the Department of Human Geography and Planning in Utrecht University. His research interests are public space, retailing, shopping and everyday life, urban routes, encounters with difference, and borders.

**Martin van der Velde** is an associate professor at the Department of Geography, Spatial Planning and Environment in Radboud University Nijmegen. His current research interests are concentrated around border-related issues, especially with regard to labour market, consumer behaviour, migration and European integration.

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