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Cross border shopping and the ‘bandwith of familiarity’

Exploring the positive impact of national borders on consumer mobility in the Euregion Rhine-Waal

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Cross-border shopping and the ‘bandwidth of familiarity’:

Exploring the positive impact of national borders on consumer mobility in the Euregion Rhine-Waal

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Abstract.
In contemporary literature on consumption studies, shoppers are considered highly mobile while looking for ‘new’ and ‘different’ experiences. In an attempt to find satisfaction, these ‘fun (s)hoppers’ explore both different places and countries. Borders between countries are often assumed to have negative implications for international mobility. The negative impact of borders involves obstructing economic and juridical differences, for instance. Instead, this paper quantitatively investigates the positive impact of national borders on mobility. The positive impact is caused by functional, physical and socio-cultural dissimilarities between cities on both sides of the border. This contribution reflects on mobile consumerism by discussing motives, intentions, perceptions, assessments and practices of ‘fun (s)hoppers’ that are crossing borders to visit consumption spaces on ‘the other side’.

Introduction
One of the main objectives of the European Union (EU) is to remove obstacles for international mobility and to encourage cross-border interactions. Free movement of products, services, people and capital between countries is considered a necessity for an economically prosperous Union, as was already mentioned in article two of the Treaty of Rome, signed in 1957 and establishing the European Community. National borders could prevent a growth of international imports and exports, limit the scope of people looking for jobs and restrict the mobility of business and consumption capital. This contribution, while focusing on consumer behaviour, investigates the possibility of cities and shopping centres on ‘the other side’ as being highly appealing to people. The positive impact of borders on consumer mobility is central to the analysis here. If consumers are as mobile and adventurous as they are usually characterised in recent academic literature and studies on consumers and consumption (Royek and Urry, 1997; Zukin, 1998; Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001) then inhabitants of a cross-border region could be on an exploration to a high degree. Mobile and adventurous shoppers travel around the cross-border region to explore functional, physical and socio-cultural dissimilarities between places on both sides of the border.

This paper proceeds as follows. In the first part, some general comments on borders will be presented. In the second part, the current discussion on shopping behaviour and mobility will be scrutinised. After the two conceptual pillars have been cast, some empirical evidence will be given, which will flesh out the abstractions in the case of the Dutch-German border region.

Inviting borders and shopping practices
When talking about borders in the context of shopping behaviour, first of all a clear distinction has to be made between borders, as administrative, historic and more or less arbitrary lines on a map, and the actively constructed, reconstructed and experienced demarcations between (groups of) people (Van der Velde, Janssen and Van Houtum, 2005). In both interpretations, borders have a distinct influence on the perceptions shared by those living on both sides of the border. These perceptions have their influence on everyday spatial behaviour. In the first sense, borders as lines, borders may be considered as more or less ‘objective’ and external interpretations, in the second, as more ‘subjective’ or internal (Van der Velde, 2000a). The general idea, in the early stages of the integration process that borders as external barriers could (easily) be removed with the (financial) help of the EU, has proven to be incorrect. On the contrary, borders are settled in the minds of people more firmly than expected. These mental borders can be characterised as symbolic and experienced lines, influencing the spatial extent of human behaviour. For instance, the assessment of the opportunities and difficulties connected with border crossings, as well as the subjective
observation and beliefs of differences on both sides of the border, have an impact on cross-border behaviour.

It is quite common to think of borders as obstacles for interaction between citizens in different countries (Nijkamp, Rietveld and Salomon, 1990; Plat and Raux, 1998). Considering shopping behaviour, borders could restrict the international mobility of consumers and spending power. As a consequence, catchment areas of cities and shopping centres might be smaller in size when located close to a border compared to a situation of a similar city and shopping centre located in a ‘borderless’ region. In short, borders often demarcate catchment areas of cities and shopping centres (Van der Velde, 2000b; see fig. 1). This constrains the cross-border flow of products, services, people and capital. In that respect, the border could be symbolised as a door that is closed but not locked. Only people that really make the effort to approach the door and open it may see and take opportunities to cross the border.

**Figure 1: The demarcation of catchment areas**

A. ‘National’ consumer markets with closed borders  
B. Cross-border consumer markets with open borders

Despite the fact that national borders often are seen as ‘crowd repellers’, they could also function as ‘crowd pullers’. This is a clear expression of the fact that borders in general reveal a very Janus-faced character (Van Houtum, Kramsch and Zierhofer, 2005). Williams and Van der Velde (2005) describe already six of these ‘dualities’, ranging from the interpretations of borders as stemming from ‘nature’ or ‘nurture’ to borders regarded as binary phenomena as opposed to exhibiting a much more fuzzy character. With regard to shopping behaviour, at
least two of these distinctions are useful when trying to grapple with the border effects, especially when descending to a disaggregate level of analysis.

When interpreting the consequences of borders on an individual level from a functionalist perspective, i.e. borders seen as instruments or outcomes of practices, two seemingly opposing views appear. On the one hand, borders may be observed as guardians against threats from ‘the other side’. In this sense, the border is seen as something that is natural and logical. On the other hand, borders can also be regarded as creating differences between the adjacent territories. These differences, in turn, may create opportunities. In this sense, the functional view of an opportunistic border concurs with an individual perception of the border as a barrier. The optimal utilisation of these border-related opportunities can then be obstructed by this exact border. The duality of borders logically follows. They are either the instrument to reach certain goals, the final goal itself, or, both simultaneously.

A second distinction that is important to our analysis is the interpretation of borders as more static versus one that stresses the dynamics much more. In the first interpretation, the border is used as a noun. It indicates the (more or less) stable outcome of demarcation practices. In that case, the border itself is in the centre of interest. In the other interpretation, the term border is interpreted as an active verb, or as a process (Van Houtum, Kramsch and Zierhofer, 2005). In the same vain, the distinction that Paasi (1996) makes between borders as morphologies (borders on the ground) versus borders as representation or interpretation (borders in the mind) is similar to these two interpretations.

In this contribution, especially the opportunities created by borders are put to the fore where the active and dynamic character of the border plays a central role. Therefore, especially the possible positive impact of borders are under scrutiny. Borders could promote mobility due to price differences for similar transportable and non-transportable commodities such as petrol and land respectively, as well as functional, physical and socio-cultural differences between places. Focusing on the latter differences, border regions usually offer relatively large dissimilarities in a relatively small area. As a consequence, borders may have an inviting impact on consumers to come and have a look. If so, motives, intentions, perceptions, assessments and practices of consumers are orientated towards exploring dissimilarities between cities and shopping centres on both sides of the border. Borders could arouse consumer interests because of the strangeness of foreign places. It is people that make the decisions to cross borders (see Van Houtum, 2000), to visit ‘foreign’ cities and shopping centres that look different, offer different commodities and have a different atmosphere and customs. In that respect, the border could be symbolised as a door that is not closed but ajar and therefore brings to the attention the possibility to cross the border. ‘A door ajar’ arouses curiosity to explore the cross-border region and to perform fun shopping and fun hopping simultaneously.

**Fun (s)hopping**

Within recent academic literature and studies on retailing and consumption, the prevailing image of the contemporary consumer is that of a ‘fun shopper’ or ‘recreational shopper’. Three dimensions of shopping as ‘recreational’ and ‘fun’ are discussed here (Spierings, 2006; see tab. 1), although shoppers may simultaneously consider the same shopping practice as ‘work’ and ‘run shopping’ (see Lehtonen and Mäenpää, 1997). Each of the dimensions stresses different and coherent aspects of the dominant image of contemporary consumerism, while centring on the pleasures of shopping. These pleasures may be found at near locations
and also at more distant locations for which people have to travel longer and perhaps even cross national borders, as will be the focus of this paper.

Table 1: Dimensions of fun (s)hopping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Consumer behaviour</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Looking for things to do</td>
<td>Consumption of consumer services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Looking for things to sense</td>
<td>Consumption of the shopping environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Looking for shopping centres</td>
<td>Consumer mobility to find satisfaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By performing recreational shopping practices, the contemporary shopper strolls around shops and shopping centres. He tries to find new experiences while spending his leisure time and perhaps also money. He is in the city looking both for things to do and to sense in the city. Firstly, the ‘fun shopper’ strolls and gazes around shopping centres to consume the consumer services mix, including retail services as well as cultural and catering facilities. It is by looking for things to do that he tries to find satisfaction. Secondly, the fun shopper also consumes socio-cultural and physical elements of the shopping environment. While strolling and gazing around, he sensorially consumes merchandise in shop windows, other consumers constituting a shopping crowd and the vibes of the city. Thus, the contemporary shopper also tries to find satisfaction by looking for things to sense in addition to things to do. Thirdly, the fun shopper is willing to visit several shopping centres and shops in hometown as well as more distant cities. The contemporary shopper has adopted a highly mobile lifestyle to find what he is looking for. While travelling at the regional, national and international level, places as well as the urban landscape in between cities and consumption spaces are consumed sensorially.

**Consumer services**

The consumption of consumer services implies that the fun (s)hopper strolls and gazes around several shopping centres, many shopping streets and a lot of shops to find things to do. While visiting domestic places and crossing national borders to shop in foreign places, he tries to find functional facilities of shopping centres - including retail services and merchandise for sale - that could give him satisfaction. It is retailers that earn an income by offering commodities and services to shoppers. Contemporary consumers are not easily seduced to make an acquisition and spend money, however. They approach shopping centres as ‘worlds of seduction’ in a ‘cool’ manner (Lash and Urry, 1994). The contemporary shoppers is ‘just looking’ at the displayed commodities in the shopping window and in the shop. In doing so, the fun (s)hopper fakes to be shopping for the experience of shopping as a game. Playing the shopping game does not necessarily result in consumer purchases (Shields, 1992). Consumers may stroll through shopping streets without spending money on commodities and services.

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1 ‘Sensing’ is defined in this paper as a dimension of consumerism that focuses on the visual consumption of social and physical features of shopping centres. The dimension ‘doing’ focuses on the consumption of functional facilities. The former also could be considered as a constituent of the latter and both dimensions are performed simultaneously. A distinction between ‘sensing’ and ‘doing’ was made, however, to analyse different motives for visiting shopping centres.
Consumers are deliberately offered the free opportunity to examine the shopping window and to have a look around in a shop. The intention is to turn urban strollers into consumers and to seduce shoppers into buying commodities (Bauman, 1993). The layout of shopping centres is also designed to make shoppers spend as much time inside as possible. The design is meant to make people contemplate merchandise while strolling through shopping streets and gazing at shopping windows as long as possible (Gottdiener, 1986; Goss, 1993). In doing so, shoppers explore the full range of offered goods and services and may find things they would like to buy and experience. Crawford explains by arguing that:

‘[m]entally “trying” on products teaches shoppers not only what they want and what they can buy, but also, more importantly, what they don’t have, and what they therefore need. Armed with this knowledge, shoppers can not only realize what they are but also imagine what they might become. Identity is momentarily stabilized even while the image of a future identity begins to take shape, but the endless variation of objects means that satisfaction always remains just out of reach’ (Crawford, 1992, p13)

Thus, shoppers are invited to visit shopping centres and shops to spend a great deal of their leisure time in the ‘dream world’ of consumption. They are expected to visit shops and perform ‘just looking’-behaviour while trying ever changing merchandise and making consumer purchases (Gregson et al, 2002). The fun (s)hopper is never finished shaping his identity and keeps on examining the commercialised urban landscape to find fulfilment. In doing so, he might even want to explore shops and shopping centres in places on ‘the other side’ of national boundaries.

To extend the stay and increase the spending of contemporary consumers, shopping centres contain the catering industry, the cultural sector and other entertainment facilities in addition to retailing. These increasingly converging services offer ‘shop entertainment’ to meet the demands of consumers looking for the fun in shopping (Featherstone, 1991; Hannigan, 1998). They combine a large variety of services, including high-quality retailing such as speciality shops and department stores, restaurants, pubs, museums and street festivals (Jansen, 1989; Clement and Reinartz, 1997). By consuming the functional facilities of shopping centres, however, products and practices are ‘… things to be played with for a while, then ditched as we move to something else’ (Corrigan 1997, p179). The fun (s)hopper is never satisfied. He continues to be looking for more appealing products and entertaining practices while also consuming the shopping environment which constitutes a great deal of the shopping experience.

Shopping environment
The consumption of the shopping environment implies that the fun (s)hopper strolls and gazes around shopping centres and shops to find things to sense. In doing so, he consumes thing like shop facades, the displayed commodities in shop windows, the interior design of shops, street furnishings as well as other people strolling and using city centres. The environment - as consumed by shoppers - consists of both the stationary, physical and moving, social features of the shopping environment. According to Lynch, the ‘[m]oving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important [for the image of the environment] as the stationary physical parts’ (1960, p2). Moreover, a shopping centre without a lively, social atmosphere is not an appealing destination, which is not to deny that the physical parts of places also contribute a great deal to the urban atmosphere. It is by travelling to several shopping centres and strolling through many shopping streets that the contemporary shopper tries to find satisfaction by consuming social and physical features of the shopping.
environment in connection with the functional facilities of the shopping centre (Jansen-Verbeke, 1988). He can choose from a variety of shopping centres as offered in the home country (see Spierings and Van de Wiel, 2004) and he perhaps even travels across borders to experience ‘foreign’ places.

Fun (s)hopping implies the observation of the large abundance and diversity of spatial practices on public streets and squares. The contemporary consumer not only wants to observe the social gathering, however. He also wants to be observed himself while moving among the shopping crowd (Urry, 1990; Oosterman, 1993). By being part of the crowd, the shopper co-performs the ‘spectacle’ (see Debord, 1969). This spectacle, ‘… which is marked by the exchange of looks and gazes, complements the theatrical display of goods and commodities’ (Shields, 1992, p7). It is by showing the branded bags he carries and the branded clothes he wears that the consumer sells himself as a commodity (Clarke, 2003). In addition to interacting socially with other shoppers, the fun (s)hopper also interacts with the shop floor staff. Inside shops, the shop floor staff tries to create a pleasant shopping experience to stimulate consumer purchases and spending (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

Next to social exchanges and potential commodity-currency exchanges, fun (s)hopping also includes the consumption of the built environment of shopping centres (Urry, 1995; Crewe, 2003). It is by strolling through shopping streets and visiting shops that the built environment is consumed along with contemplating the offered consumer goods and services (Schroeder, 2002). These days, the physical features of the shopping environment are designed for the entertainment of visitors. Facades, windows and the interior of shopping buildings (Kooijman, 1999) as well as the street pavement, advertisements, billboards and benches (Featherstone, 1998) are created and changed to contribute to the pleasure of shoppers. The reason for constructing such ‘ludic landscapes’ is to offer the fun in shopping as well as to seduce shoppers to increase the amount of time and money spent in shops and shopping centres. In doing so, appealing consumption spaces are designed with the intention to attract consumer and their spending from near and distant places and thereby to stimulate the mobile lifestyle of consumers.

**Consumer mobility**

Consumer mobility implies that the contemporary shopper is travelling to stroll and gaze around several shopping centres and shops to find things to do and sense. The contemporary consumer has adopted a mobile lifestyle to find fulfilment (Rojek and Urry, 1997; Terhorst and Van de Ven, 1999). He is a fun (s)hopper or ‘shopping tourist’ visiting other cities occasionally in addition to the hometown (Buursink, 1996). He is on a ‘quest for difference’ to find entertaining experiences (see Baudrillard, 1988). While roaming his hometown and travelling to shopping centres in other cities, the consumer is looking for ‘unknown’ and ‘unexpected’ things in several shopping centres. Visiting the nearest shopping centre has become less of a habit. More generally, shoppers have become less loyal to products, shops and shopping centres. It is within shopping centres that they are on a voyage of exploration by ‘… discovering new lines, new fashions, new “product ideas” and new forms of fun …’ (Gabriel and Lang, 1998, p69). Furthermore, fun (s)hoppers travel within cities to find appealing shopping centres and also travel between cities with similar purposes on a regional, national and international scale. Despite the high level of mobility, however, fulfilment is not found. Consumers keep on driving on motorways in an attempt to find the shopping satisfaction they cannot find.
To attract mobile shoppers and their spending power, shopping centres are deliberately created and changed to offer ‘unknown’ and ‘unexpected’ things. It is within and between cities that a process of differentiation is taking place (Zukin, 1998; Spierings, forthcoming). The making of ‘strange’ shopping centres has the intention of enabling and encouraging the mobile lifestyle of consumers. The consumption landscape is designed to appeal to shoppers coming from near locations as well as shoppers coming from distant locations. It is due to the increasing consumer mobility that any consumption space becomes a home to shopping ‘strangers’ more and more. The latter used to shop mostly at nearby locations but now also visit more distant shopping centres occasionally and even cross national borders to do so. The consumer services as well as the physical and social features of the shopping environment should not be too dissimilar, however. Too large and too many differences could cause shoppers to feel ‘estranged’, which could scare him off. Consumers experience part of the pleasure of shopping from being able to foresee what will come next (Boyer, 1992). Fun (s)hoppers want to feel at home mentally when they are away from home physically (Tester, 1994; Van der Velde, 2000c). The ‘unexpected’ and ‘unknown’ should remain somehow ‘familiar’ when shoppers travel to several shopping centres in domestic as well as foreign cities and when they explore shopping streets.

By travelling and selecting shopping centres at the regional, national and international level, shoppers create their own consumption space by combining several shopping centres and shops (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001; Gregson et al., 2002). It depends on the willingness to travel whether shoppers select from a small or large range of consumption spaces in the home country and abroad. To facilitate and promote the mobility of consumers, shopping centres are also made well accessible for cars and large scale parking spaces are constructed at the same time. While driving on the highway from one place to another, shoppers also sensorially consume the commercialised and aestheticised urban landscape of and in between shopping centres, cities and countries (Houben, 2003). In doing so, fun (s)hoppers may cross national borders to explore a different highway scenery and urban landscape, ‘unexpected’ consumer services and an ‘unknown’ shopping environment. Thus, visiting foreign cities could be a great source of fun for adventurous shoppers.

**Here and there**

Shopping centres on ‘the other side’ of the border may have a great appeal on consumers looking for the ‘fun’ in (s)hopping in and between several cities. The consumer services and the shopping environment of as well as the travelling to ‘foreign’ cities might be very attractive when offering unknown and unexpected experiences. Differences between cities in two countries often are larger than between cities in the same country. Differences imply dissimilarities regarding functional structures of shopping centres and socio-cultural as well as physical shopping environments. Dissimilarities between ‘here’ and ‘there’ therefore could have a positive impact on mobility of consumers and interactions between citizens of different countries if being (t)here is a ‘familiar’ experience. Large dissimilarities in the socio-cultural sense will result into mental borders that have a negative impact on cross-border interactions (Van Houtum, 1999). When dissimilarities between places on both sides of the border are too large, this could restrain people from visiting these places. Spending time and money in ‘foreign’ shopping centres should offer a great deal of ‘familiarity’ in addition to several peculiarities (Spierings, 2003). Having opened the door, representing the border, shoppers should be offered a more or less familiar view and scenery. If this is not the case however, shoppers might be deterred from visiting ‘the other side’ because they want to avoid uncertainty and unexpected experiences (see Van Houtum and Van der Velde, 2004). In case of too large and too many differences, people might not want to take the effort to pass through.
the door, representing a border, and perhaps even will close the door. They do not want to feel ‘dis-placed’. Shopping in different countries could be the ‘ultimate’ fun shopping experience by offering ‘familiar, foreign adventures’. Motives, intentions, perceptions, assessments and practices of cross-border shoppers therefore will be discussed next. This is done by focusing on the Euregion Rhine-Waal, a region that crosses the Dutch-German border. It is in this Euregion that the most recent, large-scale quantitative and qualitative analysis, which suits the purpose of the paper, was undertaken of cross-border purchasing power flows and visiting flows (KUN and GMUG, 1999).

Cross-border shopping in the Euregion Rhine-Waal
The Euregion Rhine-Waal offers many possibilities to shop in the Dutch-German border area (see fig. 2). It comprises, among other things, two middle-sized cities of about 150,000 inhabitants on the Dutch side - Arnhem and Nijmegen - and several smaller places with usually less than 50,000 inhabitants such as Kleve, Goch, Emmerich and Kranenburg in Germany as well as Zevenaar, Groesbeek, Gennep and Millingen in the Netherlands, which are all located along the border. In the following, when discussing the area of origin of shoppers, ‘the Netherlands’ and ‘Germany’ denote the Dutch respectively German part of the Euregion Rhine-Waal. When the areas of destination are discussed, however, referring to ‘the Netherlands’ and ‘Germany’ also means places outside the Euregion in addition to places within the Euregion under scrutiny.

It is due to the national border that the Euregion Rhine-Waal contains relatively large dissimilarities in a relatively small area. This may offer inviting opportunities for fun (s)hopping within and between places on both sides of the border. An interesting question, therefore, is to what extent cross-border shopping takes place, from what places shoppers are coming and to what places they are going? Additionally, and in particular, what motives and intentions do consumers have for performing cross-border shopping practices. Moreover, how do they perceive national borders? In this section, cross-border shopping practices will be quantified for the Euregion Rhine-Waal by analysing data originating from the aforementioned research project on cross-border purchasing power flows and visiting flows. The assessment of several dimensions of the visited shopping centres - quality and range of retail services, the parking facilities and the shopping atmosphere - are also dealt with here as signalling potential reasons to shop abroad. The next section - while analysing in detail cross-border practices of people from two communities within the Euregion - the motives and intentions of cross-border shoppers are focused on as well as their perception of national borders in that respect.

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2 The city of Duisburg is also part of this Euregion, but because of its eccentric position within the region it is left out of consideration. Besides, from the aforementioned study also comes that Duisburg does not play an important role when it comes to cross-border shopping.

3 We would like to thank research assistant Anke Remmers here for assisting us in the analysis of the large database on purchasing power flows and visiting flows in the Euregion Rhine-Waal.
Consumer flows

As a first step in our analysis of cross-border shopping practices, table 2 presents the data for the most important flows of fun (s)hoppers within the Euregion. These results are based on 17,000 questionnaires carried out in the Euregion Rhine-Waal (KUN and GMUG, 1999). In line with the discussed research project, ‘recreational shopping’ or ‘fun shopping’ are defined here as spatial practices which centre on shopping as a non-goal orientated, leisure activity. This is done in many research projects on shopping behaviour to clearly mark the difference with ‘run shopping’ as a mainly goal-orientated form of shopping. This is not to say that run shopping cannot be enjoyed however. On the contrary, run shopping can be ‘fun’ and, at the same time, fun shopping can be ‘run’. Once again, the focus in this paper is on pleasures and fun of shopping.

Table 2 shows that Dutch fun shoppers are mostly orientated towards shopping centres in the home country and that Germans also largely visit domestic places for recreational purposes. A small portion of the total number of fun shopping visits is performed on ‘the other side’ - about 1.5 percent of all visits for both shoppers originating from the Netherlands and Germany. This implies that the national border does function as a barrier for international interaction indeed, which is not to say that no cross-border interaction is taking places at all. On the contrary, the number of cross-border shopping visits is significant. Dutch fun shoppers visit German places about 420,000 times per year and Germans visit the Netherlands for

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4 To calibrate the number of visits for recreational shopping, the method of the so-called ‘standard visitor’ was used. Analogous with the more widely used ‘standard consumer’, a ‘standard visitor’ is a ‘virtual’ person that has only one destination for this kind of trips. The number of ‘standard visitors’ multiplied by the average number of visits per person per year for recreational shopping yields the estimated total number of trips.
recreational purposes more than a million times per year. This means that the national border somehow also does have a great appeal for many shoppers. This is in particular the case for people coming from Germany. Dutch places receive about 2.5 times more visits by ‘foreigners’ than German places.\(^5\) This should be seen within the context of the regional distribution of larger places that usually offer more opportunities for fun shopping. In fact, the Dutch part of the Euregion contains more large places than the German side which could explain at least part of the greater appeal of the former.

Table 2: Fun (s)hopping in the Euregion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of analysis</th>
<th>Number of visits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visits from the Dutch to Germany</td>
<td>420.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits from the Germans to the Netherlands</td>
<td>600.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits from the Dutch to Kleve</td>
<td>175.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits from the Germans to Nijmegen</td>
<td>400.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits from people from Nijmegen to Kleve</td>
<td>40.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits from people from Kleve to Nijmegen</td>
<td>130.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on: KUN & GMUG 1999 (authors’ calibrations)

Focusing on the cross-border flow of consumers from Germany towards the Netherlands reveals that Nijmegen is the most important place for fun shopping. Germans pay about 400,000 visits per year for recreational purposes to Dutch places - this concerns 37 percent of the total number of fun shopping visits of people from Germany to ‘the other side’. For people from the Netherlands, Kleve is the most important place for fun shopping visits. They pay about 175,000 visits per year to this German city, which concerns 42 percent of the total number of fun shopping visits of Dutch consumers to places abroad.

Centring on cross-border interactions between Nijmegen in the Netherlands and Kleve in Germany - as the most popular places for cross-border fun shopping in the Euregion - shows that people from Nijmegen pay about 40,000 visits per year to Kleve for recreational purposes. This comes down to 78 percent of the total number of fun shopping visits of inhabitants from Nijmegen in Germany. Inhabitants from Kleve pay about 130,000 fun shopping visits per year to Nijmegen, which implies that also 78 percent of shopping visits for recreational purposes in the Netherlands are performed in Nijmegen. The cross-border interaction between both places illustrates and substantiates the general picture - as discussed above - that Germans pay more visits to the Netherlands than the other way around. Nijmegen receives 3.5 times more visits for fun shopping by people from Kleve than the number of visits that Kleve receives by people from Nijmegen. Once again, this should be seen within

\(^5\) A similar argument could be made regarding the places Nijmegen in the Netherlands and Kleve in Germany in particular. These places are focused on in the following analysis. People from Nijmegen pay 0.8 percent of the total number of fun shopping visits in Germany, which comes down to about 50,000 visits. Considering people from Kleve, 12 percent of the total number of fun shopping visits are performed abroad - this implies more than 165,000 visits.
the regional context because Nijmegen is a larger place - offering more opportunities to shop for recreational purposes - than Kleve, although it is not likely that this explains everything. Altogether, the main picture of fun (s)hopping which appears is that shoppers crossing borders still choose places close by to visit. They are willing to travel to more distant places across the national border and at the same time stay close to the home.

**Consumer assessments**

So, what are possible reasons for fun shoppers to either stay on the relatively ‘known’ domestic side of the border or to travel to the relatively ‘unknown’ foreign side of the border. A comparison of the assessments - by different groups of shoppers - of several dimensions of shopping centres is used here to signal potentially important fun shopping reasons (tab. 3). The dimensions under scrutiny are the ‘quality of retail services’, the ‘range of retail services’ - both referring to the functional facilities of shopping centres as discussed in the previous subsection on ‘consumer services’, the ‘parking facilities’ - as discussed in the subsection on ‘consumer mobility’ - and the ‘atmosphere’ in shopping centres - referring to both socio-cultural and physical features as discussed in the subsection on ‘shopping environment’.

German visitors in general value the atmosphere of places in the Netherlands higher than Dutch visitors. The range and quality of the retail services are approximately equally valued by all fun shoppers and the parking facilities are assessed lower by German visitors than Dutch visitors. This could imply that the atmosphere in shopping centres on ‘the other side’ is an important reason for German visitors to travel across national boundaries. Fun shoppers coming from the Netherlands in general assess the parking facilities of shopping centres in Germany higher than German visitors. The range and the quality of the retail services as well as the atmosphere are valued lower than German shoppers. The atmosphere is assessed a little lower and, relatively speaking, also the least lower, although the differences with other dimensions are not very large. This does not imply that the atmosphere is a potentially unimportant reason for Dutch shoppers to cross the national border. What it does mean is that the parking facilities potentially are an important reason for international fun shopping trips by people from the Netherlands.

Centring the analysis on visitors in Nijmegen and Kleve reveals, on the one hand, that German visitors in general value the atmosphere in Nijmegen higher than Dutch visitors. The assessment of the ‘atmosphere’ clearly differs the most between both groups of shoppers in Nijmegen, with a ‘second place for the ‘range of retail services’ - although valued substantially lower - the ‘quality of retail services’ is valued almost equally and the ‘parking facilities’ are valued lower by German visitors. It could be argued therefore that the atmosphere of shopping centres is a potentially important reason for German fun shoppers to leave the home country and travel to Nijmegen whereas the range of retail services could also be a significant reason to cross the border. On the other hand, people from the Netherlands in general shopping for recreational purposes in Kleve value the parking facilities higher than German visitors. The assessment of this dimension clearly differs the most, with a ‘second place’ for the ‘atmosphere’ - although valued much lower - and the other dimensions are valued almost equally by Dutch and German visitors. This could imply that the parking facilities of foreign places are a potentially important reason for Dutch shopper to go abroad whereas the atmosphere in German shopping centres could also be a relevant reason in that respect.
Table 3: Average assessment of shopping centre dimensions (on a scale from 1 to 10; N is the number of respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dim.</th>
<th>Level of analysis</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Ass.</th>
<th>Level of analysis</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Ass.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of retail services</td>
<td>The Dutch on Germany</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>The Dutch on the Netherlands</td>
<td>2958</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germans on Germany</td>
<td>4261</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>Germans on the Netherlands</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Dutch on Kleve</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>The Dutch on Nijmegen</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germans on Kleve</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Germans on Nijmegen</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People from Nijmegen on Kleve</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>People from Nijmegen on Nijmegen</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People from Kleve on Kleve</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>People from Kleve on Nijmegen</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of retail services</td>
<td>The Dutch on Germany</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>The Dutch on the Netherlands</td>
<td>3043</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germans on Germany</td>
<td>4346</td>
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<td>Germans on the Netherlands</td>
<td>317</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Dutch on Kleve</td>
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<td>7.2</td>
<td>The Dutch on Nijmegen</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germans on Kleve</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Germans on Nijmegen</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>6.7</td>
<td>People from Nijmegen on Nijmegen</td>
<td>1039</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People from Kleve on Kleve</td>
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<td>6.3</td>
<td>People from Kleve on Nijmegen</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking facilities</td>
<td>The Dutch on Germany</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>The Dutch on the Netherlands</td>
<td>2714</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germans on Germany</td>
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<td>6.5</td>
<td>Germans on the Netherlands</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Dutch on Kleve</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>The Dutch on Nijmegen</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germans on Kleve</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Germans on Nijmegen</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People from Nijmegen on Kleve</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>People from Nijmegen on Nijmegen</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People from Kleve on Kleve</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>People from Kleve on Nijmegen</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>The Dutch on Germany</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>The Dutch on the Netherlands</td>
<td>3068</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germans on Germany</td>
<td>4380</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Germans on the Netherlands</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Dutch on Kleve</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>The Dutch on Nijmegen</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germans on Kleve</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>Germans on Nijmegen</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People from Nijmegen on Kleve</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>People from Nijmegen on Nijmegen</td>
<td>1037</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People from Kleve on Kleve</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>People from Kleve on Nijmegen</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on: KUN & GMUG 1999 (authors’ calibrations)
A comparison of the assessments of inhabitants of Nijmegen travelling to Kleve and inhabitants of Kleve travelling to Nijmegen (tab. 2) should be understood as really tentative because the number of respondents is not high enough to make general statements. Broadly speaking, the data regarding inhabitants from inhabitants of Nijmegen and Kleve in general shopping in each others city seems to fit the general picture, as described above. In short, Dutch fun shoppers seem to focus on parking facilities when visiting German shopping centres and German fun shoppers seem to keep their minds on the atmosphere of Dutch places.

In the next part, the data presented in this section will be elaborated on and enriched by adding a study on motives and intentions of cross-border shoppers. This is done by focusing on two small places in the Euregion Rhine-Waal, namely Millingen in the Netherlands and Kranenburg in Germany (see fig. 2). The main questions considered are: why do shoppers cross national boundaries to visit places on ‘the other side’ and how do perceive borders in that respect?

**Millingen and Kranenburg compared**

The data underlying the current section stem from an offspring of the bigger project on cross-border consumer-flows mentioned before (Van der Velde, 2000c). To get insights in the motives and intentions, around one hundred inhabitants in each of the border towns Millingen and Kranenburg, in the fall of 1999, were approached with questionnaires. The respondents were confronted a.o. with a number of propositions concerning their ‘feelings’ with regard to shopping, on which the respondent had to react. 6 The data is still highly relevant for our purpose, first of all because all the propositions were posed in a very general sense, not including any references to time or place specific contexts. Secondly, there is no indication that there have been big changes where it concerns the relations between and consequent perceptions and assessments of the Dutch and Germans. 7 And finally, what is maybe most important, there is no more recent data available where in such a particular and detailed way cross-border shopping behaviour and the underlying intentions, perceptions and assessments are addressed.

Groups of consumers are distinguished here on the proportion of the shopping trips per respondent that is crossing the border for two types of trips, to wit trips for buying clothing and the recreational 'day-out' to do window-shopping, without the explicit aim of buying goods. Of course, shopping for clothes might not be completely covered by our definition of fun shopping, but they are included here, because for very many these kinds of trips do incorporate a high degree of ‘fun’.

The respondents were asked where they had been recreational window-shopping in the last year as well as for buying clothing, and how often they had been there. In this manner, the shares of cross-border shopping could be determined (tab. 4).

---

6 In order to assess the different propositions, the respondents were confronted with a five-point Likert scale.
7 Of course the Euro was introduced, but already before that there were hardly any problems with regard to different national currencies. In the border region, both the Dutch and the German currencies were readily accepted.
### Table 4: Share of cross-border shopping trips per respondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Window-shopping</th>
<th></th>
<th>Buying clothing</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Millingen</td>
<td>Kranenburg</td>
<td>Millingen</td>
<td>Kranenburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>till 1/3</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/3 till 2/3</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3 or more</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Van der Velde 2000b

Immediately it shows that a far bigger part of the inhabitants in Kranenburg, compared to Millingen, indicated that they do cross the national border to buy clothing or go window-shopping. This is at least for a large part because the nearest town of considerable size in the region, Nijmegen, is located in the Netherlands. The stronger cross-border orientation of the inhabitants of Kranenburg is induced by the lure of Nijmegen.

In the analyses, the respondents were aggregated into two groups. With regard to buying clothing, the respondents are split up in a group that is not crossing the border at all and one that is. With regard to window-shopping, the first group consists of respondents having German destinations for less than one third of their visits.

**Perceiving the border**

For our specific purpose of tracing ‘positive’ border effects, several analyses are useful. First of all, a confrontation of cross-border mobility and the perception of the border between Germany and the Netherlands stands out. As was already discussed in the previous conceptual part on borders, when dealing with the multifaceted aspects of borders, two factors or interpretations can be discerned, the border as a ‘relevant border’ and the ‘border as barrier’. When these interpretations are confronted with the distinguished groups, i.e. the border-crosser and the non-crosser, it turns out that respondents shopping for both reasons (with a specific purpose as well as for window-shopping) on the other side of the border - both in Millingen and Kranenburg - rate the border less as relevant. At the same time, they interpret the border also more as a barrier. This seeming paradox can be explained, when one takes into account that crossing borders, still means entering a relative ‘unfamiliar’ area. As long as one does not enter this area, no actual knowledge of possible hindrances is available. To put it differently, if someone does not see any reason to cross the border (and therefore regard the border as a relevant phenomenon), the border does not impose a barrier in any way. After all, they do not have interests in ‘the other side’ (Van der Velde, 2000c).

**Driving forces**

In general, determining the covert but salient driving forces or intentions behind cross-border activities is very difficult, much more so than confronting overt behaviour with perceptions and images. These perceptions and images are connected with more or less concrete objects, like the border. Intentions, however, are connected to actions. This is why in general no direct reference is possible to concrete objects or destinations. Intentions towards ‘the other side' and ‘them' are therefore only measurable in an indirect manner, which is done here by presenting propositions to people from Millingen and Kranenburg (see also Werlen, 1993 and Walmsley and Lewis, 1993).

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8 The extended factor-analysis underlying these factors can be found in Van der Velde 2000c
In the project from which the present data originate, shopping behaviour and spatial patterns in general were at stake. With regard to the two types of trips at hand, some four dozen propositions were presented to the respondents. In this analysis only the propositions are included which are clearly linked to the ‘fun’-and ‘challenging’ part of shopping as well as those related to accessibility. Furthermore, the present analysis is restricted to correlating the answers of the samples with their overt behaviour concerning crossing borders (tab. 5).

The respondents are divided in two sub-groups, because of the fact that there are differences between the Dutch and the Germans. As was also discussed in the previous empirical part on consumer flows and assessments, this partly may come from cultural differences, but also may be invoked by different regional settings.

The first comment that has to be made is that, partly due to the relatively small size of the samples, not many propositions significantly (statistically) differentiate between the sub-groups of border crossers and non-border crossers. This is in particular the case for ‘window-shopping’. Nevertheless, some clear indications can be observed.

Three propositions stand out in both the German and the Dutch sub-group, one relating positively to shopping abroad and two negatively. The positive one relates to the opportunities created by the border (129), in the sense that sometimes for certain goods or products, the neighbouring country offers better opportunities to succeed. Triangulating from other sources (a.o. Van der Velde and Vergoossen, 1995), this might be caused by the fact that for the Dutch in Germany, when considering clothes, the bigger sizes are more readily available. For Germans, especially the younger ones, consider the Dutch ‘boutiques’ often more fashionable. The other two ‘significant’ propositions relate to the issue that there is an upper limit to the level of accepted ‘unexpectedness’. The proposition concerning the wish to shop in a familiar surrounding (31), which can relate to the socio-cultural atmosphere and the shopping environment when abroad, lead to this presumption. Also the support of the proposition that clothes should be bought as fast as possible (32) correlates negatively with the level of cross-border shopping.

Next to the striking results for both of the sub-groups, there are propositions that correlate contrastively in both of the samples. With some exceptions, however, they are in general quite weakly related to cross-border activities in at least one of the sub-samples. The most remarkable exceptions are first of all regarding prices important when buying clothes (23). The Dutch that try to shop as cheap as possible tend to stay in their home-country whereas the Germans are somewhat more inclined to cross the borders. This might be explained by the regional context again. On the Dutch side of the border the shopping facilities are more abundant because of the presence of bigger cities and the possibilities of shopping at cheap prices. This might also explain the opposite relations when considering bigger cities for buying clothes (24) and strolling when window-shopping, which might be more fun in the bigger cities (8).

With regard to the wish for good public transport, it is the other way around. The Dutch public transport ‘fans’ cross the border more often, while in Germany this is the opposite. This is both the case for fun shoppers (6) and, although to a much lesser extent, when buying clothes (21).

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9 The numbers refer to the numbers in table 5.
Table 5: Assessment of the proposition and cross-border activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Window-shopping</th>
<th>Border crossers</th>
<th>Dutch sub-group</th>
<th>Border crossers</th>
<th>German sub-group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is important for me to be able to park my car easily</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Window-shopping means also having a social drink as well</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>* +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I don’t mind a long travel</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I know many cities to go shopping</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Window-shopping is more fun in an ‘unknown’ city</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Good accessibility through public transport is important</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>* -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The outlay of a city-centre is determining my choice</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Strolling through a city is fun</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The bigger cities are the better places</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am associating windows-shopping only with shops</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. An abundance of shops makes a city attractive</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shopping for clothing

| 12. Some clothing are better bought abroad                                        | 2.13           | ** +           | 3.69           | ** +           |
| 13. I shop in those places where I happen to be                                  | 2.24           | ** +           | 1.61           | +               |
| 14. I visit especially shops that offer bargains                                  | 1.90           | * +            | 1.18           | +               |
| 15. For me a shopping mall is an attractive place                                 | 0.16           | +              | 1.49           | +               |
| 16. I often cannot succeed in the local shops                                    | 1.43           | +              | 0.08           | +               |
| 17. Shopping is a social event                                                   | 1.00           | +              | 0.83           | +               |
| 18. I don’t mind a long travel                                                    | 1.11           | +              | 0.32           | +               |
| 19. It is important for me to be able to park my car easily                       | 0.20           | +              | 0.51           | +               |
| 20. It is not annoying when I return with other products than planned             | 0.55           | +              | 0.60           | +               |
| 21. Good accessibility through public transport is important                      | 0.88           | +              | 0.12           | -               |
| 22. I don’t mind where I buy as long as it is of high quality                     | 0.59           | -              | 0.12           | +               |
| 23. It is a challenge to buy as cheap as possible                                 | 0.78           | -              | 1.08           | +               |
| 24. I prefer bigger cities                                                        | 0.40           | -              | 1.01           | +               |
| 25. I patronise only high-quality shops                                           | 0.48           | -              | 0.96           | -               |
| 26. Good prices are important                                                    | 0.95           | -              | 1.38           | -               |
| 27. I prefer shops where I have a good change of succeeding                       | 0.58           | -              | 1.49           | -               |
| 28. I am only buying branded products                                             | 1.54           | -              | 0.91           | -               |
| 29. I buy in local stores whenever possible                                       | 0.21           | -              | 2.76           | ** -           |
| 30. Most of the time I buy in familiar shops                                      | 0.55           | -              | 3.25           | ** -           |
| 31. Being in another town I prefer shopping in familiar branch stores             | 2.40           | ** -           | 2.51           | ** -           |
| 32. I try to shop as fast as possible                                            | 1.97           | * -            | 1.97           | * -            |

Italics: nationally contrastive correlations
Grey: very weak correlations in either sub-group
† One asterisk (*) indicate significance at a 90% confidence-level (two-tailed) and two (**) at a 95% confidence-level.

Based on: Van der Velde 2000c

The remainder of this section will confine itself to an analysis of distinctive propositions. Three propositions display relatively high scores in both samples. The first issue that quite strongly correlates to cross-border activities, is the tendency to shop where one happens to be (13). This might point at a group of people that is quite flexible and adaptive in their

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10 The analysis in the table confines itself to two sets of Mann-Witney tests. These sets consider the Dutch and German respondents respectively, with regard to how much of a coherence is present between the assessment of the propositions and whether or not fun shopping is done, respectively clothing is bought abroad across the border. In the third and sixth column the pluses and minuses indicate whether a positive or negative correlation exists between a more positive assessment of the proposition and the level of cross-border interaction. In the respective first two columns the Z-score for the Mann-Whitney test and the level of significance are recorded.
behaviour and not clinging to routine patterns. For these people, differences across borders are not important, be it in a positive or negative sense. The second factor (14) shows a contradictory result for the Dutch group with the previous observation (proposition 23) of the ‘cheap skates’. But maybe these kinds of bargain hunters have to be differentiated from them. A bargain need not always be cheap in absolute terms. Furthermore, there is the issue of parking. Especially for window-shopping there seems a positive tendency of cross-border shopping for those that value good parking facilities (1).

Finally, the noteworthy remaining results are discussed briefly. The remaining positive correlation are observable when shopping is regarded as a social or attractive event (2, 15, 17) and when one is willing to go at any length for shopping (3, 4, 18) and, furthermore, when local circumstances ‘force’ you (16). All of the negatively correlated factors relate to familiarity. It concerns factors such as preferring buying in familiar shops, having a good change of success, buying in local stores and branded products (26, 27, 28, 29, 30).

**Conclusions**

National borders often are considered to have a negative impact on mobility of people and thereby also on interactions between inhabitants of different places on both sides of the border. In the case of recreational shopping, borders also seem to have a positive impact on shopping trips to ‘the other side’. In fact, a significant number of cross-border visits is performed in the Euregion Rhine-Waal for recreational purposes and to explore as well as experience ‘foreign’ places. In general, it show that more Germans pay shopping visits to the Netherlands than the other way around. This can at least partly be explained by the regional context. The Dutch part of the Euregion Rhine-Waal contains larger places than the German part. Larger places usually offer more fun shopping opportunities.

People perform hopping behaviour by travelling to places across borders because they are looking for places offering appealing and different functional facilities, physical features and socio-cultural experiences. While shopping in ‘foreign’ places, they gaze at the merchandise in shop windows, stroll around shopping streets, enter shops, interact with the shop floor staff and possibly also spend money on goods and services. They also visually consume shop facades and the shopping crowd which may add a great deal to the fun in shopping. While hopping to and shopping in German places, Dutch visitors seem to pay more attention to parking facilities than German shoppers visiting Dutch places, who seem to focus on the urban atmosphere much more. This does not imply that the atmosphere of German places is not a relevant visiting motive for Dutch visitors and that for the Germans functional facilities like parking are unimportant. Altogether these empirical observations support the stereotypical image of Dutch shoppers having a more ‘functional’ focus and German shoppers being more ‘emotionally’ orientated.

People may have many driving forces to cross borders, including several functional, physical and socio-cultural opportunities and differences of foreign shopping centres. The empirical evidence suggests that when shopping promises to be and also is ‘fun’ in places across the border, both Dutch and German shoppers are more willing to travel to ‘foreign’ places. Despite the fact that shoppers indicate that they are willing to travel long distances to find appealing shopping experiences, when crossing the border most of them visit places which are located near the border. They mostly stay ‘close to home’, referring to the absolute distances between places and possibly also to the metaphorical sense of places being ‘distant’ and ‘foreign’. In fact, shoppers seem to choose the more ‘familiar’ options - which are also often located at the nearest distance from the hometown - from the many ‘unfamiliar’ possibilities.
Something which stands out in the foregoing analysis is that there appears to be an upper limit to the unexpectedness which cross-border shoppers are willing to accept. When dissimilarities become too large, shoppers could be deterred from undertaking border crossing practices. Visiting ‘foreign’ shopping centres should be a ‘familiar’ experience for them. If differences are too large, the border will function as a crowd ‘repeller’ and its crowd ‘pulling’ possibilities will not be acknowledged by shoppers. More generally speaking, consumers may recognise borders as something ‘natural’ which naturally obstructs their mobility, although they themselves do not recognise borders as obstructing because they have no intention to explore ‘the other side’. To them, the border is a door that is closed and should stay closed to protect them against ‘threats’. To other shoppers, however, the door is not closed but ajar which arouses curiosity to visit places across the border. They see the opportunities that ‘foreign’ places offer to experience ‘new’ and ‘different’ things. Functional, physical and socio-cultural differences may promote mobility and ground the border in the mind as something positive - instead of something negative. Thus, the manner in which people see, approach and use the national border depends on personal perceptions and intentions.

Shopping experiences occur within what we could like to call a ‘bandwidth of familiarity’. When differences are large, on the one hand, maintaining socio-cultural borders will not stimulate recreational shoppers to visit ‘foreign’ places. In fact, too much differences could deter shoppers because they feel displaced. Recreational shoppers are looking for ‘the known unknown’ and ‘the expected unexpected’ to make sure that they will feel at home mentally when they are not physically. They do not want to feel a ‘culture shock’. On the other hand, very small differences between shopping centres on both sides of the border, could make shopping centres less appealing for visitors which value the ‘foreignness’ of places. This does not imply that removing socio-cultural borders will result into recreational shoppers no longer visiting shopping centres in the adjacent country. However, it will make the cross-border region a less appealing region for fun shopping due to the disappearing positive impact of the socio-cultural border within a relatively small territory. Thus, cross-border shoppers do not want differences to be too large - this could obstruct international interactions - and when the ‘familiar foreignness’ of places disappears, the appeal for visitors coming from ‘the other side’ of the border could also disappear. Border regions are expected to become less heterogeneous areas either in the near future or the more distant future. This could cause borders to slowly ‘dissolve’ and ‘disappear’. Policy measures are taken in an attempt to open as well as close borders and people themselves personally also (re-)construct and (re-)interpret borders. This makes borders and border regions interesting case studies of international integration and socio-cultural and socio-economic exclusion due to fear for the other but also of chances to take ‘adventurous’ opportunities and willingness to meet ‘foreigners’. With regard to consumer behaviour, there is the intriguing issue of the seeming ‘border paradox’, where increasing cross-border integration (e.g. in the form of regional ‘homogenisation’) can coincide with decreasing cross-border interaction.
References


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