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Working Paper

De-bordering: homogenization or differentiation

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De-bordering: homogenization or differentiation

Martin van der Velde (based upon work in progress together with Bas Spierings)

Work in progress, please do not quote

National borders usually are considered to constrain the international flow of products, services, people and capital. However, physical borders may be removed relatively easy but mental borders and images of 'otherness' can be incredibly 'sticky' (Van Houtum 1999). Old and new mental representations of controversies, cooperation, differences and similarities between 'us' and 'them' may have a long-lasting impact on cross-border mobility.

Borders then create difference and familiarity that both can be encouraging and discouraging for mobility

The main objective of the collaborative proposal is to unravel how mental barriers for mobility are constructed and deconstructed in the minds of inhabitants. This includes an analysis of historical commonalities and fractures influencing personal representations of borders and 'otherness' and the impact political and media campaigns may have on these representations. To achieve this objective, the focus will be on analysing daily life practices of inhabitants performed in different 'old' and 'new' cross-border regions in the EU. Daily life is seen here as expressing personal representations of cross-border unfamiliarity – generating either international mobility or immobility.

The concept of 'unfamiliarity' is used in many studies on borders and border regions to philosophically explain cross-border (im)mobility. However, no detailed and comprehensive empirical analysis of the concept has been undertaken so far within an internationally comparative framework. This collaborative research project aims to fill the gap by drawing on recent work from the main applicants on the so-called 'bandwidth of unfamiliarity' which will be explained later.

The added value of the collaborative project is a better understanding of the 'border paradox' where increasing cross-border integration and cohesion could coincide with decreasing cross-border mobility. The aim is to find out what degree of unfamiliarity and what international differences encourage and discourage cross-border interaction, under what socio-cultural and historical conditions, and what this could imply for the development of regional cohesion.

Illustration

Cross-Border Shopping Mobility

General conclusions:
1) The border creates opportunities that are more seen by crossers (12/23)
2) The level of unexpectedness is a factor for border-crossers (30/31/32)
3) There are national contrasts
   a. mobility-wishes (6/21) ← cultural differences
   b. big-city atmosphere (8/24) ← regional context

These conclusions maybe a bit circumstantial, but for us they a starting-point for further research, especially the positive aspects.

(Un)familiarity

Instead of seeing borders only as barriers, they can also be seen as opportunity
   a) differences (price, assortment, opening hours, customs, etc.)
   b) 'strangeness', unexpectedness

The border symbolised as a 'door' that is not locked but ajar → some have the curiosity to explore (part of the shopping experience)

But too large socio-cultural dissimilarities might have negative impact on cross-border interaction, so there should be something familiar, familiar unexpectedness. 'Borders' and 'bordering' maybe could create this balance

Bandwidth of unfamiliarity

From the literature comes that several differences are used to explain why shoppers cross borders.

To understand how these differences work together to discourage and encourage cross-border mobility we categorise them into more 'rational differences' between countries on the one hand and more 'emotional differences' on the other hand.

In order to scrutinise how the interpretation by shoppers of both rational and emotional differences could generate (im)mobility we introduce the 'bandwidth of unfamiliarity' concept. The bandwidth signals the level of unfamiliarity people are willing to accept. It shows what differences people consider as push and pull factors – resulting into mobility – and what differences they consider as keep and repel factors – resulting into immobility.

As portrayed in the figure shifting 'blocks' of rational and emotional differences together constitute shopping (im)mobility – depending on how shoppers interpret differences between countries and places.

Push factors stimulate mobility because they imply that places in the 'home' country are perceived as less attractive for shopping than places on 'the other side'.

Pull factors also promote cross-border shopping when 'foreign' places are considered more appealing than places 'at home'.

Keep factors stimulate immobility when places in the 'home' country are considered as more attractive for shopping than 'foreign' places.

Repel factors promote immobility because they imply that places on 'the other side' are perceived as less appealing than places 'at home'.

As portrayed in the figure, rational and emotional differences between places on 'both sides', which shoppers are willing to accept and consider as appealing, fall within their 'bandwidth of unfamiliarity'. In that case, these differences operate as push or pull factors and encourage international mobility. However, when shoppers consider international differences too large, they fall outside the bandwidth and operate as keep or repel factors – which implies that cross-border consumer mobility is discouraged and prevented.

What is considered as 'familiar' or acceptably 'unfamiliar' might differ between people. Some probably will also be more inclined than other to look for and appreciate differences between places on 'both sides' of the border. When differences disappear, however, this could cause a decreasing appeal of going abroad and increasing consumer immobility.

In fact, when shoppers perceive less and less appealing differences and more and more less appealing or even unappealing ('repelling') similarities, motivations to cross borders for shopping purposes diminish. The strength of push and pull factors together declines and the strength of keep and repel factors together grows, causing the 'block' of rational differences to shift to the right and/or the 'block' of emotional differences to shift to the left. This implies that cross-border shopping will take place less frequently. Motivations to cross borders also diminish when shoppers perceive more unacceptable differences. The strength of keep and repel factors together grows and the strength of push and pull factors together declines, causing the 'blocks' of rational differences to shift to the right and the emotional to the left respectively. This results in less international interactions as well.

There appears to be an upper limit to the unexpectedness which cross-border shoppers are willing to accept.

If differences are too large, the border will function as a crowd 'repeller' and its crowd 'pulling' possibilities will not be acknowledged by shoppers. If shoppers consider international differences to be within their 'bandwidth of unfamiliarity' this arouses curiosity to visit 'foreign' places offering 'new' experiences. If they are to small no reason to go. Rational and emotional differences may promote mobility and ground the border in the mind as something positive - instead of something negative.

Points for discussion

The first part makes clear that borders are important when it comes to interaction, barriers to interaction per se, both mentally as well as physically and demarcation between 'differences'

With regard to the latter it is import to realise that these differences, when it comes to shopping, but also in other cases, can be stimulating for CB-interaction. But at the same time the differences should also not be too big. People have a tendency to stay 'close to their home turf' both geographically as well as mentally. There is a 'bandwidth'.

A preliminary conclusion could be that it is just a certain degree of fragmentation that is necessary to generate cross-border interactions and mobility and therewith a cohesive 'de-bordered' border-region.

De-bordering: Homogenization or Differentiation

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HOME

Welcome message:

Greetings to all the current members of the Association for Borderlands Studies (ABS) and also to interested friends that have yet to join or renew their membership. As our website materials will explain in more detail, the ABS is dedicated to the study of border regions in our constantly changing world. We are proud to provide a welcome venue for sharing such research through our annual meetings we hold with the Western Social Science Association, the Journal of Borderlands Studies, and the fellowship that we provide to those interested in contemporary border issues. We invite you to explore our website and journal, join the ABS through our secure Internet registration page, and enjoy our truly international association.

Best Regards,

Tony Payan , President
Association for Borderlands Studies

For information, contact the officers.

http://www.absborderlands.org/2officers.html

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Journal of Borderlands Studies

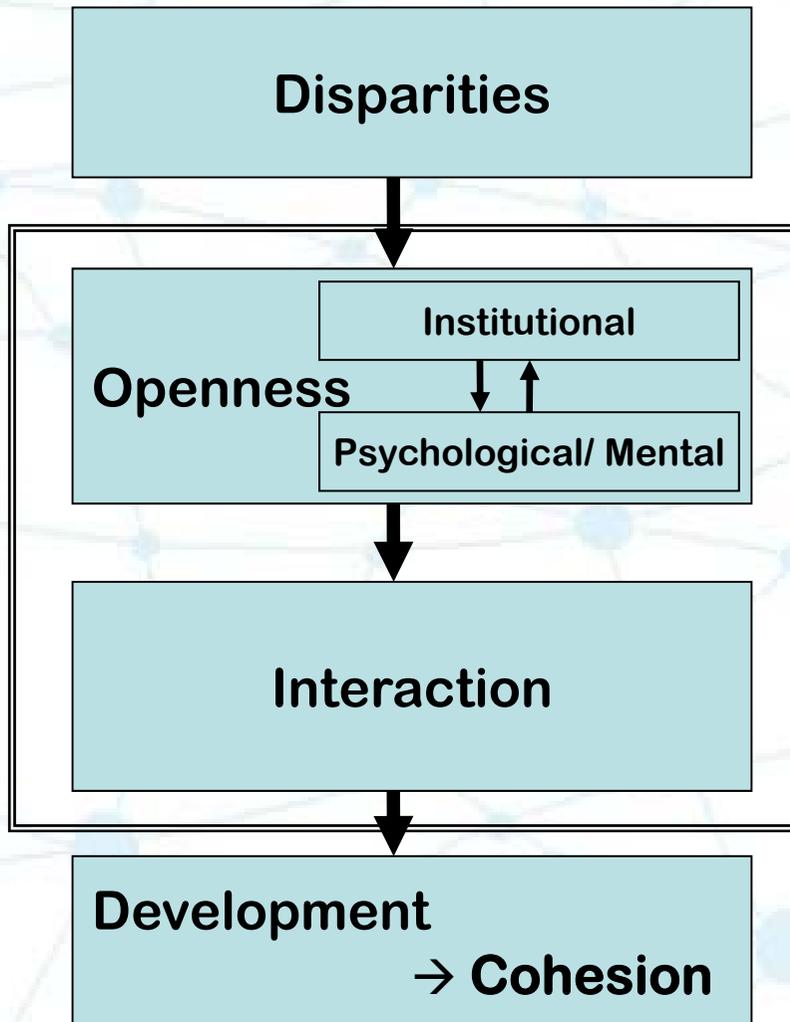*Journal of Borderlands Studies*

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- **Introduction**

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EU-discourse

Project:
The (de)construction of borders and unfamiliarity in the European Union: an analysis of historical representations of otherness and contemporary daily practices in border regions

Borders ...

- often still seen as constraints
- are both physical and mental
- functioning based on old and new representations
- create both difference and familiarity
        → both encouraging and discouraging

Project:

Aims

- unravelling the (de)construction of mental borders

- in an historical context

- with focus of the influence of media and politics
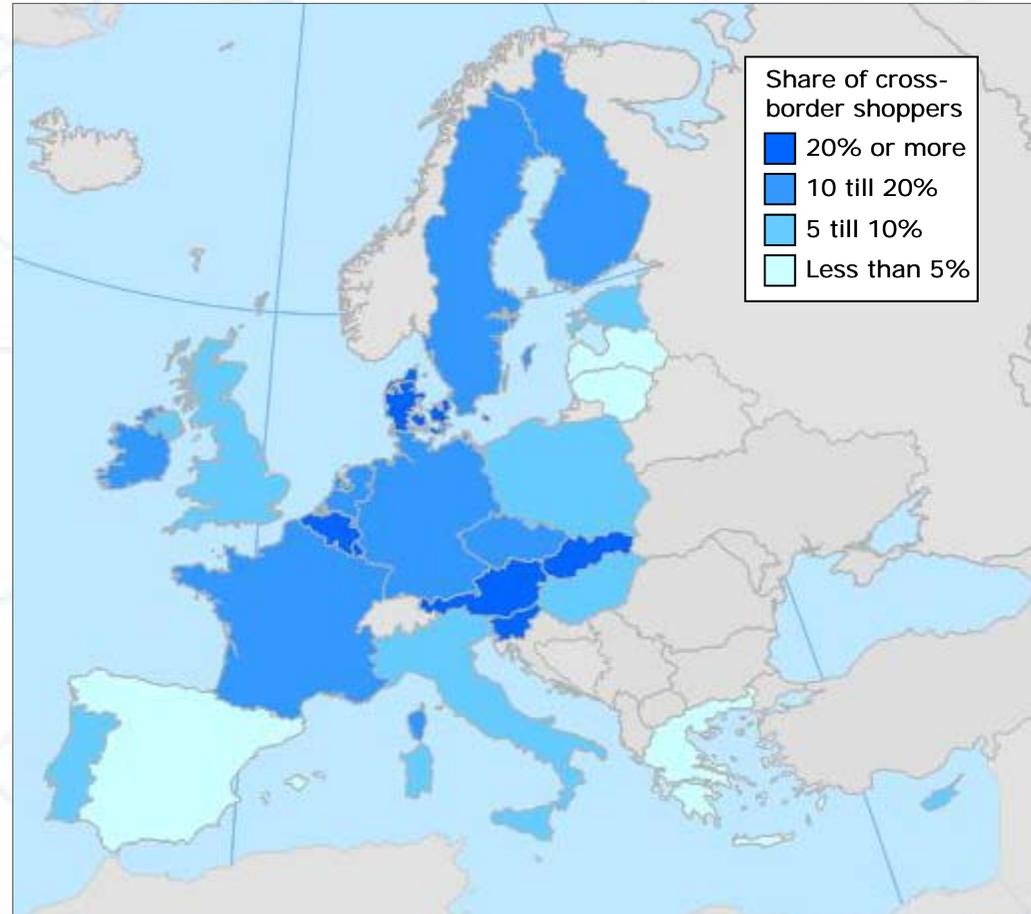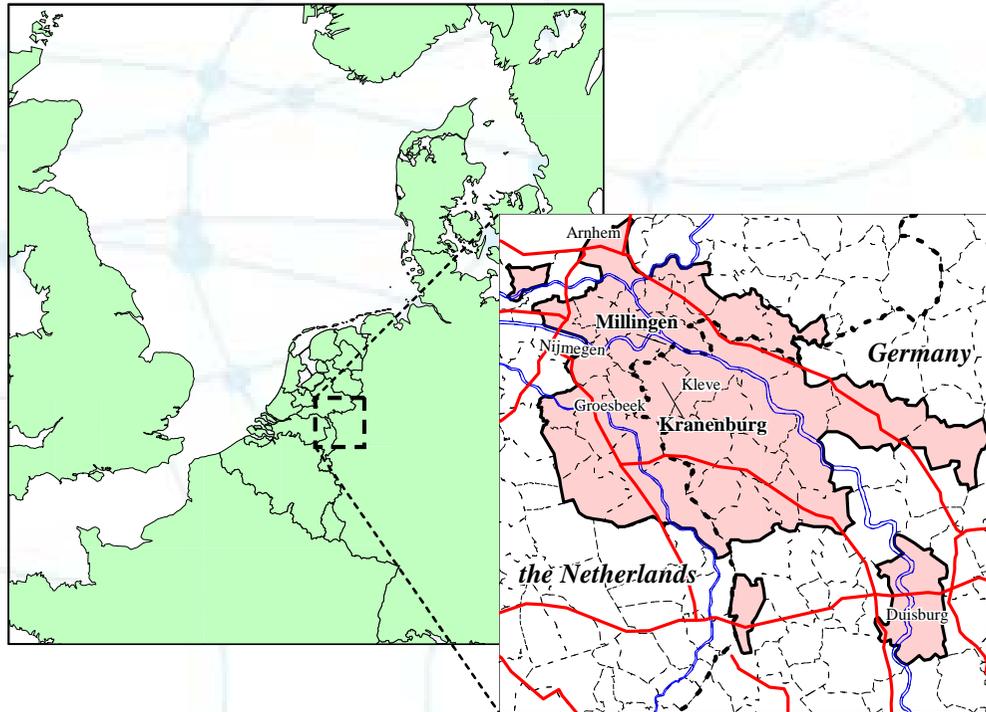
- emphasising daily practices

Project:

Novelty

- unfamiliarity as more than a theoretical concept

- strongly empirical and comparative

- applying the 'bandwidth of unfamiliarity'-concept

- better understanding op the 'border-paradox'

Cross-border shopping mobility in the EU-25

Share of cross-border shoppers
- 20% or more
- 10 till 20%
- 5 till 10%
- Less than 5%

Cross-border shopping mobility in a border-region

Motive	From Germany to the Netherlands	From the Netherl. to Germany	% of total
Shopping for daily products	938,000	437,000	0.4%
Run / Purposeful shopping	488,000	161,000	1.0%
Fun / Leisure shopping	1,071,000	420,000	1.5%
Total	2,497,000	1,018,000	0.6%

'Motives' for mobility

	Window-shopping			Buying clothing		
	Millingen	Kranenburg		Millingen	Kranenburg	
None	54,5%	17,6%	'Non-crossers'	72,5%	36,0%	'Non-crossers'
till 1/3	22,7%	28,4%		12,8%	27,9%	
1/3 till 2/3	20,5%	25,7%	'Crossers'	13,8%	18,6%	'Crossers'
2/3 or more	2,3%	28,4%		0,9%	17,4%	
N	88	74		109	86	

		Border crossers yes/no: Dutch sub-group			Border crossers yes/no: German sub-group		
Window-shopping		MW	sig.[†]	sign	MW	sig.[†]	sign
6	*Good accessibility through public transport is important*	0.89		+	1.82	*	-
8	*Strolling through a city is fun*	1.07		-	1.20		+
Shopping for clothing							
12	Some clothing are better bought abroad	2.13	**	+	3.69	**	+
21	*Good accessibility trough public transport is important*	0.88		+	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		+
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.

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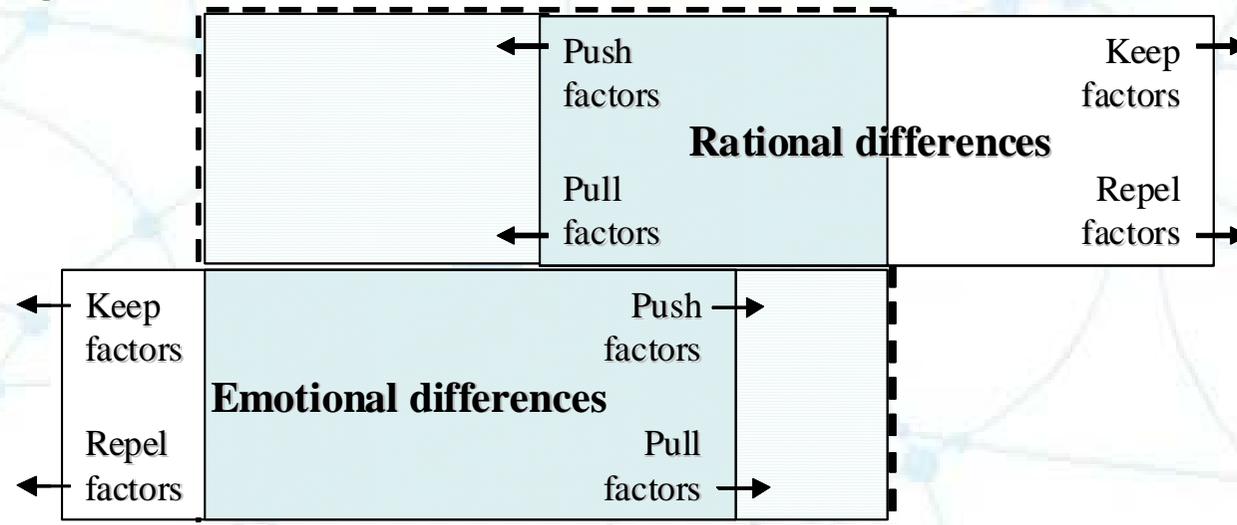# Bandwidth of unfamiliarity

Borders can …

- be barriers as well as opportunities

- be considered doors that are ajar (instead of locked)

- create a balance between familiarity and unfamiliarity

Bandwidth of unfamiliarity

Bandwidth of unfamiliarity

Mobility

Immobility

Conclusions and points for further discussion

- Tendency to 'stay close to home',
                          both physical and psychological

- There exists a bandwidth of unfamiliarity

- 'Fragmentation' and/or 'differentation'
         is needed to achieve integration and therewith
                          a cohesive 'de-bordered' region