# The spatial production of a border-crossing civil society in Görlitz and Zgorzelec. A German point of view

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**Abstract.** After decades of uncertainty and continuous change to the border regime since the split-up of Görlitz into a German part west of the river Neisse, and a Polish part called Zgorzelec after the Second World War, both towns established the self-designated European City Görlitz-Zgorzelec in 1998. Although journalists and politicians maintain that Görlitz and Zgorzelec are a case model for European integration, there are obvious differences between the visions connected to the project 'European City' and the everyday life. Following the key research question, whether the 'European City Görlitz-Zgorzelec', in its attempts to develop a border-crossing civil society, is also constructed from below by citizens on both sides of the border, my contribution to the field of border studies uses a qualitative micro-level approach to these processes in the fields of culture, leisure and education. For that aim, an ethnographically inspired socio-geographical research design has been linked to Henri Lefebvre's theoretical framework of the double triad of spatial production developed in *The Production of Space* (1991). From the perspective of actors in civil society in both towns, who are active in constructing, shifting and deconstructing borders, the article aims to illuminate both territorial and social bordering processes. Borderwork is embedded in and connected to transformation and peripheralisation processes, as well as to the discourses on and the funding instruments of European Integration in the context of the complex history of the Polish-German border.

**Contents:**

## 1.   Introduction

After several waves of migration caused by flight and expulsion during and after the Second World War and after decades of political uncertainty and power bloc confrontation before the collapse of the Soviet Union, within the last 20 years the regions along the Oder and Neisse river have regained importance as an interface between East and West (Lentz et al., 2009: 125). The cities of Frankfurt(Oder)/Słubice, Guben/Gubin and Görlitz/Zgorzelec, all of which were divided after the Second World War when a new border was drawn between Poland and Germany, are nowadays referred to as the 'Laboratory for Europe' (Hermann, 2012) or a 'case model for the European unification process' (Müller-Gerbes, 2006). Especially following Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, international newspapers began to publish articles on Görlitz-Zgorzelec, the 'German "gate" to the new EU member state Poland' (Welter et al., 2008: 3) and the crystallisation point of social, economic and cultural integration processes for 'the new Europe' (Günther, 2006). The articles deal with cross-border employment and further intensification of cross-border-interactions in daily life (Zbikowska, 2012a, 2012b). In contrast people in Görlitz and Zgorzelec have to face complex problems due to the accumulation of transformation processes, unemployment, demographic change and peripheralisation (Lentz et al., 2009: 131). Despite existing evidence, these local issues remain hidden behind the enthusiasm for the 'European vision'. In the case of Görlitz, they also remain hidden behind a constant special discursive pattern, which praises the city's architectural heritage as the 'most beautiful town in Germany' (Kiesow, 2010).

Following the joint submission for the European Capital of Culture 2010, where both cities were runners-up behind the Ruhr area, Görlitz and Zgorzelec (Fig. 1) aim to develop a transnational, pluralistic community (Baumgardt, 2004), including the de-construction of a formerly closed border on both political and social levels. These efforts can be subsumed under the larger denomination *Europastadt* or *Europamiasto* (European City), a self-designation brought into being by both cities in 1998. However, former mayors of Zgorzelec and Görlitz (Fiedorowicz, Karbaum, 2005: 9-10) and scholars, such as Weiske et al. (2008) point out that the term 'European City' will remain an empty statement, void of real meaning, unless there is a bottom-up process by the citizens of both towns with an increase of cross-border-interaction in everyday life. Following this idea, the aim of this article is to analyse Görlitz's and Zgorzelec's active citizenship in the cultural and educational sphere. To do that, I use a qualitative micro-level approach, in order to describe manifold of borderwork: the construction of a transnational, pluralistic community and the de-construction and shifting of borders.

## 2.   Micro-level approaches
##     in border studies
##     and my understanding of 'the border'

Before outlining my theoretical background and its methodological implications and before contextu-

**Fig. 1.** The Old Town Bridge across the river Neisse connects Görlitz (left hand side) and Zgorzelec (right hand side) and was reconstructed in 2004, after it had been destroyed in the aftermath of the Second World War. It rapidly became part of the daily life of inhabitants from both cities and it is excessively used as a symbol for co-operation efforts from both towns and European Integration

*Source:* Own photo

alizing and presenting the case study area, I want to present some remarks on border studies and my own contribution to this field. Political Geography plays a key role within border studies, which connect perspectives provided by different disciplines for the study of borders. Newman (2006a) argues that the renaissance of border studies since the mid-nineties is a result of growing interdisciplinarity and has also been reinvigorated by the 'borderless world' discourse, which appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This renaissance led to a more complex understanding of borders (Paasi, 2005; Johnson et al., 2011: 67), which had previously displayed a lack of differentiation and had been largely one-sided: '[...] Geographers have not traditionally paid much attention to the meanings of boundaries in the construction, organisation and reproduction of social life, territoriality and power, but rather have understood boundaries as forming categories of their own and then classified them on diverging grounds' (Paasi, 1998: 65). Building on this critical remark, borders can be seen as 'woven into the fabric of society and [...] the routine business of all concerned' (Johnson et al., 2011: 67).

The discussion of borders has been subject to continuous change within social and political sciences oscillating between on the one hand, more static, state-centric, territorial understandings of space, which serve as a basis for international law, and more dynamic relational or topological approaches on the other (Johnson et al., 2011: 61). The latter focus on the de- and re-bordering of ter-

ritories, networks, 'spaces of flows' (Castells, 1991), different stakeholders and the decreasing role of the nation-state. However, as Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) point out, it 'is not that the modern space of the nation-state has disappeared or been rendered irrelevant by global processes. Rather, it has been placed under stress, altered, and made to coexist with a variety of other spatial formations that have transformed it, recalibrated it, and made the borders that cross and exceed it as crucial as those that define its territorial and symbolic limits' (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2013: 63). That is why borders as multiple and heterogeneous processes require the coexistence of different perspectives and approaches within research, as Rumford (2012) indicates in his article 'Towards a Multiperspectival Study of Borders', whereas a 'general theory of borders would seem a very problematic matter' (Paasi, 2005: 668). Micro-level case studies like this article remind us that 'locals do not necessarily see borders in the ways as governments' (Rumford, 2012: 889) and point out the importance of the so called 'borderwork' (Rumford, 2008) by normal citizens, NGOs and entrepreneurs (Johnson et al., 2011: 67). Furthermore, borders are 'markers of division but also [...] mechanisms of connection and encounter' (Cooper, Rumford, 2013: 108), which is why they can be barriers for some, while others can use their connective potential as gateways and sites of encounter.

Publications on 'binational cities' (Ehlers et al., 2001) or 'border-crossing cities' (Buursink, 2001)

like Görlitz and Zgorzelec discuss a vast scope of connected topics, including microeconomic simulations (Wagner, 2005), cross-border urban development (Neumann, Friedrich, 2005), governance approaches (Leibenath et al., 2008a), cross-border milieu analysis (Matthiesen, Bürkner, 2001), local trade-relations (Dołżbłasz, Raczyk, 2011) and socio-psychological contact theory (Mirwaldt, 2010). In Europe, they are embedded in the discourse of border opening, institutional cross-border cooperation and Europeanisation,  but also in the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at the new inner and outer borders of the European Union after its eastward enlargement in 2004 (Rumford, 2009).

Although these general international discussions are important for the understanding of concrete border situations, scholars like Paasi (2005) fear a certain trend of de-peopling border studies by only 'reading and interpreting texts on boundaries instead of doing time-consuming fieldwork among border-people' (Paasi, 2005: 668-669). The pure 'remote sensing of borders' (Doevenspeck, 2011: 140) and the analysis of master-narratives are not only in danger of becoming 'repetitious and lopsided' (Megoran, 2006: 622), but also of becoming irrelevant, as they neglect the fact that 'bordering is not always the business of the state. Ordinary people (citizens and also noncitizens) are increasingly involved in the business of bordering [...]. Citizens, entrepreneurs, and NGOs are active in constructing, shifting, or even erasing borders' (Johnson et al., 2011: 67). In the context of the German-Polish border Lentz et al. (2009: 125) even maintain that 'the most important' level of co-operation is not political cooperation but 'co-operation in civil society' (Lentz et al., 2009), which contains a 'range of formal and informal nonstate organisations, groups, and associations' (McIlwaine, 2009: 136) providing direct contacts and spontaneous encounters on both sides of the border. Civil society is therefore more than a mere policy tool, as it 'facilitates the assessment of the relationship among the individual, society, and the state" (McIlwaine, 2009: 140) as an analytical focus often used within post-socialist contexts (McIlwaine, 2009: 136). Within border studies, Rumford (2012: 887) argues that borderwork, 'societal bordering activity undertaken by citizens', is 'a key dimension of a multiperspectival approach to border studies'.

My article therefore uses a micro-level approach and builds on a series of contributions, which look at how people 'make sense of their border-related social world' (Doevenspeck, 2011: 129) within their narrations and practices of everyday life. In this way it is possible to show the 'diverse experiences and meanings which borders have for the individual [...], particularly [in cases] where physical borders have been "removed", or "opened" and are non-visible' (Newman, 2006b: 152), as is the case at the Polish-German border today. Therefore, 'the border must be conceptualised as a part of daily life to understand the logics and concrete processes of its diverse perpetuations instead of seeing it as an abstract construct' (Doevenspeck, 2011: 129). However, focusing on the micro-level of spatial activity does not aim at contrasting it with the study of 'larger-scale territorial transformations' (Paasi, 2001: 8). Both approaches are complementary to each other and are able to enrich border studies, as border regions are 'nested scales' (Häkli, 2008: 474), which form and are formed by 'hybrid bundles across the local, regional, national and international networks' (Häkli, 2008: 475).

## 3.  Theoretical background, research questions and methodological design

For me, asking the question 'Is the "European City Görlitz-Zgorzelec", in its attempts to develop a border-crossing civil society, also constructed from below by citizens on both sides of the border?' does not mean that 'European City' is a 'space-in-itself' (Lefebvre, 1991: 299) or a pre-given spatial container, which has to be filled with social action. Following Henri Lefebvre's initial proposition that '(social) space is a (social) product' (Lefebvre, 1991: 27) in *The Production of Space* (1991), it is instead seen as produced through spatial practices, through 'the use of space and its qualitative properties' (Lefebvre, 1991: 404). Lefebvre argues that the interest of spatial analysis 'must shift from *things in space* to the actual *production of space*' (Lefebvre, 1991: 37), which means that there is a special interest in the way space is produced along with different values and interests within social reality. Lefebvre there-

fore establishes a triadic model of three dialectically interlinked 'moments or formants' (Lefebvre, 1991: 369) of the production of space. Considerably widening Marxist theory and inspiring human geographers like David Harvey and Edward Soja, Lefebvre's model embraces spatial social practices, as well as spatial representation and imagination in everyday life (Schmid, 2008: 40-43). The core model consists of a double triad with a phenomenological layer including 'spatial practice', 'representations of space' and 'spaces of representation' and a linguistic-semiotic layer, including 'perceived', 'conceived'

and 'lived' space (Schmid, 2008: 29). Figure 2 illustrates this model by providing examples. Schmid (2008: 40), who conducted basic research on the *Production of Space*, argues that Lefebvre's triadic figure 'links three moments that are left distinct from each other, without reconciling them in a synthesis—three moments that exist in interaction, in conflict or in alliance with each other.' As a result, it must be assumed that space is not only produced through these dimensions, but that it is also 'at once result and cause, product and producer' (Lefebvre, 1991: 142).

representations of space
*conceived space*

They give images and thus also define a space at the level of discourses. For example maps, spatial models, images and concepts within science, politic and planning, but also within daily life.
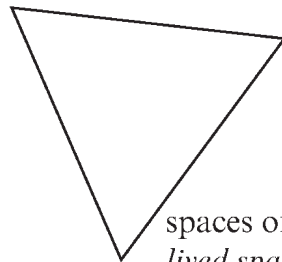
spatial practice
*perceived space*

The material dimension of social activity, like networks and relations of interactions within real life. This activities are bound to the body as producer and consumer of space.

spaces of representation
*lived space*

symbolic dimension of space, subconscious, almost inexpressible and unanalysable categories like „urban" or „home" within a society.

**Fig. 2.** Henri Lefebvre's Production of Space

*Source:* Own compilation using Schmid (2005, 2008)

My sub-questions are structured in accordance with the triadic model and expand on Schmid's (2008: 40) proposition that 'space and time are not only relational but fundamentally historical' and are 'continuously produced' (Schmid, 2008: 43) by adding a diachronic compound.

*The etymology of space and place:* Which historical episodes become relevant or are set as relevant for cross-border interaction? Are there attempts or a social will to process the joint history?

*Production through representations of space:* Which conceptual and discursive contexts shape citizens' cross-border interactions?

*Production through spatial practice:* In which way and to what extend do cross-border interactions, integrative transborder offers and spaces of shared ex-

perience exist? How are these offers and spaces of shared experience arranged and used by border-people?

*Production through spaces of representation:* Which narrative fields connect and separate Görlitz and Zgorzelec?

Lefebvre directs his theoretical thoughts towards everyday life, which 'shows how people live, […] the strategies from which the everyday emerges and reveals the arbitrariness of the dominant order' (Ronneberger, 2008: 135). Everyday life, as highlighted by Lefebvre (2004: 90-91), is the place where mechanisms of social consumption and production become apparent through the analysis of ostensibly insignificant patterns and repetitive processes. Everyday life therefore seems to be a fruitful

basis for analysing the production of a cross-border civil society and the 'simultaneous subversion and perpetuation of political borders "from below"' (Doevenspeck, 2011: 129) as a spatially produced 'sociological fact' (*Soziologische Tatsache*, Simmel, 1983) and its related concepts of territoriality, statehood and nationality.

Following these thoughts and scholars like Megoran (2006: 622), who plead in favour of a 'return to the field' in border studies, fieldwork is the methodical tool of choice in order to answer the research questions. I spent two months in total in the case study area (Fig. 3) in 2012 in order to undertake fieldwork, most of the time in a shared flat in Görlitz, just 800m away from the border crossing point *Stadtbrücke* (*Most Miejski*). Opting for an ethnographical approach, and combining three qualitative methods in order to 'brightly illuminate the relationships between structure, agency and geographic context' (Herbert, 2000: 550), I have based my conclusions on an analysis of 21 problem-centred narrative interviews, field notes with observations of everyday life and the analysis of documents. During the interviews, which were 20 to 90 minute audio recordings conducted in German or English and transcribed afterwards, I spoke to 12 people from Görlitz and 7 people from Zgorzelec. On the one hand, this ratio reflects the distribution of the population between Görlitz and Zgorzelec, on the other hand it illustrates a fact described by many of my interview partners: in Zgorzelec there are only very few actors of partly institutionalised citizens' cross-border interactions. Following Herbert (2000: 552), who notes that 'order should emerge *from* the field rather than be imposed *on* the field', I chose my interview partners using a snowball-system. This means that I did not rely on a probability sample of the whole population, but tried to highlight the variety of opinions on these issues by people who have a cross-border occupation, like the organiser of a border-crossing demonstration, teachers in bilingual classes, people establishing a European Encounter Centre in Zgorzelec, etc. Müller (2012) notes that subjects often behave according to the motto 'talk left, walk right', pointing out that in interviews we can only get interpretations, narratives and opinions on social action. That is why I engaged in data gathering through participant observation of daily life near the border, at different

places along the border and at border crossings, as well as during special events, such as an international job fair in *Miejski Dom Kultury* (municipal cultural centre), a workshop of the Zgorzelec Youth Parliament and meetings of expellees in the Silesian Museum so as to link stories about the border with practices. Supplementary to my interviews, field notes and smaller talks during participant observations have been analysed. On several occasions I took photos and collected documents, which are a main source for representations of space, rounding up my impressions of border-related interactions and counterbalancing weaknesses of specific methods and data sources.

## 4. The Görlitz-Zgorzelec case study area

Paasi (2005: 669) points out that 'each of the […] current land boundaries is unique and each is related in different ways to local, regional, state-bound and supranational (or even 'global') processes.' These processes in transition are 'as much economic as cultural, social as political' (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2013: 61). Attempts at cross-border interaction in divided cities along the Polish-German border are inseparably connected with specific historical circumstances on the one hand (Jajeśniak-Quast, Stokłosa, 2000: 9; Lentz et al., 2009: 125) and with the current processes of transformation, peripheralisation, depopulation and European Integration on the other (Matthiesen, Bürkner, 2001).

Görlitz (Fig. 3) was mentioned for the first time as *villa gorelec* in 1071. Due to its geographic location at a river crossing of the important *via regia*-trade route, it became a powerful mercantile city under Bohemian rule in the High Middle Ages (Haslinger, Waack, 2010: 9) and had its second period of prosperity under Prussian rule from 1815 till the end of the First World War. During that last period, Görlitz's population increased from 8,000 around 1800 to over 85,000 inhabitants in 1914 (Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt, 1880-1914), making it one of the richest cities of the German Empire. There followed by a slight but creeping decline till the final phase of the Second World War, when all seven bridges across the Neisse were destroyed by the retreating German armed forces. Opiłowska
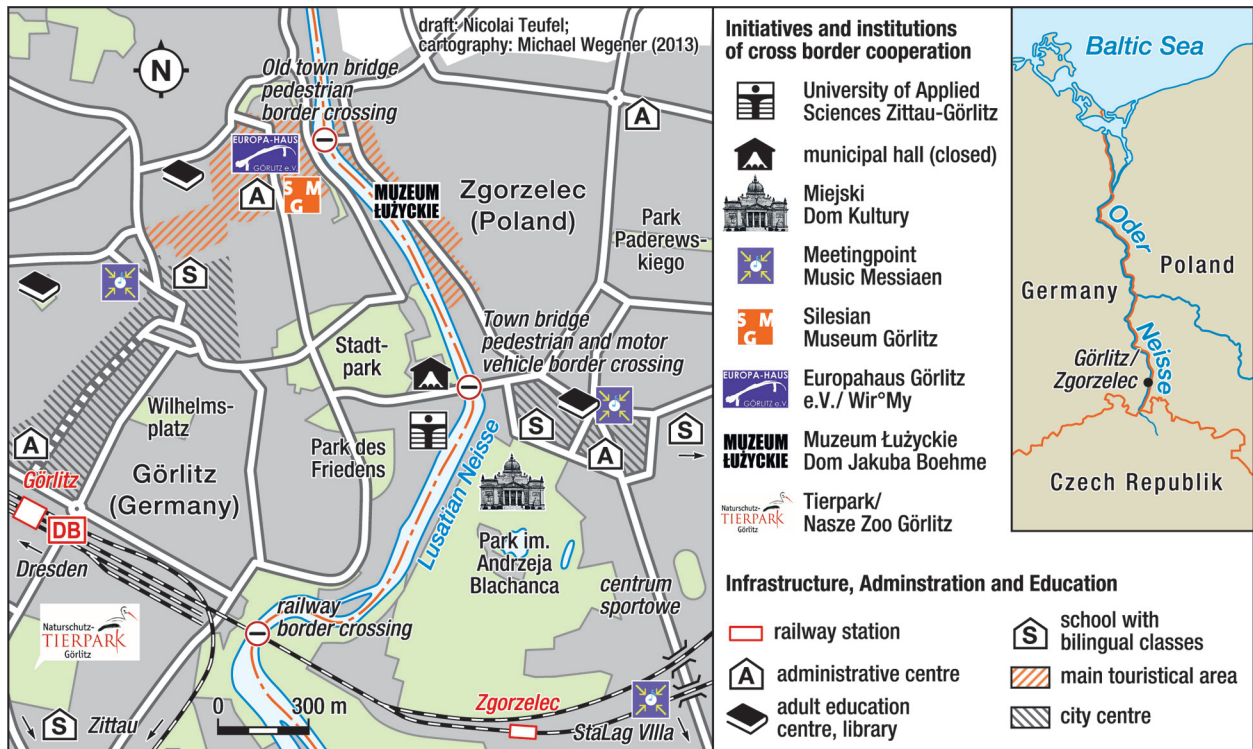
**Fig. 3.** Map of the case study area

*Source:* Own draft, cartography by Michael Wegener

(2009: 15) describes the year 1945 as the turning point for the memory of both cities and their inhabitants. The westward shift of Poland's borders after the war due to the Potsdam Agreement resulted in mass displacement and forced migration of about 8-10 million Polish and German people (Weger, 2009), as well as in the division of Görlitz. The bigger area west of the river, including the city centre, remained German, whereas the eastern parts became the newly founded town Zgorzelec on Polish territory. However, the border situation remained unclear and was acknowledged only *de facto* until the border treaty in 1990, which finally defined the Polish-German border along the Oder and Neisse River, referring to the Treaty of Zgorzelec from 1950 between the GDR and the Republic of Poland and the Treaty of Warsaw from 1970 (Lentz et al.*,* 2009: 125). Shortly after the war, Görlitz was inhabited by about 40% refugees from the former eastern territories of Germany. There was a complete population shift in Zgorzelec, which became a home for people from the former Polish eastern territories around Lviv, settlers from central Poland, soldiers and Greek civil war refugees. People in both

towns shared the experience of facing border-related uncertainty under Soviet rule (Lammert, Pietsch, 2011). Until the late 1960s, people in Görlitz had hoped to return to their original homes, whereas those in Zgorzelec feared that they would have to leave their new homes again.

First major attempts of cross-border cooperation between Görlitz and Zgorzelec result from the time of the open border between 1972 and 1980, followed by a town twinning agreement in 1980, its renewal in 1991 and a completely new agreement in 1993. These attempts are in contrast to the fact that the topics of flight, expulsion and uncertainty had been tabooed until 1990, and the huge influence of different historical images and identity politics, as well as in contrast to the sharp cultural difference between Zgorzelec and Görlitz. Since 1996, Görlitz and Zgorzelec have been holding annual joint City Council meetings and adopted the self-designation 'European City Görlitz-Zgorzelec' in 1998. Reflecting on the situation from 1990 until the millennium, Buursink (2001: 13) states that 'one cannot be but optimistic about the degree of convergence that has been reached in the past few years'. Further

milestones can be seen in the joint application for European Capital of Culture 2010 and the opening of the Old town bridge (*Altstadtbrücke/Most star-omiejski*) in 2004, almost 60 years after it had been destroyed by retreating German forces.

Despite the enthusiasm of the 1990s, political visions and people's expectations, Görlitz and Zgorzelec are still situated on a contact line of two peripheral regions (Sokol, 2009: 56), which are characterised by weak economic structure, infra-structural endowment, depopulation and location far from the centres of political decision-making (Miosga, 2008: 15).

Today about 13% of Zgorzelec's population are unemployed, and 17% are jobless in Görlitz. This re-flects the loss of jobs linked to the changes in post-Soviet Europe after 1989, although with the biggest

employer Turów (a mining and power plant) still running, Zgorzelec's situation seems to be slight-ly better. As a result, many people left Görlitz af-ter 1990, and the population declined from 75.000 in 1990 to 55.000 in 2012, whereas Zgorzelec shows a smaller loss from 36.000 to 32.000 people with-in the same time period (Urząd Miasta Zgorzelec, 2011; Stadtverwaltung Görlitz, 2012) (Fig. 4). Many hopes were connected with Poland's EU and Schen-gen accession in 2004 and 2007 respectively, but the main profiteers of increasing east-west relations are predominantly metropolitan areas like Szczecin, Poznań, Wrocław, Berlin and Dresden, which cut off the closer border region from international in-vestments and made it a transit area for trans-Eu-ropean structures and commodity flows (Lentz et al., 2009: 128).
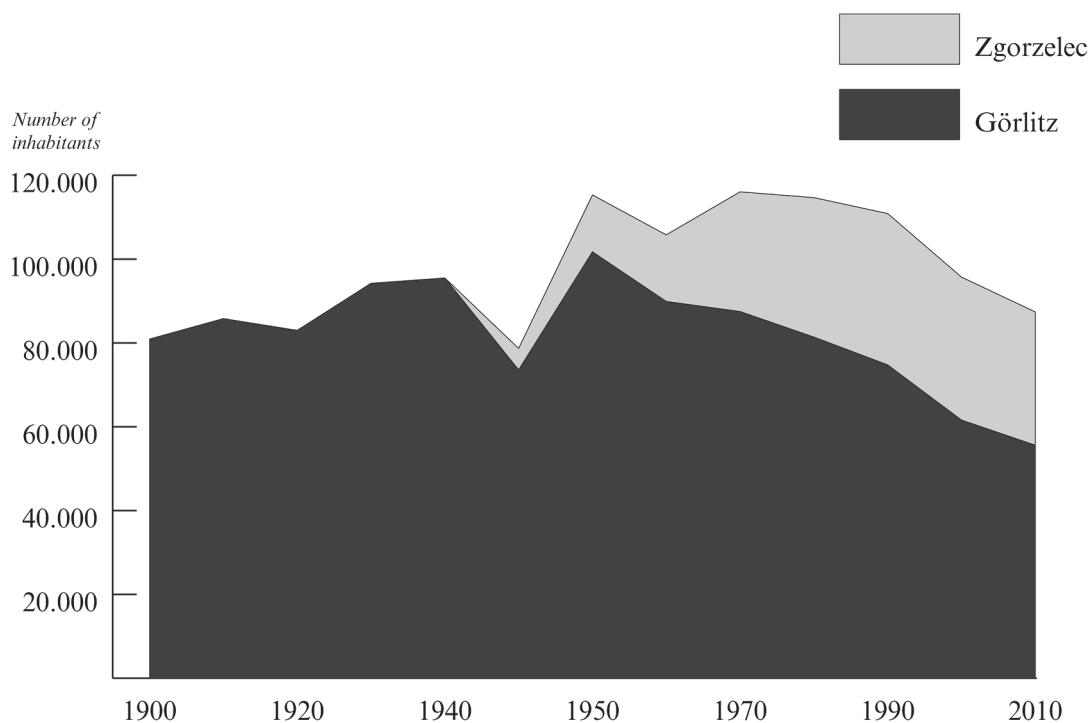


**Fig. 4.** Population development of Görlitz and Zgorzelec until 2010

*Source:* Own compilation on the basis of statistical data for both towns and both countries from the respec-tive statistical offices

## 5. The spatial production of the 'European City Görlitz-Zgorzelec' from below

Starting from a diachronic perspective and the 'et-ymology of places', this chapter presents my main

research results regarding the production of a tran-snational, pluralistic community through repre-sentations of space, spatial practices and spaces of representation.

## 5.1. The etymology of places

Both political and civil society activists emphasise the nexus between past, present and future. It is connected to the actual production of space, as 'time and space are not separable' (Lefebvre, 1991: 118) and historical space with its connections and interferences is always part of current space (Schmid, 2005: 247). Wóycicki (2012: 7) points out that local history is more than just a mere reflection of national history, especially in the case of Görlitz and Zgorzelec, where national history has had an enormous impact on both cities, but has also been subverted or perpetuated at turning points in local history. Therefore, Pfeiffer and Opiłowska (2006: 52) state that the political vision of becoming a European City cannot become true until

joint work on the recent history of both towns is done. The exhibitions 'Sie waren Helden 1945-1989' ('They were Heroes 1945-1989') in *Miejski Dom Kultury* (municipal cultural centre) in Zgorzelec in 2012/13 and 'Lebenswege ins Ungewisse' ('Life Journeys into Uncertainty') in the Silesian Museum in Görlitz in 2011/12 are the first steps towards a dialogue. Especially the work of Meetingpoint Music Messiaen, a cross-border project with offices in both towns, which aims to develop an international meeting centre on the ground of the former *StaLag VIIIa* in Zgorzelec-Ujazd (Fig. 5), has to be mentioned. Such projects contribute to the slowly increasing attempts at dealing with these undoubtedly incisive and important chapters of history by organising work camps, workshops, lectures and meetings with pupils from both towns and from all over Europe.



**Fig. 5.** StaLag VIIIa in Zgorzelec-Ujazd

*Source:* Own photo

In everyday life, history becomes important either when it is used to interpret current events or when it is unavailable as a source for understand-

ing the present. As a member of Meetingpoint Music Messiaen explains: 'I'm often asked: "why are the houses here at the border so dirty, why don't they

*renovate them properly, why are these houses all dilapidated?" – Well, just because people here didn't feel responsible for these houses. For a long time they believed that they would have to go again.'* (1). A member of the Silesian Museum, who also organises well-attended excursions to Zgorzelec for German people, states that most people in Görlitz do have gaps in the knowledge about Zgorzelec's past and present. Moreover, a member of Görlitz's zoo, which was built during the times of the GDR, reports that some people in Görlitz feel uncomfortable with the new bilingual self-description *'Unser Zoo – Nasze Zoo'* (our zoo), arguing that it was built after the separation and therefore it is a solely German achievement, neglecting the history of Zgorzelec. Additionally, a lot of people in Görlitz still talk about the *Oberlausitzer Ruhmeshalle* (Upper Lusitanian Pantheon), although the building became the culture house of Zgorzelec (*Miejski Dom Kultury*) after 1945.

In contrast, older history, especially of Görlitz in the late Middle Ages, can be considered as well researched and is progressively acquired by political and civil actors in Zgorzelec. After years of propaganda about the essentially Polish 'regained territories' (*Ziemie Odzyskane*) opening up cannot be taken for granted, whereas older history seems to be less conflictual and is nowadays a linking element across the Neisse. The case of Görlitz-born theosoph Jakob Böhme shows this very well: his birth house on the Daszyńskiego Street now contains a museum, the city festival of Zgorzelec is called '*Jakubifest*', a memorial has been placed at the intersection of Stefana Okrzei Street and Bohaterów Getta Street and the pub '*Przy Jakubie*' takes his name from Böhme. Furthermore, a new street in Zgorzelec is named after Scultetus, an astronomer who also lived in Görlitz, and there is an on-going historicised reconstruction of the *plac postowa/Postplatz* (Postal Square) and the Posting Milestone (*Postmeilendistanzsäule*) next to the Old Town Bridge.

## 5.2. Representations of space

Representations of space are understood as the conceived space of planning and science, but also of maps and visions, which become relevant for spatial planning and everyday life. Although visions of increasing cross-border interaction look very similar on paper, there is a gap between the 'symbolic universe' (Matthiesen, Bürkner, 2001) of local politics' 'European City', and the active civil society, who criticise the mere production of European symbols.

Answering the question of what 'European City' actually means requires archival work, although the term is frequently used by local politicians and the city marketing office of Görlitz (*Europastadt Görlitz-Zgorzelec GmbH*). Following the proclamation of a 'European City' in 1998, one can find an interesting note in the *Ratsarchiv* of Görlitz: 'the European City resulted from the consequences of historical changes and the consequences on the Polish and German citizens, following the fact of a common cultural area and as a result of common solutions for the different problems in the fields of culture, education, economy and local politics' (Ratsarchiv Görlitz). Although there have already been concepts and visions, such as 'Stadt/Miasto 2030' (City 2030) at the beginning of the 21st century, the phrase 'European City' is almost solely used on the Görlitz side of the Neisse river, having become a catch phrase without new ideas and actions by local politicians and city planning in Görlitz. Görlitz's former mayor for cultural affairs, Ulf Großmann (1990-2008), provides an unambiguous analysis of the last 5 years of local politics in Görlitz, which is in sharp contrast to the eager production of 'European signs': '*It's absolutely clear that nothing will change until you cope with the arising challenges and opportunities. And for the moment we have a completely destructive and absolutely incomprehensible strategy. Well, you cannot even speak of a "strategy". […] That is what I said: The danger of normality. Yes, now everything is free and open and everyone can do everything or does not do it. And local politicians do not take on their political mandate and creative mission. They do not use the chances, which derive from the new border situation. The communication between Görlitz and Zgorzelec has almost hit rock bottom. […] Unfortunately, this seems to be a clear policy stance of Görlitz towards the Polish: "we are not interested." And the Polish do notice this stance and begin to block communications and interactions. Completely normal. They say: "Well, if they do not see a need for cross-border co-operation, then we simply do not do it."'* (2). During his analysis he also reflected on the

asymmetrical power relations within Polish-German cross-border management, often giving the Polish partners a more passive and defensive role.

Following Großmann's critique and despite broad general agreement on core thoughts of the European City vision, people in Görlitz and (more reserved) in Zgorzelec point out that it is '*not always puppies and kittens, it just sounds good and often has nice logos*' (3), harshly rejecting symbolic politics, which are not connected to real political actions. Some even note that reducing the 'European City' to its symbolic value evokes memories of the 'socialist sister state' discourse. However, initiatives like Meetingpoint Music Messiaen e.V. underline the importance and the processual character of learning to lead a harmonious, equitable coexistence and to undertake cross-border co-operation between members of three different national states, which could be meaningfully linked to the visions discussed in the context of the 'European City' proclamation. When asked about the typical shortcomings of informal cross-border co-operation people often point to the lack of political framework and political interest, and to funding problems: '*Contacts between Görlitz and Zgorzelec arise from below, but unfortunately there is no roof over these attempts. The city of Görlitz is not really interested in cross-border contacts. But we do need co-ordination, financial support and so on.*' (4).

Many self-critical people in Görlitz admit that there is also a lack of co-ordination between the initiatives in Görlitz and that the joint planning efforts between Polish and German partners often contain asymmetrical power relations with the Germans planning and then asking partners in Zgorzelec to just join in. However, organisers of initiatives in Zgorzelec are aware of this asymmetry, but do not think that it is wrong in principle, as they still have to learn how to use the new EU-related instruments due to the later accession to the EU.

## 5.3. Spatial practice

Because of the goal of creating a cross-border civil society, spatial representations of the 'European City' can only be produced through spatial practice, with the body being the producer of space and at the same time the medium of spatial experience

(Schmid, 2005: 213). According to Mirwaldt (2010), an improvement of cross-border relations between citizens can be achieved through quantitative and qualitative intensification of encounters and interactions between both groups.

'*It is pretty normal that Polish people are in Görlitz. Nobody thinks that it is strange. And there are a lot of Germans who come here. […] I know it is as normal for us as I feel when I go to Görlitz. It is normal to hear German language on the streets or in the shops. Nobody thinks that it is something bad, or something strange. We are getting used to each other. It is good. I know that it was not like that before.*' (5).

In a qualitative view, Buursink (2001: 10) distinguishes between biculturalist consumers, who make regular border crossings for shopping or work, and biculturalist citizens, who participate in social life on both sides of the border. Confirming Dołzbłasz and Raczyk's (2011) case study, the majority of cross-border interactions come from the field of consumer behaviour, like in many other border towns, providing low-threshold access for loose encounters framed by consumption routines and more extensive consumer facilitations (acceptance of the Euro, bilingual signs, etc.) on the Polish side. Despite popular beliefs and prejudices, this distribution is contradictory to the actual consumer potential (Donat et al., 2012). It is often stated that more than Poland's accession to the EU, the joint application for Europe's capital of culture by Görlitz and Zgorzelec has supported the development of wider and more substantial initiatives in the field of culture, leisure and education, which create spaces of common experience and provide intermediary positions between both towns. In contrast to the field of consumption, initiatives and offerings of cross-border-orientated cultural and social activities are mostly located in Görlitz. Although there is a general approval of these offers, using them is limited to a small group of open-minded, often better situated, slowly growing (upper) middle class in Görlitz, whereas it is a far less socially selective matter for people from Zgorzelec. Going to the theatre and zoo on the other side of the border, and sending their children to bilingual classes has become a more normal part of life for people from Zgorzelec.

With the opening of a new motorway bridge in order to avoid transit traffic in the city, the opening of the Old town bridge (Fig. 1), whose infra-

structural function is highlighted by citizens, in contrast to the symbolic function stressed by politicians, and the removal of border controls, there are no longer visible obstacles for cross-border interactions. Instead, the lack of knowledge of the respective other language is unanimously described as the biggest and most durable barrier between Görlitz and Zgorzelec. Although it is now possible to learn the respective other language at all levels of the educational system, almost all people agree that reducing the language barrier will be a long-term ambition across generations. The same applies to filling knowledge gaps, comprehending differences in mentality, reducing prejudices and building confidence between actors from both sides of the Neisse. These mental borders are invisible, but they do shape cross-border relations and spatial practice.

*'The biggest problem is the language. The language barrier, it is obvious. Shopping works out fine, that is normality today, but different mentalities do remain. Especially amongst elderly people, but also amongst other groups. That is really hard to change.'* (6)

## 5.4. Spaces of representation

Spaces of representation are closely linked to collective experiences and imaginations and are in-

separable from social practice (Schmid, 2005: 222). Narrations connected to the production of the European City show the dominance of certain narrative clusters and of the question of sovereignty of spatial interpretation. Narrations about Görlitz and Zgorzelec becoming 'one city' can be found in various contexts in dialogue with German interviewees, but are seldom expressed by people from Zgorzelec. The difference can be explained by the fact that this vision is often justified with an integrity-metaphor of Görlitz before 1945, but it ignores Zgorzelec as an independent town with its own history since 1945. It is almost the same with narrations about the Silesian identity of Görlitz, which only applies to the decreasing number of refugees from this area after the Second World War, but is irrelevant for people from Zgorzelec, who more often describe themselves as people from Upper Lusatia. A large information board welcomes people with the sign 'Welcome to the Lower Silesian European City Görlitz-Zgorzelec' at the border crossing on the German side (Fig. 6). Paradoxically, you have to leave Zgorzelec, in order to see this information board welcoming you in the European City of Görlitz-Zgorzelec. Therefore, it reveals in an exemplary manner the contradictions within both narrations, which cannot be considered to be significant linking elements.



**Fig. 6.** A forest of signs, including an information board next to the border crossing paradoxically welcoming people to Görlitz-Zgorzelec after leaving Zgorzelec

*Source:* Own photo

Instead, the loss and creation of 'home' is a common narrative cluster and experience across generations on both sides of the river, although it has gained far less attention of local politicians, it is not explicitly connected to representations of the European City and it is mostly discussed separately on each side. 'Linked to very real physical and material consequences' (Doevenspeck, 2011: 140), the loss of homes resulted from the historic ruptures in 1945 and 1990, whereas the new regained freedom after 1990 made it possible to produce new homes and at the same time forced people to leave the new homes due to the loss of jobs caused by transformation processes. Statements about losing a home and creating a new one are omnipresent in interviews and even in daily life. In part, this is connected with the aim of providing a perspective for the young: '*Well, young people between thirteen and sixteen years might be a bit lethargic sometimes, but that cannot be an excuse for not offering and developing perspectives for them. That has to be our motivation. Otherwise they will leave and go elsewhere.*' (7).

In that context Görlitz's picturesque townscape is an integrative element for people both from Görlitz and Zgorzelec, with the latter more and more identifying with both cities.

'*A lot of money comes from the European Union, but I think our country is also changing. Not only here in Zgorzelec. It is still developing and if someone would come back after a few years, he would see a huge difference.*' (8). In the local context, talking about possibilities predominates over the symbolic meaning of European integration often emphasised by politicians. Although the European Union is mostly mentioned in a financial context, the idea of European Integration 'is equally or maybe even more important as a driver of cross-border cooperation than European funds' (Leibenath et al., 2008b: 188). This becomes clear when talking to people from Zgorzelec. For them, Poland's accession to the EU did not only mean open borders and access to funding programmes, but also strengthened the citizens' sense of belonging to the European Union and made them feel more equal to their German partners.

## 6. Conclusions

'*And the open border in general. It was not like that six years ago. I do know this very well. When I was a child it was totally different: going to the border, traffic congestion, showing your passport, crossing the border. Children today do not have this experience. And a child, who grows up today and only knows the open border, will think differently. They will not go to the border and see policemen, who control everything before allowing you to cross the bridge. That is why I think there is a chance of positive development for cross-border interaction within the next twenty years.*' (9)

Covering a range of significant examples by using a qualitative micro-level Lefebvre-inspired approach, this paper gives insight to a wide spectrum of issues and topics concerning the efforts of the production of a cross-border civil society. Undoubtedly, there are numerous local initiatives, institutions and active citizens '*filling the house of the "European city" with life and building it up from below*' (10), confirming scholars like Johnson et al. (2011), who attribute a rising influence on 'borderwork' (Rumford, 2008) to these actors. It would be naïve, however, to think that they represent the everyday life of all citizens in Görlitz and Zgorzelec, although the BMVBS (German Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development) considers them as 'seismographs, who show initial signs of change' in the border area and for the whole of Europe. Although after Poland's accession to the Schengen Agreement visible barriers like border controls have been reduced and transgression is becoming the new rule, the national border still seems to remain as a major dividing line often mentioned as a currency frontier, a border of prosperity, an economic frontier, a language barrier and a cultural border, which are at the same time de-bordered and re-bordered.

Some of these dividing lines, like the currency frontier, different tax and jurisdiction, lacking mutual recognition of professional qualifications and different postal service, directly influence daily life at the border, but can only be negotiated on a national or supranational level. Considering the ongoing process of European Integration on the (supra) national level and considering positive scenarios

like the cosmopolitan one described by Beck (2009: 616), it should be expected that these administrative, political and economic differences probably will diminish within the next years. At present, these problems lead to local solutions like the acceptance of foreign currency, the utilisation of the reciprocal mobile telephone network across the border, or the usage of the designation 'cross-border fire brigade show act' instead of 'cross-border fire drill', as the latter was forbidden by Germany's foreign ministry. These informal solutions have become a normal part of daily life in both cities and erode the border as a dividing line from below. However, 'the opening of borders does not, automatically, result in the hybridization of ethnic and national identity' (Newman, 2006b: 147). Although it is now possible to learn the (respective) other language at all levels of education, the reduction of the language barrier, which has been often mentioned in interviews and in literature as the most important barrier (Matthiesen, Bürkner, 2001; Dołzbłasz, Raczyk, 2011), will be a long-term project across generations. The same applies to building mutual trust, tackling stereotypes, understanding different mentalities and closing knowledge gaps, which are goals best achieved through direct interactions and encounters of citizens. The different degrees in both participation and planning of cross-border interactions among social and national groups show that attempts of deconstructing the territorial border are also linked to the (re-)construction of social borders.

Using a broad understanding of 'the border' as a socially constructed and 'natural' part of daily life can enrich border studies, as well as more traditional approaches of regional geography near national borders. Combining this understanding with the micro-level of spatial activity provides insight to a series of essential problems, which are blurred or even invisible from a distance, and shows national and supranational geopolitics at work, as well as their perpetuation and subversion. Arguing from the perspective of my own research and previous contributions on the Polish-German border and on Görlitz-Zgorzelec in particular, there is still a considerable amount of open questions and challenges for further research. Research desiderata reach from more detailed case studies on individual projects to bicultural research groups, and from a comparative perspective on the three divided cities to a less de-

veloped view on the rest of the border in the more rural areas. Furthermore, I do strongly agree with the proposal of Leibenath et al. (2008a): border studies should not only cross disciplinary borders, but should also establish a transdisciplinary dialogue with political, civil and economic actors, in order to pave the way for mutual learning and discussion across the national border and between researchers, application experts and stakeholders.

## Notes

(1) Interview with a German member of Meetingpoint Music Messiaen, 19.03.2012; in Görlitz at the office of the association.
(2) Interview with Ulf Großmann, former mayor of Görlitz for Cultural Affairs, 23.03.2012; in Markersdorf near Görlitz.
(3) Interview with a Polish man who lives in Görlitz, 27.03.2012; in Görlitz.
(4) Statement during a conversation with German people of the refugee-generation during an event at the Silesian Museum Görlitz, 07.03.2012.
(5) Interview with a member of Euroopera and the Lusatian Museum, 21.03.2012; in Zgorzelec at her office.
(6) Interview with a Polish teacher, 30.03.2012; after her class in Zgorzelec.
(7) Interview with a Polish teacher, 31.03.2012; during a planning workshop in Zgorzelec.
(8) Interview with a member of Euroopera and the Lusatian Museum, 21.03.2012; in Zgorzelec at her office.
(9) Interview with an adolescent from Görlitz, 27.03.2012; during a car drive and a walk in Görlitz.
(10) Interview with a man from Görlitz, who is active in multilateral youth exchange, 26.03.2012; at his house in Görlitz.

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