

CROSS-BORDER CONTACTS AND COOPERATION BETWEEN POPULATION OF LATVIA, ESTONIA AND RUSSIA: A CASE OF ALUKSNE REGION

Santa Daume¹, Mg.sc.soc; Aija Zobena², Dr.sc.soc., professor

^{1, 2} University of Latvia

Abstract. The main focus of this paper is on cross-border contacts and cooperation within Latvia – Estonia – Russia border area from the perspective of population of Aluksne region in Latvia. Aim of this research paper is to make conclusions about local populations' of Aluksne region closeness of contacts with cross-border population. It is achieved by analysing inhabitants' cross-border mobility and processes related to that. To make empirical results, survey with 200 inhabitants of Aluksne region was conducted in December 2016. Main findings point out the role of mobility and cross-border contacts in forming social reality of an individual, describe differences between frequency and reasons of border crossing of Estonia and Russia, as well as confirm the role of place of residence in the border area as an important factor for border crossing.

Key words: cross-border contacts, cross-border cooperation, cross-border mobility, Latvia-Estonia-Russia border area, Aluksne region.

JEL code: R58

Introduction

A variety of sociological theories and territories development approaches include in their analysis such theoretical and practical social concepts, associal networks, social interaction, experience exchange, social learning, social capital and other related to maintaining contacts and forming cooperation at individual, groups or institutional level. This leads to think that social contacts is one of the key concepts, which can promote explanation of more complex social processes, including the ones related to cross-border mobility and cooperation.

Because of open borders policy of the European Union (EU) and other global processes, a lot of authors analyse labour mobility (Williams A. M., Balaz V., & Wallace C., 2004; Andrijasevic R., Sacchetto D., 2016; Hardy J., Calveley M., & Kubisa J., 2015; Hardy J., 2015; Oettl A., Agrawal A, 2008), which is related to several economic factors – employment, salary, appropriate work position etc. However, mobility is a complex process with a lot of possible dimensions and forms of expression (Williams A. M., 2009). Border crossing can be related to a variety of reasons if living in a border area – to entertainment, cognitive (for example, sightseeing, exploring new cultures etc.) or functional (for example, shopping, receiving services, employment, education etc.) reasons.

The aim of this research paper is to make conclusions about local populations' of Aluksne region closeness of contacts with cross-border population. It will be achieved by analysing inhabitants' cross-border mobility and processes related to that.

Population of Aluksne region in Latvia, which directly borders with both – Estonia (the EU internal border) and Russia (the EU external border) was chosen as a case for this study. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were raised.

- H1: Population of Aluksne region has more frequent contacts and cooperation with Estonia and its population than with Russia and its population.
- H2: Population of Aluksne region has more frequent superficial contacts than intentional cooperation with population of Estonia.
- H3: Population of Aluksne region has more frequent superficial contacts than intentional cooperation with population of Russia.

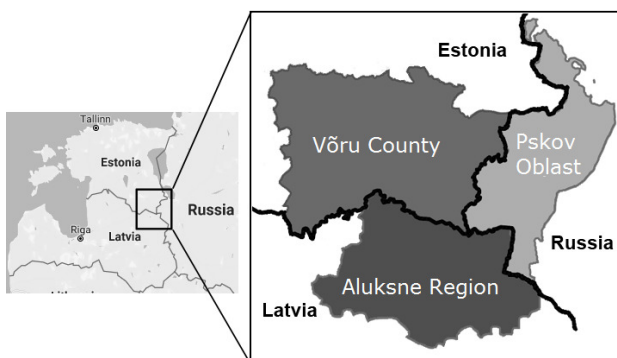
Two types of social contacts can be found when talking about cross-border mobility – first, contacts which are being formed because of mobility or during it as a result; second, contacts which are pre-existing and may lead to decide in favour of mobility. Within frame of this research paper, we define social contacts and cooperation based on their closeness: (a) superficial contacts without personal, close communication (randomly

met individuals in public places, because of visiting other country etc.) and (b) intentional contacts with purposeful cooperation and with maintaining social ties (cooperation projects, fellowship, friendship, kinship etc.).

Research results and discussion

1) The Case Study

In this article we analyse cross-border mobility, existence of cross-border social contacts and cooperation of population of Aluksne region in Latvia. The region borders directly with Estonia (the EU internal border) and with Russia (the EU external border) (Fig. 1), it has an area of 1698 km². Based on the data of Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, population of 15 381 was registered in Aluksne region in 2016. Population of the region has decreased for more than seven thousand people from 1990, and population is still decreasing for 300 to 500 hundred people each year starting from 2010 (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2016). The region is located in a peripheral territory of the country around 200 km from the capital city of Latvia. These characteristics make Aluksne region as one of the typical cases of rural regions of Latvia nowadays. Within context of regional development, this context encourages to reconsider and analyse resources and options of potential development of the region. Mobility of population can be considered as one of forms of cooperation, thereby it cannot be ignored when looking for potential options of development of the region.



Source: author's created image.

Fig. 1. Studied area

To make conclusions about closeness of cross-border contacts and frequency of cooperation, a

survey with population of Aluksne region was conducted in December 2016. In total, 200 fully completed questionnaires were obtained using online and F2F interviewing. The sample is not representative, however, all age groups are represented starting from 15 years old – 31 % of respondents aged 15 to 34, 38 % - aged 35 to 54, 31 % - 55 years old or older. The sample consists of 81 % female and 19 % male, 93 % are of the Latvian nationality, 7 % - other (mostly Russian) nationalities. In the sample, the whole territory of Aluksne region, including Aluksne city (53 %) and all 15 parishes forming the region, is represented.

2) Cross-border Mobility, Contacts and Cooperation

Over the past decade, mobility studies in social sciences have shaped a new paradigm because of an interdisciplinary approach. The new field of studies includes research on geographical mobility of humans, non-humans and objects, flows of exchange of information and capital, infrastructure and other physical means for travelling and communication. The new interdisciplinary approach combines deeply sociological concepts and field of interest with concerns of research of geographers, anthropologists and communication scientists (Sheller M., 2014).

When analysing cross-border mobility, it is possible to discuss population flows across the border as a physical movement to another country, yet formation and existence of social ties, which can be both the cause as well as consequences of cross-border mobility, cannot be ignored. International mobility not only helps improve financial situation of the individual and makes profit, but it also has an important role in transferring knowledge and skills. This process can include complex routes, regular or circular migration as well as short-term migration (King R., 2002).

International mobility of inhabitants differs from other "factor mobilities" mainly because of

its socially and culturally constructed nature (Williams A. M., 2009). One of the ideas of social constructivism expresses a statement that social environment has an important role in creating knowledge because an individual creates his or her knowledge within social and cultural context (Berger T., Luckmann P., 1991; Talja S., Kimmo T., & Reijo S., 2005; Sporane B., 2010). Within this context, cross-border mobility helps to form unique social reality, which is influenced by social environment and culture of another country across the border.

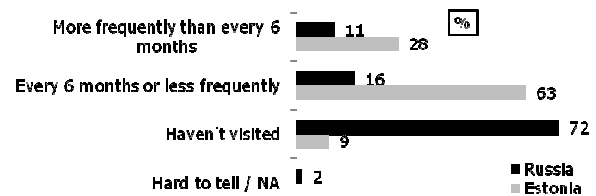
Cultural and social changes of nowadays Europe prove that mobility has an important role in everyday life of Europeans (Guereno-Omil B., Hannam K. & Alzua-Sorzabal A., 2014). Together with open border policy in the EU inhabitants' mobility has been promoted. Its aim is to transform borders of national states "from barriers into places of communication" (Prokkola E. K., 2007). However, professor of politics and international relations Chris Rumford points out that influence of borders on inhabitants of Europe is not clear (Rumford C., 2006).

To examine hypotheses of the research paper, we analyse both types of social contacts – superficial as well as intentional contacts and cooperation with inhabitants of Estonia and Russia. In addition, we analyse the most frequent destinations of inhabitants, when visiting Estonia and Russia, to examine cross-border migration flows of inhabitants.

3) Findings of Empirical Research in Aluksne Region

Survey data show that respondents visit Estonia significantly more frequently than Russia – 72 % of all respondents have not visited Russia at all during the last three years, while only 9 % havenot visited Estonia during the same time (Fig. 2). If talking about regularity of visiting cross-border countries – respondents with more frequent regularity visit Estonia than Russia – almost one third (28 %) of respondents, who have visited Estonia at least once a year within

last three years, have done it more often than once in 6 months (at least twice in 6 months). For comparison – only 11 % of respondents, who have visited Russia at least once a year within last three years, have visited Russia more often than once in 6 months. One of the main reasons of such differences is related to different EU internal and external borders policy, when inhabitants can freely cross Estonia's border, but special permission or visa is required to cross Russia's border. Our research leads to think that the EU internal border between Latvia and Estonia promotes international mobility between both countries.



n=200. Single answer question.

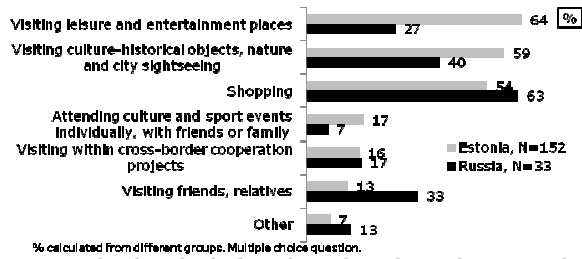
Source: author's calculations based on data of survey of inhabitants of Aluksne region.

Fig. 2. On average, how often have you visited Estonia / Russia within the last three years?

The main reasons to visit Estonia and Russia differ. Respondents visit Estonia to mostly attend leisure and entertainment places (64 %), while they visit Russia to mostly do shopping (63 %) (Fig. 3). Thereby, border crossing is also related to economic benefits – purchasing cheaper things closer to home. Most frequently inhabitants of Aluksne region purchase cheaper gas, alcohol, cigarettes and a variety of groceries in Estonia or Russia (Daume S., 2014).

It is important to note that for one third (33 %) of respondents, who visit Russia at least once a year, one of the main reasons to do that is because of visiting relatives or friends (Fig. 3). One of explanations of that can be found in more subtle breakdown by parishes of Aluksne region – majority of respondents, who visit Russia to meet relatives or friends, live in Pededze parish – it has a direct border with Russia and ~80 % of its population are Russians by ethnicity. Exactly population of this parish has the most frequent

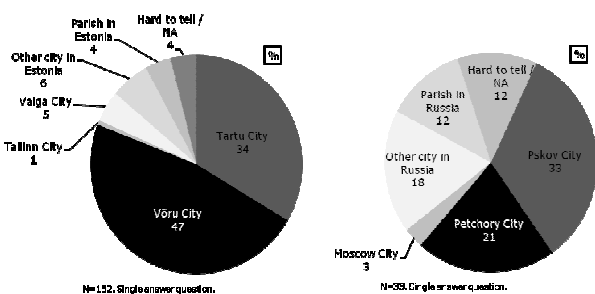
social ties with inhabitants of Russia both in terms of personal communication as well as with cross-border cooperation related projects (Daume S., 2014).



Source: author's calculations based on data of survey of inhabitants of Aluksne region.

Fig. 3. What are your most frequent reasons for visiting Estonia / Russia?

The most frequent destination of respondents in Estonia is the centre of neighbour Voru county – Voru City (47 %), which is located ~65 km from Aluksne city, the centre of Aluksne region. Voru city is the nearest Estonian city to Aluksne region. The second most frequently visited Estonian city is Tartu (34 %) –the second biggest city of Estonia, which is located ~140 km from Aluksne city. While the most frequent destination of respondents in Russia is Pskov city (33 %) – the centre of Pskov oblast located ~103 km from Aluksne city. In second place – Petchory city (21 %), which is located ~71 km from Aluksne city. It is important to note that regardless of the country, most frequently respondents visit the nearest local or national cities – which leads to an assumption that a distance from the border has an impact on choice of visiting border countries.

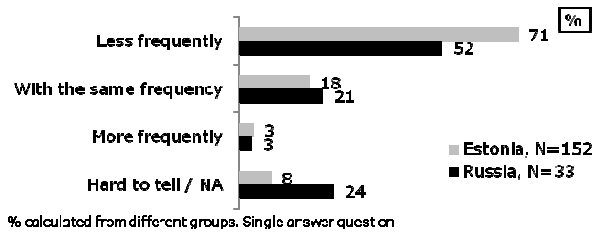


Source: author's calculations based on data of survey of inhabitants of Aluksne region.

Fig. 4. Which city / parish of Estonia / Russia do you visit most often?

Most part of respondents, who had visited both Estonia and/or Russia at least once a year

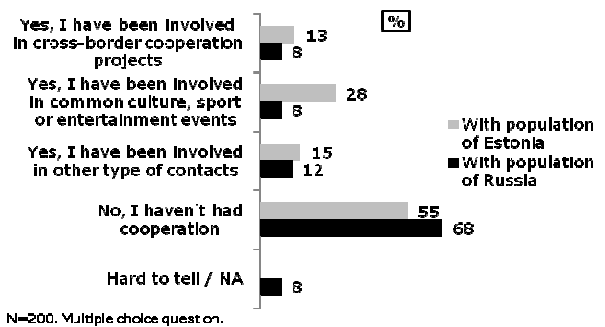
within last three years, answered negatively to the question: „In your opinion, would you visit Estonia / Russia with the same frequency if your place of residence was not in its border area?“ Accordingly, definitely or rather they'd visit a neighbour country less often (Fig. 5). Greater distance, longer time spent for driving and increase of means necessary in both cases were mentioned as main reasons for less often visits. Based on this data, we can confirm that the place of residence in border area influences the regularity of visiting neighbour countries.



Source: author's calculations based on data of survey of inhabitants of Aluksne region.

Fig. 5. In your opinion, would you visit Estonia / Russia with the same frequency if your place of residence was not in its border area?

Majority of respondents have not been involved in cooperation or intentional contacts with inhabitants of Estonia (55 %), nor with inhabitants of Russia (68 %) (Fig. 6).

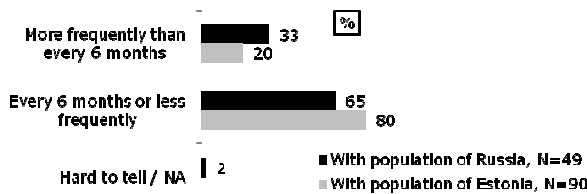


Source: author's calculations based on data of survey of inhabitants of Aluksne region.

Fig. 6. Have you been involved in any type of contacts with inhabitants of Estonia / Russia within the last three years?

If comparing results between visiting Estonia or Russia and cooperation with inhabitants of Estonia or Russia, authors conclude that respondents significantly more frequently have visited Estonia than they have had cooperation with inhabitants of Estonia. While regarding

Russia – frequency of visiting and cooperation is similar (26 % have visited Russia and 24 % have had cooperation). Even more interesting is the fact that respondents, who have had cooperation with inhabitants of Russia, have had it with more frequent regularity than those, who have had cooperation with inhabitants of Estonia (Fig. 7). Here also one of explanations could be different reasons of visiting each country.



% calculated from different groups. Single answer question.
Source: author's calculations based on data of survey of inhabitants of Aluksne region.

Fig. 7. On average, how often have you cooperated with inhabitants of Estonia/ Russia within the last three years?

Significantly more frequently respondents have been involved in common culture, sport or entertainment events with inhabitants of Estonia (28 %) than with inhabitants of Russia (8 %). A negligible proportion of respondents have been involved in cross-border cooperation projects – 13 % of all respondents have been involved in cross-border cooperation projects with inhabitants of Estonia, 8 % - with inhabitants of Russia (Fig. 6). Regarding other type of contacts, most frequently respondents mentioned communication and meetings with relatives and friends or on business purposes. Survey data did not reveal cooperation regarding receiving services (for example, medical services or education).

Conclusions

1) The role of cross-border contacts in forming social reality of the individual can be determined based on theoretical ideas of social constructivism and mobility. It can take a form of direct impact on the individuals' life (for example, easing everyday life, improving financial situation, doing shopping etc.) or

of indirect impact (for example, forming view of life through gaining knowledge and experience about another culture etc.). Empirically deeper analysis would be required to identify specific fields of life, how and where this impact takes place in everyday life. However, analysis of cross-border mobility and closeness of contacts allows us to make primary assumptions and conclusions about the studied area, cross-border flows, reasons and regularity. This can be considered as a pre-condition or basis of cross-border mobility's influence on forming social reality of the individual.

- 2) More frequently respondents have visited Estonia than Russia, as well as they have done it with more frequent regularity during the last three years. In general, they have also had more frequent cooperation with inhabitants of Estonia (cross-border projects, common culture, sport and other events or other occasions) than with inhabitants of Russia. We can conclude that the first hypothesis – population of Aluksne region has more frequent contacts and cooperation with Estonia and its population than with Russia and its population – has been proved.
- 3) Majority (91 %) of respondents have visited Estonia at least once during the last three years, while less than a half (45 %) of them have been involved in cooperation or intentional contacts with inhabitants of Estonia. We can conclude that the second hypothesis – population of Aluksne region has more frequent superficial contacts than intentional cooperation with population of Estonia – has also been proved.
- 4) Regarding closeness of contacts and cooperation with inhabitants of Russia – they are rather rare. Both frequency of visiting and frequency of cooperation are similar – only 27 % have visited Russia and only 28 % have been involved in cooperation or intentional contacts with population of Russia during the

last three years. Based on the results of this study, the third hypothesis – population of Aluksne region has more frequent superficial contacts than intentional cooperation with population of Russia – has not been proved. Nevertheless, authors conclude that a larger sample size would be required to make more persuasive conclusions.

- 5) Authors conclude that the place of residence in the border area is an important factor to visit cross-border countries. Mobility cannot be analysed only as geographical movements, but it is also important to be aware of its social aspect – mobility forms and promotes social and culture interaction, thereby either directly or indirectly affects inhabitants and their social world. Consequently, a location place in the border area can be considered as a specific factor within context of territories' development.

- 6) In the further work, authors recommend analysing the nature of cross-border contacts more in detail – for example, spread of personal contacts versus contacts of organizations or groups and its correlation with frequency of border crossing. As well as empirical study of Voru county in Estonia and Petchory region in Russia could be carried out to obtain a comprehensive picture of cross-border contacts and cooperation within Latvia-Estonia-Russia border area, not only from perspective of Latvia's side of the border, but also from perspective of the rest of two other countries.

Acknowledgements

This paper was funded by LU research project "public health, quality of life and sustainable nation" (lu reg.nr. zd2016/az117).

Bibliography

- Andrijasevic, R., Sacchetto, D. (2016). *From Labour Migration to Labour Mobility? The Return of the Multinational Worker in Europe*. Transfer, Vol. 22(2), pp.219–231. Retrieved: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1024258916635975>. Access: 12.01.2017.
- Berger, P., L., Luckamnn, T. (1991). *The Social Construction of Reality*. London: Penguin Books, p.249.
- Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2016). *ISG01.Area, Population Density and Resident Population by Statistical Region, City and County*. Retrieved: http://data.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/en/Sociala/Sociala__ikgad__iedz__iedzskaitis/IS0010.px/table/tableViewLayout2/?rxid=cdbc978c-22b0-416a-aacc-aa650d3e2ce0. Access: 05.01.2017.
- Daume, S. (2014). *Malenijas jauniesu interese par novada kulturu (Young Malenians Interest About Culture of the Region)*. Riga: Latvijas Zinatnu akademijas Vestis, Part A, No.3/4, pp.41.–60. Retrieved: [http://www.lza.lv/LZA_VestisA/68_3-4/3_Santa %20Daume %20Malenijas %20jauniesu %20interese.pdf](http://www.lza.lv/LZA_VestisA/68_3-4/3_Santa%20Daume%20Malenijas%20jauniesu%20interese.pdf). Access: 05.01.2017.
- Guereno-Omil, B., Hannam, K. & Alzua-Sorzabal, A. (2014). *Cross-border Leisure Mobility Styles in the Basque Eurocity*. Leisure Studies, 33:6, pp.547-564. Retrieved: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2013.833282>. Access: 09.01.2017.
- Hardy, J., Calveley, M., & Kubisa, J. (2015). *Labour Strategies, Cross-border Solidarity and the Mobility of Health Workers: Evidence from five New Member States*. European Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol. 21(4), pp.315–333. Retrieved: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0959680114553159>. Access: 12.01.2017.
- Hardy, J. (2015). *Explaining 'varieties of solidarity': labour mobility and trade unions in an enlarged Europe*. Transfer, Vol. 21(2), pp.187–200. Retrieved: <http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.utlib.ut.ee/doi/pdf/10.1177/1024258915573186>. Access: 12.01.2017.
- King, R. (2002). *Towards a New Map of European Migration*. International Journal of Population Geography 8 (2): 89–106. Retrieved: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ijpg.246/pdf>. Access: 12.01.2017.
- Oetli, A., Agrawal, A. (2008). *International Labor Mobility and Knowledge Flow Externalities*. Journal of International Business Studies, Vol. 39, No. 8, pp.1242-1260, Retrieved: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25483344>. Access: 12.01.2017.
- Prokkola, E. K. (2007). Cross-border Regionalization and Tourism Development at the Swedish-Finnish border: "Destination Arctic Circle". *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol.7, Issue 2, pp.120–138.
- Rumford, C. (2006). *Theorising borders*. European Journal of Social Theory, 9 (2), pp.155–169. Retrieved: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1368431006063330>. Access: 12.01.2017.
- Sheller, M. (2014). *The New Mobilities Paradigm for a Live Sociology*. Current Sociology Review 2014, Vol. 62(6), pp.789–811. Retrieved: <http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.utlib.ut.ee/doi/pdf/10.1177/0011392114533211>. Access: 12.01.2017.
- Sporane, B. (2010). *Nacionala identitate & komunikacija*. Manuskripti: Nacionala identitate un atminas institucijas (National Identity & Communication. Working Papers. National Identity and Memory Institutions). Valsts pētījumu

programma "Nacionālā identitāte", p.29. Retrieved: http://identitate.lnb.lv/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Working-papers_sporane.pdf. Access: 12.01.2017.

14. Talja, S., Kimmo, T., & Reijo, S. (2005). *"Isms" in information science: constructivism, collectivism and constructionism*. Journal of Documentation. Vol. 61, No. 1, p. 82. Retrieved: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?issn=0022-0418&volume=61&issue=1>. Access: 11.01.2017.
15. Williams A. M. (2009). *International Migration, Uneven Regional Development and Polarization*. European Urban and Regional Studies, 16(3), pp.309–322. Retrieved: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0969776409104695>. Access: 11.01.2017.
16. Williams, A. M., Balaz, V., & Wallace, C. (2004). *International Labour Mobility and Uneven Regional Development in Europe: Human Capital, Knowledge and Entrepreneurship*. European Urban and Regional Studies, 11(1), pp.27–46. Retrieved: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0969776404039140>. Access: 12.01.2017.