# The Dynamics of Unfamiliarity in the German-Polish Border Region in 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s

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Unfamiliarity indicates the feeling of strangeness that results from not having knowledge or experience of someone or something. The term "unfamiliarity," in a personal and spatial context, is best understood by looking at the interdependent relationship between two counterparts, such as the familiar and the unfamiliar, the insider and the outsider, us and them, or the acquaintance and the stranger. Something that is familiar to one person might be unfamiliar to another. Moreover, in one place the person might be regarded as an insider or observer, whereas in another, unfamiliar, setting, the same person becomes an outsider or stranger, a person being observed. Subsequently, unfamiliarity may be experienced and dealt with in different ways. Bauman (1995: 132-135) distinguishes for example between two possible effects of strangeness in modern city life. On the one hand, experiences of mutual strangeness may offer a feeling of pleasure and excitement, and are welcomed as a passing positive experience; while on the other hand, differences between the familiar and the unfamiliar could be emphasized to such an extent that people regard the stranger as a threat. Given the contextual usage of the term, unfamiliarity and strangeness will be used interchangeably in this paper.

Bauman's distinction was intended to apply to the modern city as a heterogeneous space with its distinct areas and different types of inhabitants and strangers. The experience of strangeness is therefore likely to occur in situations involving mobility, which contrasts with the immobility of the other as a result of ties and locality (Simmel 1950). In other

words, strangeness appears when people move from one place to another, changing their status from insider or acquaintance familiar with their surroundings to one of outsider or stranger, new to and unfamiliar with the place of destination. Although strangeness is associated with mobility, it must be noted that in a state of immobility, feelings of unfamiliarity can also develop. In this case, there is no association or activity beyond the local space. The notion of unfamiliarity influences the mental image and may well become a factor of mobility.

Mobilities take place at different levels: for instance, at the local level, in a neighborhood, a city or between a city and a village, at the regional level, between two or more locations in different counties or provinces, or at the international level, between countries. Feelings of strangeness are especially intensified in cross-border regions as borders not only bring many different people together, but also "reflect our contending desires for sameness and difference, for a marker between 'us' and 'them'" (O'Dowd 2003: 14-15) as result of differences in cultures, histories, political ideologies, and economic and social systems.

In this contribution, I examine feelings of strangeness or unfamiliarity in relation to cross-border contacts and activities along the German-Polish border. Given the history of the German-Polish border, a high level of unfamiliarity among its inhabitants of the region is to be expected. Just after the Second World War, the allies agreed, under the pressure of the Soviet Union, to move the Polish territory westwards as a compensation for Poland's territorial losses to the Soviet Union. The Oder-Neisse border became a fact; however, the new border not only divided nations, it also divided cities built along the Oder and Neisse. As a result of forced migrations within Poland and across the border to Germany, towns along the redrawn border obtained completely new inhabitants with different national backgrounds. Most people had no local ties, let alone ties to the region and towns on the other side of the border. In addition, strict border regulations and policies prevented the new inhabitants from seeking cross-border contacts and becoming familiar with "the other side." The effects of the Oder-Neisse border are perhaps most visible in Frankfurt and Słubice, Guben and Gubin, and Görlitz and Zgorzelec, border cities and towns which were previously united within Germany (Buursink 2001).

Although East Germany and Poland were ideological partners of the Soviet Union for most of the period between 1945 and 1989, the German-Polish border was characterized as a closed border with little to no

cross-border interaction except for a short period of cross-border (labor) mobility in the 1970s. From 1989 onward, the German-Polish border region opened up, creating opportunities for cross-border contacts and interaction. As a result of different border policies, some cross-border contacts and activities occurred while others did not; in addition, some situations may have encouraged familiarization in the cross-border region while others discouraged familiarization. At the same time, as previously mentioned, unfamiliarity, which could be both felt and/or imagined, may also be a source of attraction, giving people an incentive to explore the other side of the border and causing them to interpret a closed border as a barrier. Hence, the main objective of this paper is to go give further insight into these the dynamics of (un)familiarity by discussing the different elements of this concept and placing it in the context of the different historical periods characterizing the German-Polish cross-border region from the 1970s through the 1990s.

## UNFAMILIARITY, STRANGENESS, AND OTHERNESS

Unfamiliarity, strangeness, and otherness are interrelated terms, which are occasionally used interchangeably or with a slightly different meaning, depending on the context. As previously mentioned, unfamiliarity indicates a feeling of strangeness that results from not having knowledge of or experience with for example a person, a place, or a situation. The difficulty in defining and placing strangeness and otherness is found in the different approaches to these terms. Stichweh (2004: 111) argues that a distinction needs to be made between the experience of strangeness and that of otherness. He regards otherness as a universal social experience that is a "precondition for my experiencing myself in contradistinction to the otherness of another human being." Strangeness, however, only occurs when the otherness of the other becomes irritating or disturbing. In other words, otherness leads to strangeness through the experience of annoyance or disturbance. Gurevitch (1988), on the other hand, sees the opposite relationship, stating that the experience of strangeness reduces assumptions of typicality and similarity, exposing the otherness of the other. In addition, otherness is triggered though a process of de-familiarization, of "making the other strange." This process of making the other strange is the result of an intentional cognitive action, an internal mental

event, or an external change; it changes one's perception of and connection to the other and even displaces people from the surroundings with which they were previously associated (Gurevitch 1988: 1190). Making the other strange: this possibility illustrates that, to a large degree, unfamiliarity is individually constructed. As Bauman (1995: 146) puts forward, the understanding and placement of the other takes place as a result of remembering, selecting, and processing memories of past encounters, contacts, exchanges, and relations with the other. In addition, assumptions about the other play a crucial role in people's attitudes towards the other. According to Schütz (1962: 15) we assume that people are "guided by certain relevance structures, expressing themselves in a set of constant motives leading to a particular pattern of action and even co-determining [...] personality". Accordingly, these assumptions influence behavior and attitudes when people are confronted with the other.

Strangeness and otherness reflect upon a reciprocal social relationship between the familiar and unfamiliar, the insider and the outsider, or the here and there. Although a stranger is regarded as an outsider or an external actor, he still influences the group by bringing "qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it" (Simmel 1950). Moreover, people not only assume their own role as a result of meeting the other, but also experience and perceive the other in different ways as a result of their own unique biographical situation (Schütz 1962: 11, 19). These distinctions between one and the other, the here and there, may be regarded as mental borders (van Houtum 1999; van Houtum/Strüver 2002) which "are invisible to the human eye but [...] nevertheless impact strongly on our daily life practices" (Newman 2006: 172).

There are different ways to deal with strangeness. Mostly in modern societies, the strangeness of strangers is either reduced to a point where differences become irrelevant, or the differences and unfamiliarities are accepted to a certain extent and moved to the background in people's daily interaction (Bauman 1995; Stichweh 2004). However, strangeness continues to be a constant factor in daily encounters; it is a normal everyday occurrence, called by Stichweh (2004) the "universalization of the stranger." Even when people do not seek the experience of otherness, they may be confronted with it, influencing "the meanings we give to others and to ourselves" (Gurevitch 1988: 1196). Consequently, strangeness and otherness are clearly two interlinked terms, both of which give meaning to ourselves and expose the otherness of the other.

## UNFAMILIARITY IN CROSS-BORDER REGIONS

Cross-border regions have considerable levels of unfamiliarity as a result of political, economic, social and cultural differences between the two sides of a border. As such, borders function as symbols of identity (O'Dowd 2003: 27). Identity formation takes place at various levels, from local to national, differing from region to region and from time to time. Shields (1991) describes this as social spatialization where people organize themselves territorially, allowing regionalism to become a central part of their identities. Paasi (2009), however, turns this concept around and introduces the term spatial socialization. Instead of territoriality leading to identity formation, the socialization of actors in a territorially bounded spatial entity takes place by means of collective territorial identities, narratives, traditions, and images. A process of spatial belonging takes place whereby "people express and perform to belong, to create (and defend) their 'own space,' to separate, to differentiate, and to demarcate" (van Houtum/van der Velde 2004: 104). Furthermore, differences between people and places in cross-border regions may be stronger, as "borderlands, as front lines between states, are places of high sensitivity and self awareness, in which the sense of identity and belonging to a special place is heightened" (Amstrong 2003: 165).

The presence of differences in a cross-border region, which often lead to feelings of unfamiliarity, does not necessarily have a negative influence on the attitudes and activities of the locals. Both push and pull factors and keep and repel factors play a role in the degree of changes in mobility (Lundberg 1980; Timothy/Butler 1995; van Houtum/van der Velde 2004; Spierings/van der Velde 2008; van der Velde/van Naerssen 2010; Ernste 2010). Push and pull factors influence the decision to move, in this case, across the border. Whereas push factors involve reasons that cause people to want to escape daily situations that are perceived as less attractive than elsewhere, pull factors reflect the perceived opportunities and benefits on the other side of the border (Spierings/van der Velde 2008: 501). Factors that activate border crossing are job opportunities, easy access to and favorable prices for goods and services, recognizable social and cultural contacts, and curiosity about new places and people. Keep and repel factors are those that reinforce the decision to stay, leading to immobility. Keep factors imply the feeling of comfort and satisfaction, a feeling of "socio-spatial belonging" (van Houtum/van der Velde 2004). People are

able to apply their skills and experiences professionally, have an acceptable standard of living, and are comfortable with cultural features like language and social norms in their daily lives. However, keep factors can also be strengthened as a result of external impositions such as the presence of a powerful nationalistic political ideology or strict border policies by one or the other country. Repel factors involve the attitude that "the other side" does not have anything additional to offer. In relation to cross-border mobilities, examples are to be found in the lack of opportunities and benefits as well as in strong political, economic, or cultural dissimilarities.

The level of familiarity and unfamiliarity between locals on either side of the border depends of several factors. These are identified as three core dimensions of unfamiliarity: personal attitudes, access to and selection of information, and experience.

First of all, *personal attitudes* affect feelings of (un)familiarity in the sense that a person might consider the other side of the border irrelevant as a result of indifference (Ernste 2010), indecision, unease, or lack of awareness. Feelings of comfort and satisfaction, i.e., a feeling of "socio-spatial belonging," also play a role (van Houtum/van der Velde 2004). However, people may also actively consider moving to the other side for functional reasons such as job opportunities or access to certain goods or cultural experiences; here, pull factors reflect the perceived opportunities and benefits at the other side of the border (Lundberg 1980; Timothy/Butler 1995; van Houtum/van der Velde 2004; Spierings/van der Velde 2008; van der Velde/van Naerssen 2010; Ernste 2010). Furthermore, people in a border region may be attracted by the desire to experience something new and unknown and thus regard the unfamiliar area as interesting and exciting (Bauman 1995; MacKay/Fesenmaier 1997).

*Knowledge*, in particular access to information, is identified as informational familiarity by Baloglu (2001) and Prentice (2004); it also influences the level of (un)familiarity. Facts and assumptions about the other side of the border are often based on both direct contacts and on indirect information from, for example, relatives, friends, and colleagues. Other sources are newspapers, television, schoolbooks, and official information. Depending on the openness of the border, the history of the border region and relations between neighboring countries, information flows may be interfered with by the government's use of propaganda to influence popular opinion.

The third, and last, dimension of unfamiliarity refers to *experiences*, meaning past experiences, taking into account that perceived images differ between first-time and repeat visits to a destination (Fakeye/Crompton 1991; Baloglu 2001; Lau/McKercher 2004; Prentice/Andersen 2007). In the context of a border region, experiences refer to active and passive contacts and experiences with people and places from across the border. These experiences can occur on either side and depend on the mobility of the individual or group. Furthermore, cross-border contacts could be discouraged or stimulated through previous experiences, border procedures, national policies, historical representations, and local memories.

Taking *personal attitudes, knowledge, and experiences* into account could yield new insight into people's (un)familiarity with people and places located across the border and their motives for crossing or not crossing the border. However, these dimensions are not definite; they are interrelated and influence one another. Furthermore, while familiarity may be high on one dimension, it may be low on another. For example, the daily cross-border commuter may work across the border but need not necessarily interact with the people there. Familiarization then becomes only partial and takes place at the workplace, but not with the locals or the town on the other side of the border. Hence, the decision to cross or not to cross a border also affects a person's (un)familiarity; over time it could change a person's attitudes, knowledge, and experience with regards to places and people located across the border.

## PARTITIONED CITIES AT THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDER

As previously discussed, differences between people from different nation-states are intensified in border regions. The awareness of dissimilarities in policies, economic structures, traditions, and languages is likely to become part of everyday practices, especially for people living in the divided cities along the Oder and Neisse. From a historical perspective, cross-border contacts and practices will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

## Discrepancies Between Two Neighboring Countries

Shortly after the Second World War, Polish policy makers implemented policies for nationalizing the Polish territories, in particular the former German territories in western Poland, to enhance Polish national identity and create a buffer against potential German aggression. Politicians and the media in Poland insisted on the integration of Poles into a cohesive and homogeneous society that represented a Polish national identity. As a result, the former German lands were referred to as "recovered territories" and part of "historical Poland," based on the fact that large numbers of Poles had lived under German rule, resisting German oppression while preserving their Polish identity (Kulczycki 2001: 205f.). In reality, the group of Poles that had lived under German rule was rather small. The largest group of inhabitants consisted of forced migrants from former eastern Poland, while other groups were Poles from central and southern Poland, Poles that had fled westwards during the Second World War, and (former) military personnel (Jajeśniak-Quast/Stokłosa 2000: 46ff.). At the same time, the Polish nationalization campaign included the expulsion of Germans. Subsequently, local communities on the German side of the border region not only had to adjust to a new state border but also had to cope with large migration flows of many expelled Germans. The demographic composition in the border regions on both sides of the border changed drastically.

As a result of the forced emigrations of Germans and the emphasis on the nationalization of Poles in these territories, differences between Germans and Poles were amplified, stressing the distinction between "us" and "them." Moreover, the use of the term "autochthon" or "native" for Polish inhabitants by Polish authorities to draw a contrast to the German inhabitants in the region led to a further division between the two nationalities. Germans subsequently were regarded as "alien intruders," not only in the border regions, but in the whole of Poland (Kulczycki 2001: 207).

Despite the territorial changes and national politics that followed the war period, the German Democratic Republic and Poland had both become part of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, and this context dominated the two countries' political relations. By signing the Treaty of Görlitz on 6 June 1950, stating that "the current, determined border is the irrevocable border of peace and friendship that does not separate but rather unites both peoples," the German-Polish border was officially ac-

cepted. The signing of the treaty was followed by a period of propaganda to promote popular acceptance of the two socialist nations. In contrast to the period shortly after the war, images of the other, of those across the border, were promoted with the intention of uniting, not dividing. Newspapers and politicians spoke of 'brother nations," while street names in the border cities were named after German and Polish socialist heroes (Jajeśniak-Quast/Stokłosa 2000: 65f.).

For the most part, however, the physical border remained closed and cross-border activities did not develop at any other than a political level, with occasional festive meetings at the bridges in the border towns to celebrate for instance international Labor Day (Gazeta Zielonogórska/ Neuer Tag, 1967). As a result of this political context, direct and indirect cross-border experiences were limited, and knowledge and information flows about the other side of the border were often controlled by the government and therefore colored and selective.

## Rapprochement and Estrangement Again

In the 1970s, inhabitants of the German-Polish border region experienced a period of open borders that had already started in 1956 when the Soviet Union handed over the control of the East German border to the East German government. Subsequently, many military and administrative restrictions were removed, contributing to a slow rapprochement between East Germany and Poland (Jajeśniak-Quast/Stokłosa 2000: 72). A period of increased cross-border activities followed in the 1970s, including the free exchange of goods, information, and people. Subsequently, common initiatives in sports, culture, and education were established between border cities like Frankfurt and Słubice, followed by cross-border labor mobility and the purchase of consumer goods. Furthermore, friendships were built across the border and the number of German-Polish intermarriages also increased (Chessa 2004: 81f.).

This first period of openness was characterized in particular by curiosity on both sides of the border. Previously, people could only see the river banks on the other side of the Oder or Neisse and imagine what the cities look like, but now they had the chance to experience the cities for themselves. This curiosity became an important pull factor to cross the border, mobilizing many people to visit the "unknown," "imagined," or "previously known" on other side of the border. As a result, cross-border

tourism, and especially cross-border consumption, increased significantly. Whereas Germans were interested in foodstuffs, Poles mainly bought manufactured goods and textiles. The border cities were not prepared for the large flows of people who ventured across the border. In the case of Słubice, it became clear that shortages in hotels, restaurants, milk, bread, and butter existed or were eminent, and the only petrol station in the town could not meet the increase in demand. In addition, in Frankfurt, restrictions were put in place to prevent Poles from buying products made of leather and housekeeping tools made for export purposes. Consequently, when the German-Polish border closed again in 1980, some shopkeepers were relieved (Jajeśniak-Quast/Stokłosa 2000: 84, 88). It seems that at a certain moment, initial feelings of pleasure and excitement towards people and places across the border were taken over by feelings of annoyance. The novelty of the new border situation had passed and people realized that this was not a passing experience without lasting responsibilities but was rather becoming a permanent part of daily lives in the border cities.

As a result of the official recognition of the Solidarity movement by the Polish government, the East German government wanted to prevent a spill-over of anti-socialist ideas and decided to close the German-Polish border. In contrast to the 1970s, the last decade of socialist East Germany and Poland saw little cross-border cooperation and movement (Chessa 2004: 82).

## Local Unity in a European Entity?

After the fall of communism, the road toward a transnational German-Polish border region seemed open again, especially in the context of EU enlargement. Germany was one of the main proponents of Poland's entry to the European Union. In the 1990s, the German-Polish Euroregion Pro Europe Viadrina came into being, and the two border cities, Guben and Gubin, signed an agreement of cooperation, announcing the establishment of the Euro city Guben/Gubin. The establishment of a German-Polish university subsequently took cross-border cooperation between Germany and Poland to a higher level. Established in 1993, and formalized in a governmental agreement between the German state of Brandenburg and the Polish national government in 2002, the cross-border university Collegium Polonicum is a joint venture of the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt and the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The Col-

legium Polonicum does not advocate homogenization and assimilation but emphasizes the "acceptance of diversity and its use as a potential for creativity" (Fichter-Wolf/Knorr-Siedow 2009: 15, 18).

Despite these isolated developments, the motivation to extend European integration to the German-Polish border region has had limited reach. For the most part, it could be argued that the road towards EU enlargement turned out to be mainly a political project, putting institutional and administrative structures into place without considering cross-border integration at the level of local everyday life (Dürrschmidt 2006: 259).

In the 1990s, both the former East Germany and Poland fell into different modes of economic transformation. The East German border region underwent extensive de-industrialization, resulting in the closing of many factories and a high unemployment rate. The Polish side, on the other hand, experienced a relatively stable transformation of its economic structures with a decline in industrial employment but an increase of jobs in the private sector generally (Krätke 1999: 633f.). Economic initiatives did not necessarily focus on common economic interests in the German-Polish cross-border region. For example, Germany's privatization policy included a strong orientation toward western Germany, ignoring the opportunities of low wages across the border. In general, only a small number of firms with foreign capital settled in the Polish border region (Krätke 1999: 634). Moreover, Matthiesen/Bürkner (2001: 45) perceive a "peripheralization of the immediate border zone," implying that German-Polish cooperation did not concentrate on the immediate border region but that new trade and service centers grew in nearby urban areas such as Berlin, Szczecin, Poznan, and Wroclaw. Immediate border cities seem to have been bypassed by regional cross-border initiatives, which may also have something to do with attitudes and practices of German and Polish locals in the cross-border region.

Although formal institutions and contacts at the level of policy-making were established across the border, local level social interactions and activities remained minor and generally dependent on particular individuals or organizations (Matthiesen/Bürkner 2001; Dürrschmidt 2002; Fichter-Wolf/Knorr-Siedow 2009). Much skepticism and localism was found among locals in the cross-border region. In Guben for instance, revitalized ethnicity, economic fears of competition, and an inward-looking mentality led to a strong tendency of in-grouping. While skeptical attitudes were also found in Gubin, Poles were at the same time curious and had a more

positive attitude towards cross-border initiatives than the Germans in Guben (Matthiesen/Bürkner 2001: 46f.). Furthermore, both Germans and Poles were, and maybe still are, not entirely aware of the opportunities an integrated and open cross-border region could bring. Dürrschmidt (2006: 254f.) distinguishes two local developments. The first development involves the hyper-mobility of German locals, who started to take up temporary work elsewhere, for example in the Netherlands as bricklayers, without taking into account the opportunities on the other side of the border. In addition to the decrease of inhabitants in the German border cities, people became detached from the city and region, reducing further improvement of cross-border relations and practices. Secondly, strong feelings of belonging also played a role. Place became regarded as a closed system that does not extend beyond one's familiar setting. Moreover, past images and experiences were also important factors in the decision to move closer to or farther away from people and places across the border. A low level of trust between the inhabitants of the cross-border region also played a role in underlining perceived differences and increasing the felt social distance between the two nationalities (Krätke 1999; Matthiesen/Bürkner 2001; Stryjakiewicz 2009).

In contrast to the 1970s, where the opening of the border led to interest in familiarization with people and places located across the border, the opening of the border in 1991 led to less mutual interest. Except for local socio-economic opportunities, both Germans and Poles were mainly looking westward, partly due to German unification and the prospective benefits associated with the European Union. As a result of socio-economic interests, a level of interdependency between Poles and Germans in the local trade and service sector emerged, bringing people on both sides of the border together. In the early 1990s, differences in price and quality of goods and services led to the rise of a bazaar economy in the small Polish towns just across the border (Gazeta Zielonogórska/Neuer Tag, 1990s). In addition to these interactions and exchanges on the bazaars, Poles were also familiarizing themselves with the German language and started looking for labor opportunities in Germany. Germans, however, continued to have only little interest in people and places across the border above and beyond their interest in obtaining cheap products and services on the Polish side. For the most part, German locals maintained an attitude of indifference, standing with their backs to the Polish borderland. On the one hand, people on the Polish side seem more interested in the opportu-

nities available across the border, but on the other hand one could argue that the exchanges between people from both sides of the border occur mainly within the economic context alone. Subsequently, people's *personal attitudes, knowledge, and experiences* are framed largely within this context.

## CONCLUSION

From an adjustment to a new and contested border, with open and closed periods of border crossings, towards an open border, the German-Polish border region has been in constant change. As mentioned in the introduction, historical developments in this particular cross-border region have indeed led to a high level of unfamiliarity between the inhabitants as a result of large migration flows. People were not familiar with one another or with each other's narratives, cultures, customs, and languages. Yet, they still had to live alongside each other. The physical border was closed for a long time, during which few cross-border contacts and exchanges were allowed. A latent interest in cross-border exchange, however, was demonstrated by the fact that the opening of the border in the 1970s led to immense numbers of border crossings, contacts, and exchanges. The second, and most likely permanent, border opening in the 1990s was experienced differently.

Coming back to Bauman's theory on strangeness, the border openings in the 1970s and the 1990s demonstrate interesting levels of unfamiliarity. During the first opening of the border, inhabitants of the border cities on both sides of the German-Polish border were curious about the neighboring city across the border. The earlier forced immobility that resulted from the closed borders heightened mutual unfamiliarity but actually increased people's interest in the other side of the border. After the opening of the border, people were able to familiarize themselves with the other side of the border through personal experience and through obtaining information from family, friends, and neighbors who had been across the border. As a result, people did not have to depend on information from the government or media. The initial excitement, however, was soon overcome by feelings of annoyance, especially on the German side of the border, resulting from over-consumption, which, with rise of cross-border exchanges, might also be regarded as over-familiarity.

Subsequently, with the opening of the borders in the 1990s, feelings of excitement and curiosity were only part of the picture. Whereas Poles continue to be interested in the other side of the border, where the unfamiliar, the new, and unknown, is regarded as attractive and has become integrated into daily routines, Germans are less inclined to look for opportunities in Poland. Perhaps the German unification led many inhabitants to seek opportunities in western Germany, or perhaps the de-industrialization of the region caused a German exodus, physically and mentally, from the border region. Assumptions of the other also play an important role, especially among the Germans who seem to hold negative attitudes towards the Poles. Feelings of belonging stress these assumptions, resulting in little incentive to cross the border. When the border is crossed, social contacts are not of interest; the focus is, rather, on obtaining goods and services.

This initial literature review demonstrated that unfamiliarity is likely to trigger interest, leading to actions, in this case border crossings, whereas familiarity, or partial familiarity, with the other side of a border seems to be associated with little interest and interaction. While in the 1990s, the opening of the borders opened many opportunities for cross-border cooperation, in particular in the context of EU enlargement, these opportunities may have been partly obscured by historical representations and mental images of the other. Differences are needed to evoke an interest in the other side of the border. However, becoming familiar or remaining unfamiliar is determined not only by circumstances and external factors, but also by the position of people living in the cross-border region. They are in charge of selecting and activating (un)familiarity and must decide how people and places located across the border are assessed and dealt with.

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