



THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BORDERLAND RESEARCH

BY

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Abstract

Interest in borderland research has been developing dynamically since the previous century in various fields of social sciences and the humanities. Borderland is an interesting subject of research for many reasons. Borderland is primarily the people living on both sides of the border of the region, people coexisting with each other and in various ways looking for the most appropriate place for themselves to live and develop, and testify to their humanity, therefore, focusing research attention on the issues concerning borderland people is a priority task and challenge.

In the text, I address issues of concepts of understanding space, in the border space - anthropological perspective, multidimensional dynamics of space and border places, conditions of relations between the people of the borderland in space and places in the aspect of cultural configurations, and also attitudes towards traditions.

Keywords: *borderland research, theoretical foundations, understanding space, types of places, cultural configurations, traditions.*

Introductory notes

Interest in borderland research in Poland, on a European and world scale has been developing dynamically since the previous century in various fields of social sciences and the humanities (in particular in such disciplines as history, sociology, educational studies, psychology, ethnography, political geography, cultural anthropology, political science, and ethnology). The enriched knowledge on this subject inspiring highlights also numerous issues waiting to be discovered, resolved, and appreciated, especially owing to the initiation, strengthening, and development of collaboration and cooperation of bordering nations in all spheres of life from the perspective of the tasks carried out, as well as taking up future challenges and constructing original attempts to make them come true (Sadowski 1992; Nikitorowicz 1995; Mync, Szul 1999; Babiński 2001; Jałowicki, Karpalski 2011; Lewicka 2012; Pasięka 2016; Miluska 2016; Kurcz 2017; Zarycki 2011).

The borderland is an interesting subject of research for many reasons. Borderland is primarily the people living on both sides of the border of the region, people coexisting with each other and in various ways looking for the most appropriate place for themselves to live and develop, and testify to their humanity. Therefore, focusing research attention on the issues concerning borderland people is a priority task and challenge. It is for this reason that the approach that places, first of all,

people in the epicentr of the research realities of borderland (Perzanowski 2005, pp. 10-11), their problems, existentially significant experiences, and then elements of the region's culture, is important. This means that, from the research perspective, it is the personality and cultural aspect that, by definition, grows into the central issue. Certainly, in the space of the region and various places of the borderland, both people and cultures meet and engage in a mutual influence, however, the anthropological emphasis focuses the research process mainly on issues concerning people from the perspective of their everyday experiences of which are especially existentially significant, in the course of which something important happens, attracts special attention, and provokes reflection, and causes changes in people and/or in their surroundings (Ostrowska 2012). These phenomena and processes can be oriented both retrospectively (inclined towards the past), presentistically (related to the present), and prospectively (looking ahead to the future) (Kurcz, Sakson 2009; Kość-Ryżko 2018). Nevertheless, regardless of the positions, beliefs, and aspirations, borderland people are doomed to make constant choices and constant evaluation, which testifies to their attitude to the past and to current changes, as well as those related to the planning of the future (Barwiński 2017; Sadowski 2008; Ostrowska 2020).

Relationship borderland people - person - space -place

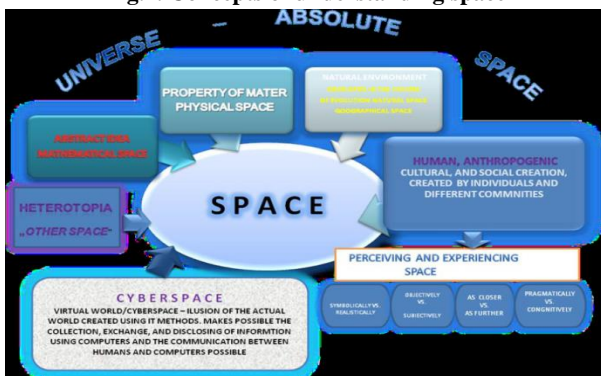


Deepening and expanding the knowledge about the people of the borderland requires a lot of research on this topic, in terms of their personal, existentially significant experiences and those accompanying them in everyday life to construct a typology of how they experience specific events from the past and current ones and, on this basis, to define/identify the determinants of the processes of developing cross-border neighbourly relations on both sides of the border as jointly undertaken actions strengthening and developing contacts between communities and representatives of territorial authorities. By assumption, common goals are articulated both outside and inside border areas, they strengthen the motivation to cooperate and in many ways combine efforts between people, including they serve to protect and preserve the common cultural heritage of both parties. This means that the main goal of the research is a thorough study of interesting phenomena, complex in terms of content, changeable, evolving, and becoming, that do not easily succumb to *anagnōrismos* (recognition). Human life in borderland takes place in the dialectical human-space-place relationship characterized by individual "own" meanings. Being an integral part of this relationship, borderland people experience it in various ways, understand it, and give it different meanings, testifying to the quality of their being in that place in the context of creating human coexistence with it.

It's interesting how is the dialectical relation between borderland man space formed in the everyday life of the inhabitants of the borderland? and: what do the inhabitants of the borderland especially prefer in their lives, what do they aspire to above all, and do they see the main issues of both nations, including those related to the carrying out of the tasks of the present and meeting the challenges of the future?

In the literature on the subject, there are various concepts of understanding the notion of space (B. Jałowicki 2011), among which, by definition, the most important for the research is the anthropogenic social and cultural space that is a human creation. This type of space can be perceived, understood, and experienced in a variety of ways, including such as experiencing space as closer or more distant, or perceiving it in a real or symbolic way, possibly situating oneself in an objective or subjective orientation, or being inclined to take a pragmatic or cognitive, creatively oriented position towards it. (Fig.1.).

Fig.1. Concepts of understanding space



Source: the author's own concept.

The terminology related to borderlands functioning in the literature on the subject is diverse and, among other things, it is proposed to use this concept "to define realities that can be characterized as spaces of weak social boundaries and permanent/strong geopolitical boundaries" (Pasięka 2016, p. 141). However, the term *borderland space* has not yet been defined, although it is used quite often in interdisciplinary considerations. I accept it in my considerations the following original approach to the category of borderland space was adopted: the cross-border sphere (in the terminology of political sciences, the terms *transnational* or *international space* have been in use since the middle of the previous century) emerged across the geopolitical borders separating neighbouring state territories with a borderline dividing part of the globe, the air space and the interior of the earth. As an anthropogenic cultural and social creation distinguished by man, borderland space has its specificity. It differs from the adjacent spaces by natural, geographical, and acquired features. In borderland space, heterogeneous processes of intertwining of coexisting nationalities, cultures, religions, norms, customs, habits, languages, values, traditions, ideologies, and ethnic groups are clearly visible.

For centuries, people have placed themselves in spaces of various meanings and operated in their area, however, by nature, for man tends to be anchored in the surrounding reality, of which he is an integral part, space is not enough to live and develop. To fulfil themselves in various spheres of reality, human beings, first of all, need their "own" place on earth (in a literal and symbolic sense), which is for them an existentially significant constitutive support of a sense of security. Especially a symbolic place in space becomes active as the cultural heritage of a given region and is part of a tradition that is constantly enriched from generation to generation.

Space and places are constitutive elements of human existence as the basic categories of man's existence and learning about the world, and finding fulfillment in it (Jałowicki 2011/a). These categories have a universal and fundamental dimension since every human being has an elementary right to his or her place on earth. (Every human being lives somewhere, resides, has a place located in space, and "his or her" place, which is its part made real. Yi Fu Tuan (1987), the author of the individualistic phenomenological concept of space and place emphasized the attachment of man to a place from the perspective of the dialectical relationship between the space associated with freedom, and the experiencing of quiet peace in a separate place, filling this space and constituting a fundamental basis for putting down roots as the soul's need (Weil 1961, p. 194). On the other hand, the sociologist Bohdan Jałowicki (1934-2020), placed the uniqueness of a place in the context of cultural heritage (Jałowicki 2009) and when asked what the uniqueness of places was, he answered as follows:

"Among the significant features determining the creation of a place, one can mention the location and beauty of the landscape, a rich history written in unique works of architecture, a legend about famous people who lived and

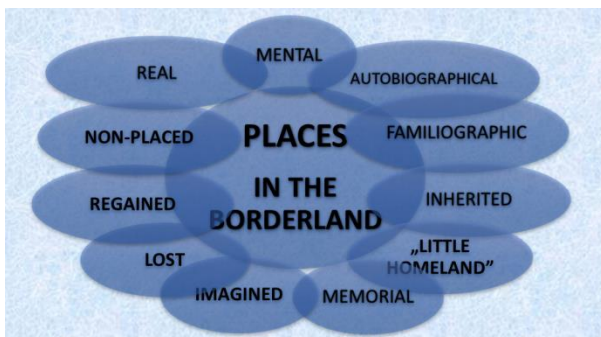
worked in a given place, specific works developed there, or important and sometimes extraordinary events that established themselves in collective memory. In this way, places become important not only for the individual but also for the wider community. Most are of local and/or regional value only, but some are nationwide important; others play such a role for the followers of a given religion, and still others seem important even on a global scale, as evidenced for example, by the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List" (Jałowicki 2011/a, p. 10).

Such dialectical approaches, in a way, refer to the ancient Greeks' understanding of the term *topos* not only as a place in space, but also as denoting places in thought and speech, and refer to the term *topophilia*, popular since the middle of the previous century, which in Yi-Fu Tuan's (1987) theory acquired the central status that makes it possible for the author to define and evaluate the tendency of man to attach himself to a place illustrating the subjective relations and axiological dependencies in people's relations with their surroundings. The literature on the subject highlights important aspects of this phenomenon, namely: "Topophilia thus fills a place with spirit, showing the person's attitude to the place, which thus acquires emotional value. Without topophilia, fragments of space with traces of material culture become still life" (Rykiel, Pirveli 2009, p. 178).

Should be taken into account these issues, inter alia, in the context of emerging barriers to the development of cross-border cooperation, including in particular too strong attachment to past experiences or becoming entangled in stereotypes reflecting negative past experiences leading to cultural homelessness (Vivero, Jenkins, 1999).

Nevertheless, the deepest roots of experiencing and understanding a place lie in the human biography and in the created linguistic image of the world, manifesting themselves in the mentality for the whole life in the form of such expressions as: "our/my home", "our/my neighborhood", "our/my town/city".

Fig 2. Types of places in the Borderlands Anthropological perspective



Source: the author's own concept.

The catalogue of places is varied and very wide, covering such diverse categories as places of residence, sacred objects, places of work, study, recreation, leisure time, landscape, and places of remembrance (Stenger 1992). In the circle of places is important, *the issue of "non-places":* - "two complementary,

but separate realities, i.e. spaces established concerning certain purposes (transport, transit, trade, leisure) and the relationships that individuals maintain with these spaces. (...) The space of a non-place deprives those who enter it of ordinary conditions. It is only what he or she does or experiences as a passenger, customer, or driver. (...) The space of a non-place creates neither a specific identity nor a relationship, but loneliness and similarity. (...) Topicality and the pressure of the moment rule here. We traverse non-places in a hurry and, therefore, are measured in units of time. These routes do not function without clocks, without timetables informing about arrivals and departures (...) A non-place frequenter experiences both the still recurring present and the meeting of oneself" (Augé 2010, pp. 20, 53-71).

Fig. 3. Multidimensional dynamics of space and border places



Source: the author's own concept.

Borderland, which, according to Bruno Schulz (2000), is a land of diversity inhabited by people characterized by a rich and varied as well as a complicated biography, and located in various cultural circles, arouses multiple interests and prompts to obtain research materials from the inhabitants of the region willing to report on the history of their lives.

The ways of understanding borderland are important, including in particular the one functioning in the literature on the subject as: "a space of changeable identities that are both the result and the source of contacts between different ethnic, religious, and national communities." (Pasięka 2016, p. 128). The source is understood is not only in the sense of starting something but also in drawing from it in the further course of processes, and phenomena in the sense of the cause, as well as the principle and result of both the cultural heritage and the transformations of borderland man (Zielińska 2003).

Assigning the marks of uniqueness to the places of the borderland, on the one hand, draws attention to the history of both the space and places of the region while, on the other hand, it primarily focuses on the issues of the individual fate of the people of the borderland, which is emphasized by the "humanistic factor", emphasizing the community of human experiences of people taking part in interpersonal relations and the resulting intersubjective meanings in the form of customs, social norms, preferred values, including those that

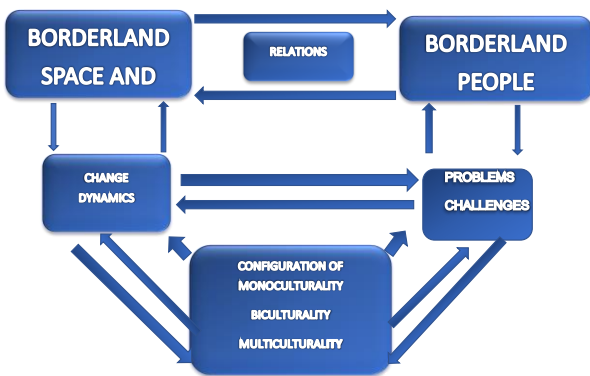
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constitute premises for the projection of the future (Kasperski 2001).

The quality of cross-border cooperation is determined by numerous factors that require constant identification and monitoring (Fig.4), including a thorough diagnosis of the common needs, interests, and benefits of both parties implementing contemporary tasks and designing a common future. (Ostrowska 2008).

Fig. 4. Conditions of relations between the people of the borderland in space and places in the aspect of cultural configurations



Source: the author's own concept.

History usually includes not only sublime, noble, and honourable events or moments but also those that, for various reasons, one would not want to experience under any circumstances. Therefore, in the process of evaluating the past times, it is indispensable to credibly and reliably account for historical mistakes, mistakes of the past, including events assessed as negative, and to explore them in such a way that it is possible to meet the challenges of the future, excluding the concealment of important facts or relying on half-truths. First of all, it is important to respect everything precious, everything that is the basis for collaboration, cooperation, and tightening ties in all spheres of life.

The perception of the borderland from the angle of evolving identities that are both the source and the result of contacts between various ethnic, religious, and national communities, creates a landscape of particularly intensified intercultural relations that construct the foundations for the valorisation of the cultural heritage of the region by the residents occupying specific places in space and testifying with their lives to the evaluative attitude towards what remains of the past and what is for them an existentially significant element of life here and now. Getting to know the history of the life of borderland residents and experiencing existentially significant places by them will make it possible to answer many questions, including those related to the valorisation of the present and planning the future, as well as identifying and recognizing barriers that constitute obstacles to establishing cross-border cooperation in order to build bridges for the integration of local communities.

The presence of human existence is quite different from the occurrence of objects that exist only "in themselves", as opposed to the man who exists not only "for himself", but also consciously "for others", for the world in which he is a part of. Moreover, despite the passage of time, by changing in his existence, man can retain his identity while remaining "the same man in his full qualitatively unchangingly defined nature" (Ingarden 1987, p. 42). Such a position sheds a significant light on the issue of tradition which is part of the area of cultural heritage and is usually considered together with this issue. It was assumed that the category of cultural heritage was assigned a scope superior to that of tradition, which is narrower. (Ostrowska 2020/a/, pp. 229-242) An important aspect of the question of the attitude towards tradition presented by the human (Bartkowski 2003). As a rule, attitudes that protect heritage, cultivate various forms of tradition, and testify to a vibrant tradition, are perceived as noble, desirable, positive, natural, obvious, and worth following. On the other hand, deviating from them in the form of passivity and losing contact with tradition, and especially not accepting it and, consequently, completely breaking contact with it, is usually treated as reprehensible and even often as a people's transgression against the accepted norms, which sometimes leads to the use of various legal, moral or religious sanctions against those people (Ostrowska 2015).

Fig. 5. Attitudes towards tradition



Source: the author's own concept.

Concluding remarks

The adopted concept of an existentially significant place, on the one hand, makes it possible to get to know the essence of the phenomenon of place individually experienced by borderland people while, on the other hand, it also reflects the social dimension of this process in terms of constructing a specific "atmosphere of a place" (Knez 2005), as well as manifesting readiness to put forward the interests of the group over personal interests (Ossowski 1962, p. 52).

Consideration of the issues of the axiological dimension of the cultural heritage of the borderland leads primarily to the essence of the existence of certain ideas and facts, processes, and phenomena from the past, as well as to the phenomena of their consolidation and passing on to the next generations as particularly valuable and important not only in the present but also from the perspective of the planned future. All ideas and produced material and social goods evoke specific evaluating attitudes in the course of making decisions about what to take from the past, what is extremely important for man, what is lasting for the community, what should be kept in mind, what

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becomes a model of cherished values and symbols surrounded by lofty emotions, what to communicate, nurture, and especially respect (Babiński 2005; Kiereta 2003; Fukuyama 2019; Kenz 2005; Ostrowska 2013; Sadowski 2019).

Foucault, who derived the concept of "other space" - heterotopia, meaning a space constructed by entangled networks of relations, from his considerations on space, place, and localization, assigned the last century the name of the age of space (Foucault 2005, pp. 117-119). However, even if places located in different spaces are constantly becoming in their processuality, they do not lose their essential role in contemporary reality and even turn out to be indispensable for man. Even in the era of new media and virtual communication, man does not tolerate continuous life on "quicksands" and invariably, for centuries, the realization of the need to experience solid ground under his feet has been existentially significant for him. Perhaps, therefore, the implementation of the planned research will in a way lead to the recognition of our century as the century of place.

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