

ABSTRACT

Keywords: border, tourism product, Augustów Canal, Białowieża Forest, Brest Fortress, Poland, Belarus.

The Polish-Belarusian borderland constitutes an interesting research area for socio-economic geography, and in particular for border geography, political geography, tourism geography, and other related scientific disciplines. On the one hand, the border may perform the function of a barrier limiting the movement of people, goods, and ideas; on the other hand, it may serve as a bridge fostering cross-border cooperation. This area is located at the intersection of numerous nations, languages, cultures, religions, and different social, economic, and political systems, which is reflected in the rich cultural, historical, and natural heritage of the region.

Throughout history, the contemporary Polish-Belarusian borderland has been inhabited by various tribes and peoples and has belonged to different state entities. The contemporary course of the border was established in 1945, following the end of the Second World War, as a border between the Polish People's Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Since 1991, following the dissolution of the USSR, it has been a state border between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Belarus. The Polish-Belarusian border also plays an important geopolitical role. It constitutes a section of the eastern land border of the European Union, the Schengen Area, and NATO, while simultaneously forming the western border of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Thus, it represents an area where different political, economic, and civilizational spaces meet.

In this doctoral dissertation, firstly, six periods in the functioning of the Polish-Belarusian border after 1945 were identified and analysed in terms of its permeability, understood as the ease or difficulty of crossing the border and the associated formal requirements, including visa and visa-free regulations. The analysis was conducted using the concept of *bordering–debordering–rebordering*. Secondly, an analysis of the functioning of tourism in the borderland during each of the identified periods was carried out, with particular attention paid to its specific characteristics and changing development trends. Thirdly, three selected flagship tourism products of the Polish-Belarusian borderland were subjected to detailed analysis, representing different spatial types: the Augustów Canal as a linear feature, the Białowieża Forest as an areal feature, and the Brest Fortress as a point feature. Each of these attractions possesses unique natural and anthropogenic values associated with the natural, cultural, and historical heritage of the region.

Tourist traffic and museum attendance were also analysed at the domestic, international, and cross-border levels with regard to the most popular tourist destinations within the studied borderland area. On the basis of statistical data concerning selected tourist sites and tourism products, an attempt was made to identify particular phases of their development—growth, stagnation, and decline—using the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model. Particular attention was paid to seasonality and to the structure of tourist and cross-border traffic. Using the concept of Multi-Level Governance (MLG), it was determined that geopolitical,

international, and national (*top-down*) factors exert a greater influence on the functioning of tourism products in the Polish-Belarusian borderland than regional and local (*bottom-up*) factors.

The dissertation subjected two key periods to detailed examination. The first of these was the period of border regime liberalisation between 2015 and 2020, when a centrally initiated process of establishing zones allowing visa-free entry for citizens of Poland, Lithuania, and other countries began in western Belarus. The second analysed period was the time after 2020, associated with the deterioration of the situation at the Polish-Belarusian border, which significantly affected both cross-border tourism and the development of tourism on the Polish side of the borderland. Both negative and positive geopolitical, bilateral, and national factors determining the contemporary functioning of the tourism sector in the studied area were identified and analysed.

In the case of the Brest Fortress, particular attention was devoted to the symbolic and ideological significance of this tourism product. Its role was analysed in the context of the revival of post-communist historical narratives, memory politics, and propaganda functions, particularly with regard to the societies of Belarus and Russia. In recent years, a systematic increase has been observed in the number of tourists from Russia visiting Belarus, which partially compensates for the decline in the number of visitors from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and other European Union countries after 2020.

The study employed the desk research method, including a review of the relevant literature, an analysis of historical materials, and an analysis of legal and strategic documents. Quantitative methods were also used for the analysis of statistical data, as well as qualitative methods, particularly individual in-depth interviews (IDIs). In addition, a range of supplementary methods supporting the research process and the interpretation of the obtained results were applied.