

## THE SCARS OF HISTORY

### THE GEOGRAPHY OF POLITICAL BORDERS OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

#### Summary

The present study constitutes an attempt to depict the geographical aspects of state (i.e. political) borders, as well as their functioning in the contemporary world. In order to be able to present such an extensive subject-matter in a book limited by editorial expectations, a subjective selection of the information presented and its interpretation was required. The choice of the issues dealt with in this study might be controversial for some. It follows from a number of different definitions of the notion of "geography". The author does not provide the one and only definition of geography. Taking the encyclopaedic definition as a starting point, the author supplements it with a numerous remarks and reservations, referring to a number of studies in the area in question, providing - sometimes very different - standpoints and opinions. The geography of political borders is defined here as a branch of research aiming at the clarification of the relations between the delineation, features and functions of state borders and the natural environment and other forms of human activity in the borderlands. The author has tried to determine the scope of meaning of certain terms, especially in those cases where their meanings may raise some doubts. This book does not attempt to impose the author's views on the readers, but make them aware that a given term is used here in a given, particular meaning.

The work is composed of seven chapters preceded by an introduction. The first three chapters comprise theoretical and methodological considerations. Political borders, i.e. the subject matter of geographical research has been presented, taking into account the complex nature of the issues in question. The majority of the issues belonging to political science, history, sociology or cultural studies, relating to the borders and the borderlands of individual countries has not been dealt with. Another chapter contains a presentation and an assessment of geographical aspects of the delimitation and demarcation of political borders. The role of natural environment has been discussed, especially in the case of borders located along the rivers, watersheds, mountain chains, etc. This part of the study ends with the chapter devoted to the typology and classification of state borders. A controversial issue of the determination of "natural" and "artificial borders", among other things, has been examined here.

The title of the fourth chapter of the work is "The dualism of functions of political borders". Its wording is justified by the fact that the assessment of the function of political borders has been limited to the role of country borders as spatial barriers and the state function of shaping the cross-border ties.

State borders can function as a number of spatial barriers, such as strategic, psychological, natural, infrastructural, linguistic, sanitary, economic, ideological, migration and comprehensive barriers, discussed in the book. The proposed division of spatial barriers into ten different categories must draw the reader's attention to the absence the legal barrier, frequently dealt with in the literature. This fact arises from the situation that all the functions of the border are regulated by the provisions of law. They determine the conditions for crossing the borders, transport of goods, but also the principles regulating the use of border rivers, cooperation in the area of environment protection in the borderlands, or the principles of forest management, to name a few. The grounds for the selection of the aforementioned, individual, borders has been presented in the dedicated chapters.

The author has described the phenomenon of the creation of cross-border regional ties as an opposing function to the aforementioned spatial barriers, constituted by state border borders, which then translates into the creation of formal territorial units, such as euroregions.

The processes shaping cross-border ties, shaped by environmental factors, such as the cooperation in the area of water management in the basins of border rivers, the creation of cross-border national parks or cross-border tourist regions, have been discussed here.

The author draws the readers' attention to the growing trend of cross-border cooperation in the three-border areas – the so-called tripoints (or trijunctions) – more examples can be found in the regional part of the study.

An important feature connected with the previously presented functions of state borders is their permeability and penetrability. The work clearly distinguishes between those two notions, frequently used synonymously in the literature. Permeability is understood as a phenomenon of legal, acceptable by the neighbouring countries, crossing of borders by authorised persons at a specific place (border crossing points) and time. The same term is also used in respect of the legal flows of capital and the transportation of goods across the borders. Penetrability of borders, on the other hand, means illegal crossing of borders, but also the contraband of goods and the diffusion of diseases of humans and animals, as well as various natural disasters with cross-border impact.

The regional part of the study contains a discussion of the spatial differentiation of the features and the functions of political borders in six territorial units, roughly corresponding to individual continents. Since the study is intended for Polish readers, it focuses on the issues related to Polish borders and other countries of the unifying Europe.

One of the sub-chapters of this part is devoted to sea and ocean islands, divided by political borders.

The issues connected with the continent without any state borders - i.e. Antarctica - has been dealt with here. International arrangements and attempts of individual countries aimed at obtaining a part of Antarctica's territory have been discussed.

Another chapter, devoted to sea borders, is an attempt to describe the geographical aspects of the delimitation and functioning of those closely guarded (especially recently) borders. Conflicts related to the political affinity of islands have been discussed. These days, the possibility of ensuring exclusivity of fishing and the exploitation of natural resources in the surrounding territorial waters is of crucial importance. The once highly valued strategic significance is gradually diminishing.

The study ends with the specification of the conclusions and the presentation of the authors' considerations. The differentiation between those notions is justified by the subject-matter of the study. What is important here is the unpredictability of political changes arising mainly from two opposing phenomena of the contemporary world: the processes of globalisation and integration and, on the other hand, opposing separatist demands within a number of countries, sometimes resulting in their disintegration. In such a situation, the XXI century is not very likely to be the "world without borders", as advocated by contemporary media. It is a convincing stimulus for the mobilization of research in the area of geography of political borders.