

Smuggling is an immanent feature of each and every national border and borderland. Despite the existence of numerous academic studies pertaining to the land situated in the vicinity of the Polish-Slovak border, the topic of smuggling has not been thoroughly examined yet, as important as it was in the daily life of the region. Since the 1918 establishment of a geopolitical border between Poland and Czechoslovakia, people living on either side of the border in Podhale, Spiš, Orava, Liptov and Lemkow land, regions characterized by harsh climate, poor soil and very weak industrialization, started to establish (or, rather, transform, renew and maintain) their own networks of contacts and interests and arrange their lives around the resources offered by the border. Soon, a considerable part of the population relied on the border as their main source of income and a way of life. Whole families from the Polish side crossed the border in order to sell dairy products or exchange them for textiles, shoes, linen or cigarettes. Many did it merely to satisfy their immediate family needs, while some smugglers turned professional: they contributed to the smuggling networks which continued to operate in the period between the two wars. During the Second World War, when these territories became the borderland between Slovakia and the General Government, the networks constituted an asset used in the smuggling of people and products and enabled the operation of courier services of the Polish Underground State.

Research into the history of smuggling and the fate of smugglers spanning more than thirty years of activity, in times marked by so many dramatic changes and events, will demonstrate how smuggling changed depending on the political and economic contexts. The smuggling practices of the people inhabiting the Polish-Slovak borderlands will be examined and described. First, principles, traditions and transformations over time will be identified; structures and rules governing the smuggling networks and their transformations; principles and practices associated with cross-border human smuggling; the relationship of smugglers with the structures of the Polish Underground State; the activity and fate of particular smugglers; the physical condition of the established border and its transformations between 1918 and 1949 and the manifestations of power at the border.

In order to describe the complex past of smuggling in the Polish-Slovak border area as accurately and as multidimensionally as possible, my analysis will combine various approaches (sociological, anthropological and historical). The sources acquired thanks to a vast archive search and field studies will be as diverse, thanks to the interdisciplinary research team.