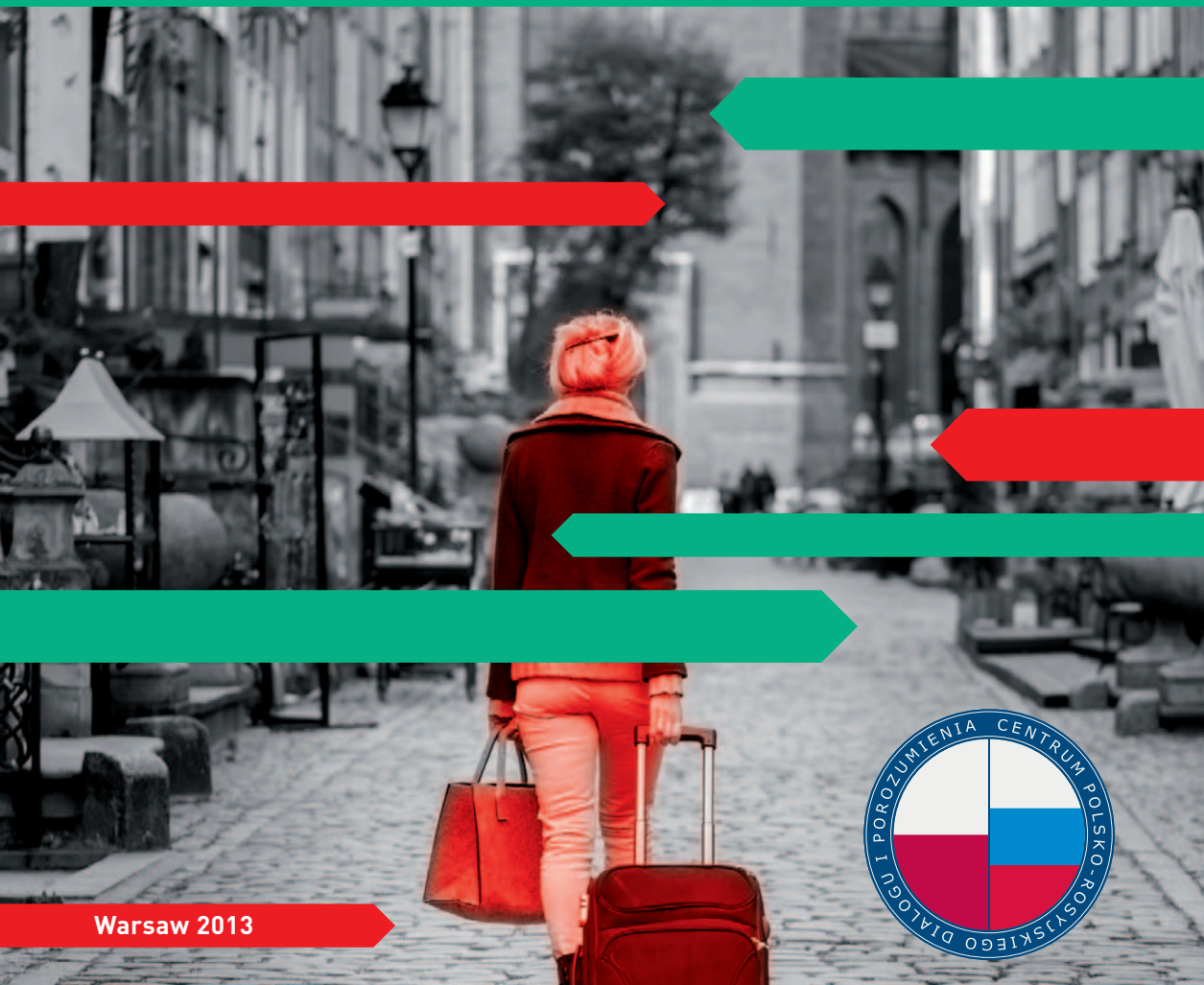


# SMALL STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Report on public opinion research  
in Polish administrative districts  
included into the Local Border Traffic area



Warsaw 2013



Report on public opinion research





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Warsaw 2013

CENTRE FOR  
POLISH-RUSSIAN DIALOGUE  
AND UNDERSTANDING



Report on public opinion research

Analyses and report: ARC Rynek i Opinia

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## About the research

Within the Polish part of the research, the following were taken:

1. Qualitative research, in the form of field reconnaissance trips by a team of four, who spent three days in Gdańsk/Gdynia/Sopot conurbation and three days in Bartoszyce, Bezledy and Lidzbark Warmiński, watching and documenting traces of Russian presence there. As part of these trips, some 50 interviews were held with representatives of various stakeholders: local residents, local government officials, business people and members of local elites.
2. Survey in the form of computer-aided telephone interviews (CATI) on a sample of 1,000 adult Poles. The sample was drawn randomly and it reflects the population of the districts covered by Local Border Traffic area, in terms of

the following characteristics: gender, age, education, town size, and district.

The research was conducted in August 2013 (qualitative part) and September 2013 (quantitative part).

Later in this report we cite findings of a nationwide research on Polish-Russian relations, taken in autumn 2012 to a commission from the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding.

The present report has an annex with several case studies involving people, companies and institutions, all of them illustrating the practical aspects of Polish-Russian relations in Local Border Traffic settings.

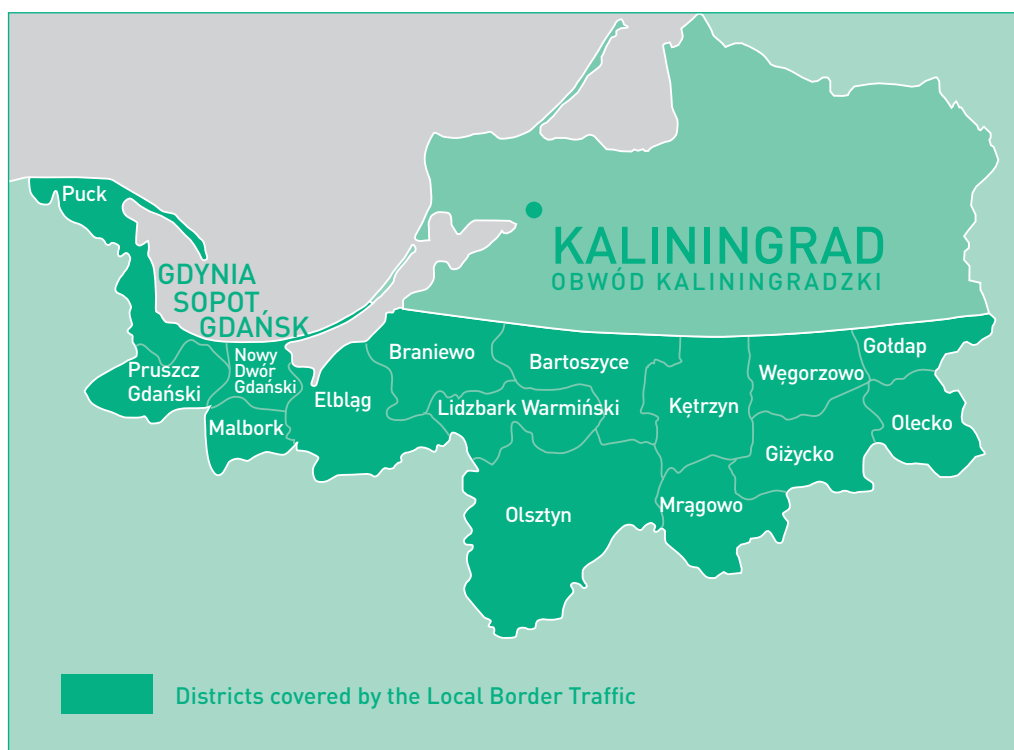
# Introduction

It would be hard to imagine a better laboratory of social change than the districts in the northern Poland which form a Local Border Traffic area (the area), together with the adjacent Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. This initiative gradually eliminates barriers to people-to-people contacts with neighbouring

country on this section of the Polish state border. Given the difficult relations between Poland and Russia, it is hardly possible to exaggerate the experiences gained from this somewhat experimental project, which facilitated travel across the Polish-Russian border.

## Figure 1.<sup>1</sup> Local Border Traffic covers the following districts:

(in Pomorskie voivodship): Pucki, Gdynia municipality, Sopot municipality, Gdańsk municipality, Gdański, Nowodworski, Malborski; (in Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship): Elbląg municipality, Elbląski, Braniewski, Lidzbarski, Bartoszycki, Olsztyn municipality, Olsztyński, Kętrzyński, Mrągowski, Węgorzewski, Giżycki, Gotdapski, Olecki. The area has a combined population of 1,918,536, according to Central Statistical Office data for 2011.



<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.emn.gov.pl/esm/aktualnosci/9181,Ratyfikacja-przez-Polske-Umowy-o-malym-ruchu-granicznym-z-Federacja-Rosyjska.html>; retrieved 03.10.2013

Population of Local Border Traffic area was surveyed a year after the new travel rules were introduced. The present report sums up the findings of both qualitative (study trips to Gdańsk, Bartoszyce, Bezledy and Lidzbark Warmiński) and quantitative research (a telephone poll on a sample of n=1000 residents). Some survey findings were additionally compared to data of the November 2012 national survey of Polish-Russian relations, carried out by CBOS polling agency to a commission from the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding.

The key insight from the research (confirmed by official statistics) is this: **The simplified travel procedures have led to a massive inflow of Russian visitors to Poland, while traffic in the other direction has been sparse.** This asymmetrical use of the opportunities provided by the arrangements can be traced to a number of reasons:

► Economic realities, especially how profitable it turns out to shop on the other side of the border. The prices of goods and services in Poland (and their value-for-money) are highly attractive to Russians. Shopping in Poland is also fuelled by a wider retail and service offer, higher servicing standards, and other factors of importance for the consumer. The reverse is true, though, for Poles visiting the Kaliningrad region.

► The Polish part of the Local Border Traffic area also features a diversified range of fairly agreeable tourist and cultural attractions, especially in Gdańsk/Gdynia/Sopot conurbation and the Mazury lake region, which are massively visited by Russians – and not only for shopping. On the other hand, Poles authorised to benefit from the arrangements are not convinced that a similar tourist offer could be found on the Russian side of the border.

► It should also be remembered that the Polish districts of the area are not much advanced economically and socially (especially in Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship, being marked by high un-

employment ratios and low incomes), which is hardly conducive to tourist traffic to the neighbouring country.

► And finally, the facilities to streamline travelling to Kaliningrad region are often more apparent than real, especially for those living far from Gdańsk, the nearest city housing a Russian consulate. If the necessary border crossing documents could be obtained on the border, this would surely boost traffic from Poland. Besides, the facilities are not quite alluring to Poles, who have got used to enjoying visa-free travel to most European countries, including some where they are only required to produce the national ID. Things are different for Russian citizens, who must apply for visas in respect of the entire Schengen area.

This evident asymmetry in visits and interest makes this experiment interesting to a sociologist. For the first time, we have an opportunity to watch live a first stage in direct contacts between Poles and Russians on such a large scale – the stage which is predominated by economic considerations (quite a natural situation in the first year of streamlined travel formalities).

Our research shows that Poles and Russians, meeting massively on the streets of Gdańsk, Olsztyn or Bartoszyce, are hardly looking at one another through the “national” or “historical” prism, as is the case with the dominant Polish thinking about relations with Russia. Instead an entirely new context emerges, the consumer context. As it is, the Russians are coming into Poland primarily as customers, doing their shopping and visiting restaurants, cafes, hotels, historical landmarks and museums. They have quite fat wallets, and not infrequently they arrive in luxurious car models. This comes as a welcome stimulus for Polish companies, and also as a new social phenomenon. Previously in the region, either there were no contacts with Russians at all, or where they did occur, the resulting image of the Russians was different.



This is a new situation for both parties, looking at each other with a previously unknown kind of interest. The present report, and particularly its parts informed by the field reconnaissance trips, cites many comments by local inhabitants in the area, who watched the Russians and had first contacts with them after decades of isolation. The research also reveals how much the presence of Russian consumers has changed the urban landscape in towns and localities in the area. Bartoszyce and Olsztyn are now the towns of multiple discounts stores and supermarkets, with the Russian language making its way to many retail locations. Familiarity with Russian begins to be regarded as a precious competence on the local labour market.

This new perception of Russians as consumers and tourists, however, has yet to fully replace the opinions and emotions which have been

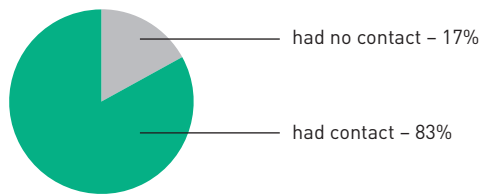
instilled by historical experiences and which remain deeply rooted in public consciousness. The everyday, mass-scale contact with Russian citizens has not yet morphed into a kind of personal, in-depth contact which would translate into a lasting and perceptible change of their image at the back of Poles' minds. In the report, we conclude that Russians "gain points when you get to know them very closely." a positive influence on opinions about Russians or Russia is only exerted by personal acquaintance with a particular Russian – and not by an obviously superficial contact in retail settings or when casually strolling in a city square. It is thus warranted to argue that we are only at the first, initial stage of building direct contacts. These contacts must leave the "consumer stage" behind, and move further towards in-depth people-to-people relationships.

# Contact with Russian visitors: facts and figures

## 1. They are coming ... to do shopping

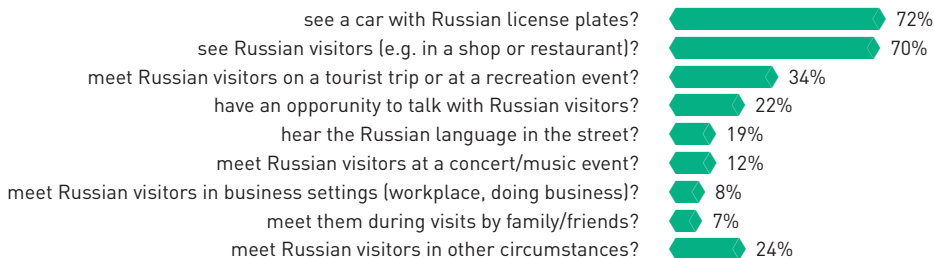
**Diagram 1.1. Contact with Russian visitors**

*Did you notice Russian visitors' presence in the past 30 days?*



**Diagram 1.2. Type of contact**

*Over the past 30 days, did you...*



Russian visitors' presence over the previous 30 days was noticed, in one way or another, by 83% of those questioned. This is confirmed by conversations with local residents and others, held within the field part of the project. There is a firm perception that Russians crossing the

Polish border could be seen more frequently after the launch of Local Border Traffic.

► *The number of Russians using various services of our tourist information centre rose nine-fold. (Bartoszyce Town Hall)*

► *More of them have been coming after the border was opened up; at that time you couldn't miss to notice that they got such an opportunity. (Shop with Polish cosmetics, Gdańsk)*

Interestingly, when asked about causes of Russians' more frequent visits, the Gdansk inhabitants not always pinpointed the border crossing simplifications. In the field part of the research, guesses about easier border crossing requirements did emerge:

► *I have been here for several years now, and I think that in the recent period there have been more Russian tourists around. To tell the truth, I do not know why. Maybe they got easier access to visas – I think they still need visas to come to us, don't they? I don't know why, but in recent years – or, rather, since last year – we have had much more Russians here. (Amber Museum, Gdańsk)*

Other respondents pointed to increased efforts by Polish companies (mostly in the passenger transportation sector) seeking to boost visits by Russians.

► *For some time now there have been very many Russians here, since Polish companies began arranging such organised shopping trips. There are such Polish operators here – independent operators, with three or four coaches each – who go to Kaliningrad, take the Russians and bring them to us. (A shopping mall – store with branded clothes, Gdańsk)*

Still others were aware that the local business offer – goods and tourist services alike – was attractive to visitors from Kaliningrad, either in terms of prices, value-for-money, quality and diversity of the offer or servicing standards. The visitors also benefit from VAT refunds, an important consideration when it comes to more expensive purchases of, e.g., furniture or household appliances.

► *We have had quite many Russian visitors this year. We saw them last year, too, but now it's like*

*there are more of them. I do not know why it is so, but here in Tri-City (Gdańsk/Gdynia/Sopot) you can now meet more and more Russians. Is it not because of the prices? It's cheaper here for them, I suppose. (Sopot Municipal Museum)*

► *There are more of them, and it's a change from last year – from the time when border formalities were eased and tax-free regulations launched. This is because non-EU residents buying things in Poland, or in any other EU country for that matter, can apply for a VAT refund. And this is quite a bargain. (Branded footwear outlet, outside Gdańsk)*

The Polish-Russian contacts may take a variety of different forms. Direct contacts are obviously less frequent (conversations with Russian visitors were indicated by 22% of those questioned in the survey, and business/professional cooperation by 8%). But what is noticed on a large scale is the presence of cars with Russian licence plates (sometimes these cars are identified not so much by their numbers as by the top-level make of the car), and of Russians who are walking/shopping (70%) or sightseeing/using recreational services (34%). Changes are also spotted in inhabitants' immediate surroundings: new shops erected in localities close to the border (four discount stores in Bartoszyce alone), dual-language signage in shop windows and restaurant menus, and other similar devices to attract the attention of Russian visitors.

► *Russians coming to Gdańsk? Well, they are rich. You can tell it by looking at the cars they use, such as Q7, Mercedes – actually, different makes can be seen, but for the most part they drive expensive cars. But some others arrive here on Kaliningrad coaches. (Taxi driver, Gdańsk)*

► *Because of the Russians, we too have been changing our attitudes. For example, it is with the Russians in mind that some shops stay open on Sundays and late at night, which I believe benefits us, too. (Bartoszyce Town Hall)*



Figure 4. Dual-language signage, restaurant/minibar menus in Gdańsk, and a poster inviting Russian visitors not to miss local tourist attractions.



Figure 5. Russian cuisine restaurant at Old Town in Gdańsk.









**Figure 8.** Deals and offers for Russian visitors: Russian language courses in Gdańsk, tourist information centre in Sopot, an invitation to settle in Poland (Russian language advert of apartments in Gdańsk), and Russian-language offer of Gdańsk Old Town sightseeing.



The opportunities offered by Local Border Traffic are not missed on the business community, who have been gradually making use of them. Russian speaking staff and Russian-language leaflets are emerging in venues frequented by the Russians, such as the IKEA store in Gdańsk or the Dwór Galiny complex outside Bartoszyce (its billboard welcomes drivers crossing the border at Bezledy). The newspaper "Goniec" in Bartoszyce carries an insert "Vmestyę", with Russian-language information and advertising content. Polish business people render Russian-targeted services, carry customers for shopping in Polish discount stores, deal with the profiling of accommodation offers to suit the visitors' needs, etc.

According to locals' conventional wisdom, Poland is visited by two groups of Russians. Those at the "middle affluence" level are said to be largely interested in shopping for groceries, while those in the smaller group of the "more affluent" tend to combine shopping mall visits with sightseeing, dining at restaurants, and using spa services.

► *They visit the Old Town, that's for sure. Usually these are whole families – some four or five people, involving father, mother, son, daughter, or perhaps an auntie. But generally, if someone is interested in sightseeing, they are usually at the upper end. (Tourist information centre, Gdańsk)*

► *Recreation in the broad sense. Quite often they arrive here on a Thursday or Friday. They make reconnaissance at shops, buy various things and collect them several days later, upon departure. In the meantime, they go to our clubs, dine at restaurants, and they also visit our spa resorts – particularly in the direction of Stupsk and the beautiful Dolina Charlotty spa complex. (Media Markt, Gdańsk)*

► *The typical Russian visitors can be divided into two groups: the middle-affluent Russians who come here for one reason, namely shopping. They do not necessarily have to re-sell the goods back*

*at home, although we know full well that their prices may be up to thrice as high as ours. The other group are typical tourists, taking typical weekend family outings, which include an aqua-park for kids and a spa for adults. (Bartoszyce)*

► *What Russians buy in Poland are staples, such as food – especially food, to be more precise. They mostly visit supermarkets and large-area stores. (Gdańsk resident working for Sopot Municipal Museum)*

► *The Russians mostly buy clothing, but I also saw them buying raw meat in 10kg bags at a Tesco. This is simply because these things cost them less than back home. They also buy electronic equipment – the offer here is wider and the prices are much lower. (Taxi driver, Gdańsk)*

Restaurants not only invite Russians in their own language, they also serve them dishes which appeal to the Russian palate. But it is also often argued that Russian visitors eagerly go for Polish and international cuisine.

► *What do they order? Their traditional dishes, such as pelmeni. They are 25-to-40 years' old, and they usually come here in pairs or with family. They tend to spend much and they do not care about prices. Their usual drink is the Polish vodka brand, Żubrówka (bison vodka). (Russian cuisine restaurant, Gdańsk)*

Retailers in the Gdańsk/Gdynia/Sopot area notice that they are getting their first regulars among the Russians.

► *The Russians have been coming here virtually without a break, all the year round. These are young people, but there are families, too. Overall, you can see their faces time and again, but there are also many people who visit us for the first time. (Large furniture store, outside Gdańsk)*

► *I'm excited with them. I have my regulars from Kaliningrad who come here to buy suits. (Clothing outlet, outside Gdańsk)*

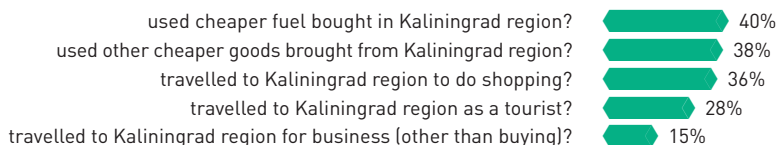


The contacts can be viewed in terms of “outreach” and of their “density”. The contacts’ outreach refers to their spread in any form. Some 83% of the respondents declared having had such contacts over the preceding 30 days. In the sample under review, the farthest outreach can be spotted e.g. in the districts close to the border (Bartoszycki, Braniewski), where some form of contact with Russian visitors over the recent time was declared by nearly everybody, a high outreach index was also seen in Gdańsk/Gdynia/Sopot (nine out of ten respondents).

Regarding the notion of density, it is defined as having contact with at least three manifestations of Russian presences over the preceding 30 days. The most “dense” contacts are thus reported in districts along the border (Bartoszycki, Braniewski, Gołdapski), where they are the most diversified and comprehensive. More than a half of these districts’ inhabitants declare having experienced the visitors’ presence in at least three ways. In the remaining districts, including the municipalities of Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot, the density of contacts has been lower.

### Diagram 1.3. Outreach of selected activities related to Local Border Traffic

*Do you know personally someone who over the past 12 months...*

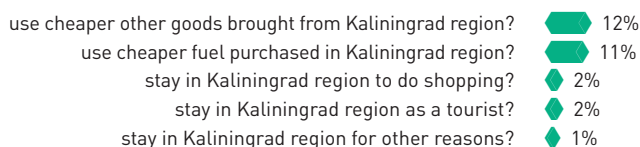


The scale of social phenomena which have been either triggered or accelerated by Local Border Traffic is reflected in the 57% proportion of respondents who declare knowing personally someone who has directly taken advantage (in one way or another) of opportunities provided by the simplified cross border procedures. The practice of the widest extent is buying cheaper

fuel from a petrol station on the Russian side – and this fuel is often resold in Poland. Using lower-priced goods carried from Kaliningrad region (mostly cigarettes and alcoholic beverages) is another practice frequently contacted by inhabitants of the area (38%). One out of three respondents knows personally someone who crosses the border for the purpose of buying goods there.

### Diagram 1.4. Respondents’ personal experiences with Local Border Traffic

*Over the past 12 months, did you personally...*



Some 18% of those surveyed declare having directly benefited from Local Border Traffic over the preceding 12 months – whether by using goods brought from Kaliningrad region (more

frequently), or by visiting Russia in person, for one reason or another (much less frequently). Territorial diversification is very clear. In Bartoszyce district, the proportions of those who

declare having used cheaper fuel and cheaper other goods carried from Kaliningrad region reach as high as, respectively, 44% and 39%. But these practices are only of marginal weight in the largest urban centres in the area, namely Gdańsk/Gdynia/Sopot and Olsztyn (declared by 5% of the respondents).

The typical direct beneficiary of the opportunities arising from Local Border Traffic over the past 12 months has this profile: living in a smaller locality (with up to 50,000 inhabitants), a man, assessing his household's financial status as either middling or bad.

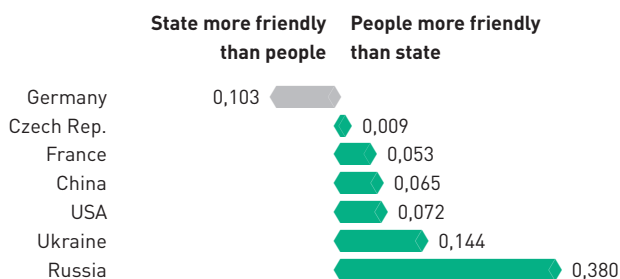
Interestingly, the attitude towards Russians on the part of people enjoying one of these benefits is sometimes less friendly than the attitude of other people. Asked about their emotions accompanying thoughts about Russians, those beneficiaries list negative emotions more frequently (e.g. distrust) than positive ones (e.g. sympathy). In addition to that, they declare a higher social distance to the Russians (as expressed by readiness to accept Russian visitors in various walks of life). Nor are they more convinced than others about Poles' benefiting from the Local Border Traffic arrangements.

# Contact with Russian visitors: impressions and opinions

## 2. Side by side but not together

**Diagram 2.1. Perception of states' and peoples' attitudes towards Poland and Poles**

*Q. I will read out a list of various states/peoples. With each one, please indicate whether it is very friendly to Poland, rather friendly, neither friendly nor hostile, rather hostile or very hostile.*



In addition to easier border crossing and commercial exchanges, the Local Border Traffic no doubt offers an opportunity to build close neighbourly relations between Poles and Russians. In direct people-to-people contacts, one's stereotypes and prejudices can be exposed to a reality check. There is a chance that the social distance we perceive between us and the Russians can be shortened.

► *Q: How do you perceive Local Border Traffic from the standpoint of international politics? – I'll tell you: this is wonderful. I am all for people to meet each other, talk to each other*

*and so on, because this reveals that neither we are so nasty to them nor they to us. Some such myths and prejudices about the Russians may, perhaps, be making rounds. I think that Bolshevism and Russia must not be thrown together, and must be approached separately. (Sales assistance, IKEA store)*

► *I've been meeting Russians for quite a while, and to me they have always been, and still are, open people. They are also nice, although this can also be said of most tourists coming here. As for the Russians, they are not noisy – they are simply normal. By tempera-*

*ment, they seem to be close to us. But take the Germans. You do not yet see them but you can hear them – that is to say, it depends on how old they are. Those elderly Germans, they are quiet, but the younger Germans – you can hear them from afar, even though you do not see them. So, compared to Germans, the Russians are very quiet. (Amber Museum, Gdańsk)*

As demonstrated by research findings (from the telephone poll and from a 2012 omnibus survey), Poles are convinced that the attitude of Russians towards Poles is more friendly than the attitude of Russia towards Poland.

► *There are no particular spats between Poles and Russians, because Russians are humans and Poles are humans, too. Rather, you would see more conflicts higher up.*

All those questioned about the subject emphasise that the behaviour of Russian visitors is quiet and as expected – whether in public places or, e.g. on the road. According to law enforcement agencies, there were virtually no incidents involving visitors. Opinions were formulated that during their first visits to Poland, the Russians were conspicuously obliging, even diffident.

► *As a rule, you could not tell that they are Russian – otherwise than by language. Usually we learn that they are Russians only when they speak, because they are just regular guys. (Taxi driver, Gdańsk)*

They have surely plucked up more courage now – they know quite well what they want, where they are going, and they largely feel at home. They may happen to be noisy, but there is nothing to be said against their conduct.

► *They know everything, like where a certain warehouse is located or where meat is sold. They have inside-out knowledge of our local environment – I myself didn't know about some shops of which they knew.*

► *Russians are unlike other tourists, they are interested in typical shopping. This is because of the VAT differentials. Even the tourist information centre now offers Russian-language guidebooks. Many young people have been coming, e.g. on school excursions, but older folks, too. We have had a whole cross-section here: young people on private stays, large organised groups, senior citizens, families. For a weekend getaway, the distance is just 140 km. (Private tourist agency – owner)*

Language happens to pose a barrier to cutting down the distance, but it is by no means insurmountable.

► *It is my sense that Scandinavians are more open than Russians. Yes, Russians are certainly less open. They are simply less communicative, in terms of language, and they are not as eager to interface with us. (Shop with Polish cosmetics, Gdańsk)*

► *In part we use kind of a sign language, and we also remember some words from school. We're getting along. (Shopping mall, branded clothing store, Gdańsk)*

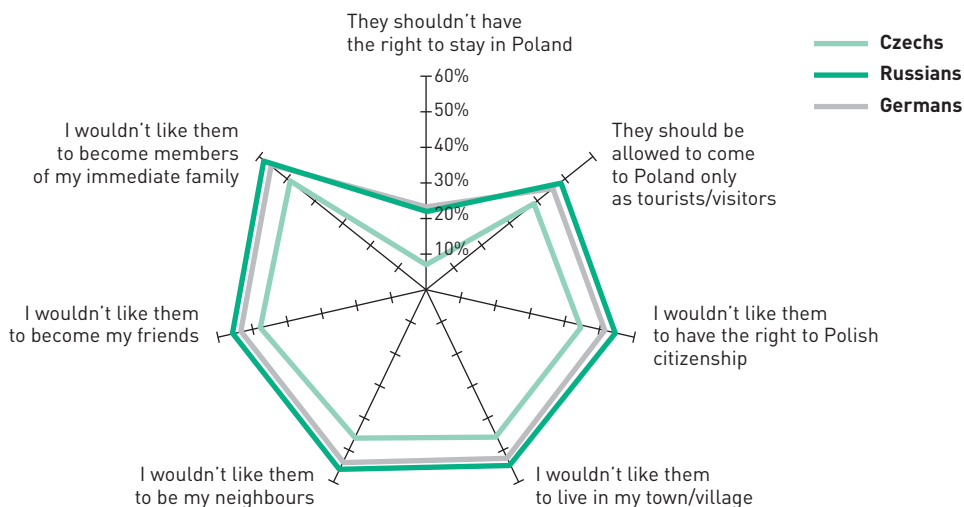
► *You do not necessarily have to know Russian, because they often speak in a way that we understand. It is true that some words may have different meanings, but we speak part-Russian, part-Polish – myself included – and in this way we understand each other. (Russian cuisine restaurant, Gdańsk)*

But does that mean that we see friends in Russians and meet them only with joy?

A popular measure of social distancing, used by sociologists, is the so-called Bogardus scale, where several questions are asked about accepting representatives of a given group (national, ethnic, religious) as members of the respondents' ever closer circles, down to the family circle.

**Diagram 2.2. Russians on social-distance scale**

*Please, think about a person of a given nationality. Now, answer whether or not the following comments fit in with your opinion.*



The attitude towards representatives of a given group is presented and analysed against the attitudes towards other groups, measured in the same way. When selecting the nationalities with which to compare the Russians, we followed the findings of the 2012 omnibus study, which showed Poles' attitude towards Czechs (and Slovaks) to be relatively the most favourable. On the other hand, in the case of Germany, the people-to-people relations were found to be perceptibly less friendly than inter-state relations.

As it turns out, on the social distance scale, Russians are much closer to Germans than to Czechs. Actually, assessments of Russians and Germans happen to be identical. For example, 21% of the respondents wouldn't give Russians the right to stay in Poland and 22% would not give such rights to Germans (against only 7% in respect of Czechs). Some 55% wouldn't like Russians to become part of their close family (e.g. through marriage, partnership involving a child, etc.), against 56% and 48% who would not accept in this role Germans and Czechs, respectively.

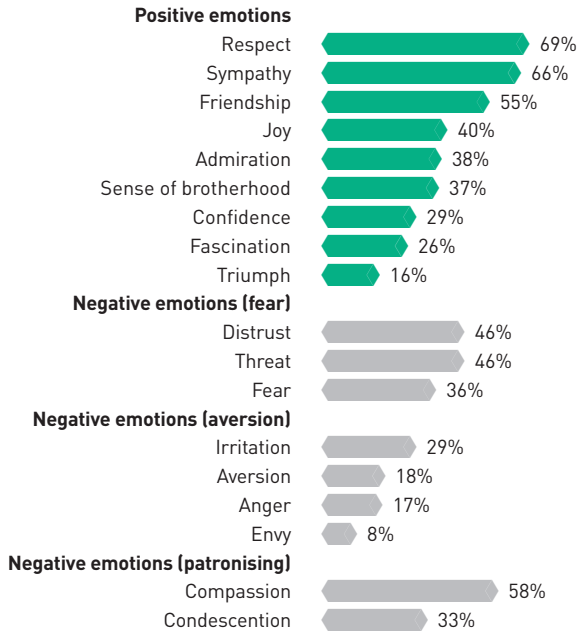
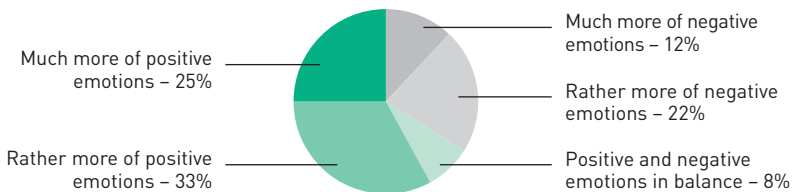
Interestingly, the recent intensification of contacts with Russians seems not to have impacted the respondents' sense of social distance to them. The percentage of those arguing that Russians should not have the right to stay in Poland in the group declaring indirect/direct contacts with Russians is similar to the percentage seen among the remaining respondents.

Among those declaring directly benefiting from Local Border Traffic arrangements (e.g. using cheaper fuel or other goods, or crossing the border under simplified procedures), the percentage of people sharing the opinion that Russians must not have the right to stay in Poland is actually higher than among the remaining respondents (29% vs. 20%). It really looks like one year is much too short a time for Poles to perceptibly change their attitudes to the Russian visitors.

► *It's OK when affluent Russians come here, but once the poorer ones arrive various sketchy dealings will begin. (Solid Security agency's patrolman)*

**Diagram 2.3. Emotions felt when thinking about Russians (1)**

*I will read out a list of various emotions. Please tell us which of these you feel when thinking about Russian citizens.*

**Diagram 2.4. Emotions felt when thinking about Russians (2)**

The emotions presented to respondents were grouped (drawing on hierarchical cluster analysis), to ensure that intuitional categorisations of emotions (into positive and negative) are extended to take into account the respondents' viewpoint and way of thinking. Four groups of emotions felt by respondents towards Russians can be distinguished: positive (1), and negative ones, stemming from different roots: fear (2), aversion (3) and sense of superiority (4).

Positively tinted emotions, such as respect, sympathy and friendship, have the upper hand. They are declared more frequently by men than by women, and also by those with higher education as compared to the rest (political correctness, intention to be seen as a modern person, free of prejudices against other peoples). Personal acquaintance clearly translates into their being perceived more favourably (commensurate with the "contact hypothesis"). Interestingly, though, among those declaring

more of superficial contacts, even if more frequent (meetings while walking, shopping, occasional conversations), declarations of positive emotions towards Russian visitors are usually less frequent. It could thus be concluded that Russians "gain points" not so much when you get to know them better, but only when you get to know them very closely.

When it comes to fear-based emotions, the dependence on respondents' age is clear. The youngest group (18–29-year-olds) declare fear perceptibly less frequently than those in their 30s and 40s, not to mention the elderly. This correlation, it seems, is of a generational nature and should be linked to the absence among the young of conscious memories of the time of "People's Republic of Poland".

The fear-based emotions are declared more frequently by women (especially those who meet Russians frequently, but in non-personal relations) and by people without higher education.

The generational perspective seems to be the best way to understand the social determinants of the stronger negative emotions of aversion or anger. Such feelings are rarely shared by younger people, and more frequently by the elderly, especially those in their 50s and 60s. Once again, it turns out that dense but superficial contacts with the Russians tend to go hand in hand with negative feelings, rather than the positive ones.

Compassion and condescension often coexist, and so the decision was taken to study them together. Their common denominator is the accompanying sense of superiority and patronising attitudes. Echoes of such attitudes towards Russians could be heard in some conversations held in the course of the field part of the research. As with the previous patterns, the correlates of these feelings are similar: relations with Russians which are frequent but superficial have the effect of fuelling such feelings, and the reverse is true when personal

acquaintance with a Russian comes into the picture.

► *If the Russians didn't come here, things would be worse. Once, we Poles were going to Berlin for buying and selling, now let them do the same here. (Taxi driver, Gdańsk)*

To sum up this part, it can be concluded that the increased intensity of mutual contacts in the area has yet to translate into a change in Poles' emotional attitude towards Russians. Poles and Russians have increasingly been acting side by side (which is a novel development in itself), meeting in everyday life and passing by one another, but at the present stage there are no signs of any closer ties developing or people getting to know each other better. The new reality that emerged is entirely one-dimensional, with the Polish-Russian relations being confined to commercial exchanges. Cultural exchanges are only in a nascent state, and there are no institutions and no organised effort to bring the two communities closer together.

► *Generally, there are quite many Russian tourists in Sopot, but they are not seen in this theatre. This is, after all, a place where you are expect to know the language. Russian-language plays are staged, too, but only when we have some festival, such as the Shakespeare Festival. Performances are then given in various languages – but this is not the case on a daily basis. (Theatre, Sopot)*

Young people in Poland do not seem to be pinning any hopes on Local Border Traffic or making any plans related to it, and interest in Russian learning is infinitesimal. Kaliningrad region is not perceived as an interesting place to visit, whether in the context of mass tourism or some niche tourist interests.

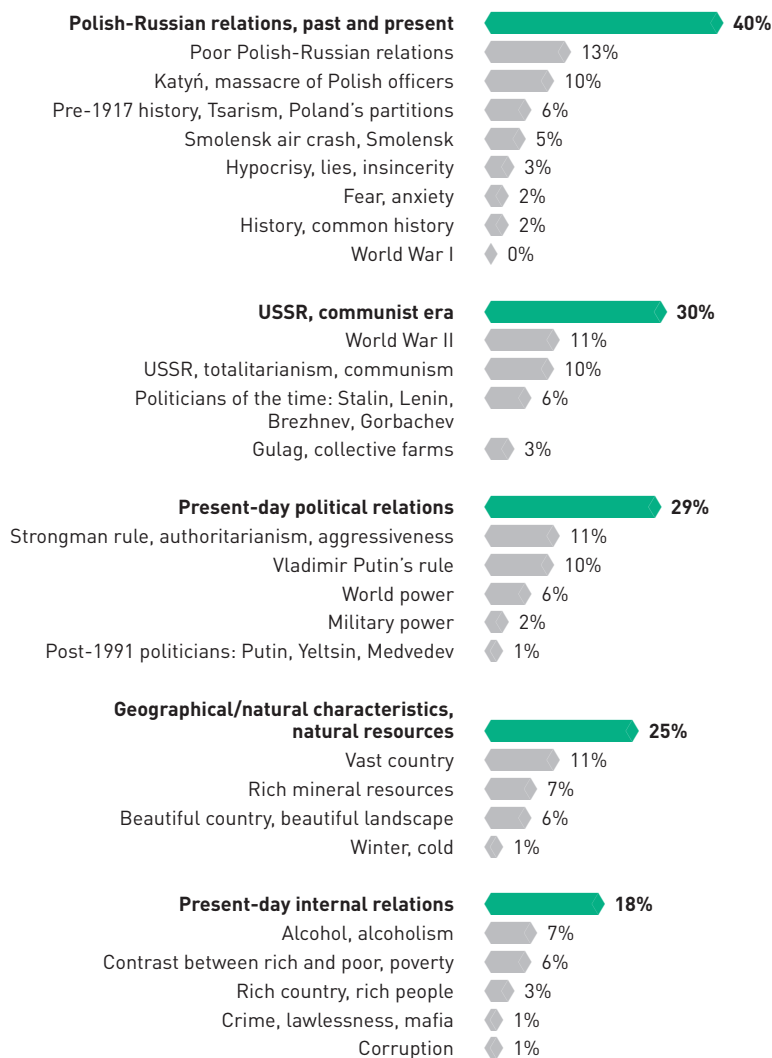
► *I haven't been there yet. I do not have any reason to do that, be it tourism or shopping. (Household appliances shop, outside Gdańsk)*

► *Somehow, nothing draws me towards Russia. I do not know why I should go there – I would rather take the other direction, do Germany or England. This may be because I take German and English language courses, and that's what pulls me. I learned about those countries in school, but I know less about Russia. (Russian cuisine restaurant, Gdańsk)*

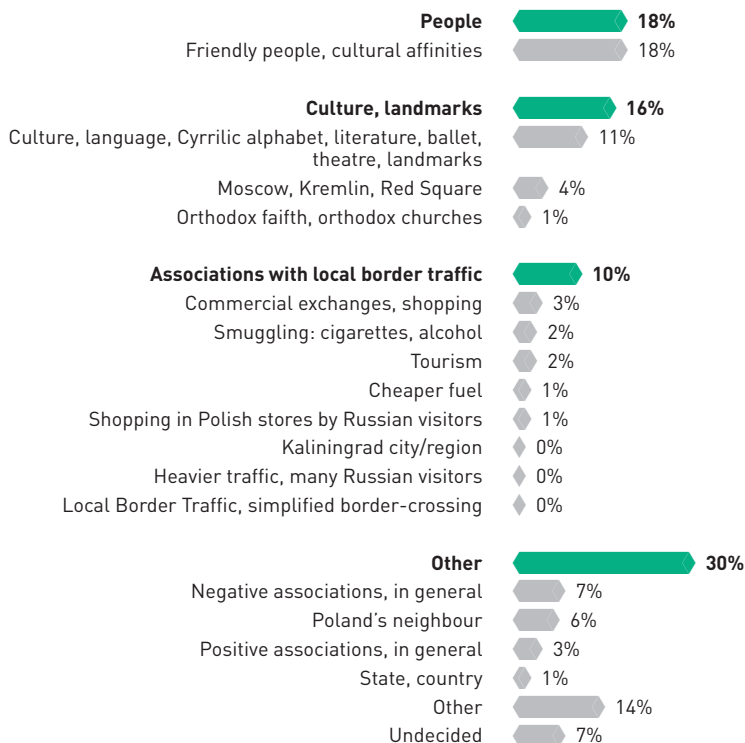
Obviously, it would be naive to expect that everything could be achieved just one year after the launch of the initiative. But it is intriguing that – with several exceptions which only prove the rule – the Kaliningrad region provides no point of reference and is not factored in plans for the future of local residents, or at least those who have been questioned on this topic.

## Diagram 2.5. Associations with Russia

When you hear the word "Russia", what are you top-of-mind associations?







In the light of the presented findings, it can be argued that the respondents' attitude towards Russians is a mixed bag of positive and negative emotions, plus a perceptible social distance. This is commensurate with findings of the omnibus survey taken in autumn 2012 on a representative national sample – in the final report, the Russians were described as the “farthest-removed among the close ones.”

There are certainly many varied and complex causes of this state of affairs. Some light, perhaps, is cast by the findings about associations with Russia on the part of telephone interviewees. Their top-of-mind associations reveal the set of primary dispositions and come as predictors of attitude towards a given subject.

The associations that locals in the area have in connection with Russia are permeated by the spirit of history and of important – past and present – events taking place in the space of

mutual Polish-Russian relations (at the state level). In these two largest groups, negatively tinted associations predominate: observations that these relations are generally not good, vivid reminiscences of Katyń, remembrance of the time of Poland's partitions, of the air crash of the presidential plane in 2010, and of the time of communism. Such associations are indicted by seven out of ten respondents.

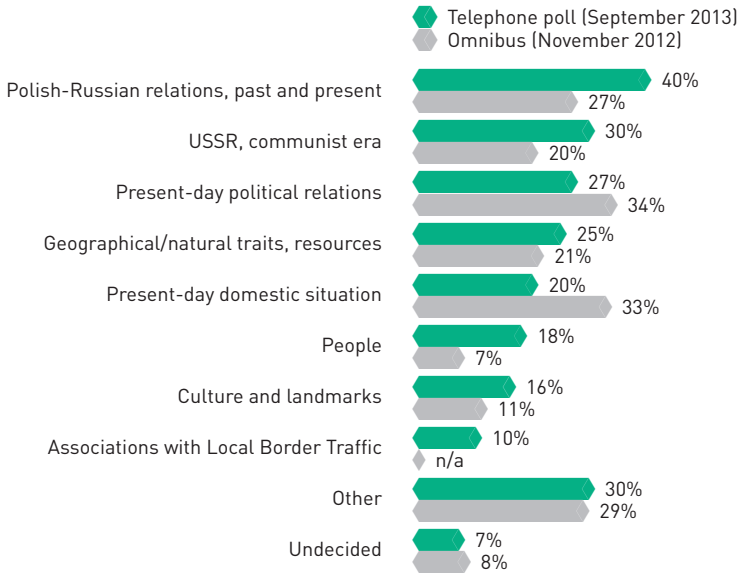
There are also strong associations with Russia's contemporary political and systemic realities, with the present Russian authorities and that country's position on the international arena (29%).

Every fourth association is a neutral observation about Russia's geographical or natural characteristics. Present-day internal and social problems of Poland's eastern neighbours are indicated by 18% of the respondents. Also 18% of them name Russia's inhabitants as good-hearted, friendly and culturally close to Poles.

Only 10% of those questioned have associations related to Local Border Traffic, an unimpressive result compared with the other groups of associations. But it must be added that in some districts near the border (Bartoszycki, Braniewski),

and also in Lidzbarski district, the associations spring to the mind of every third respondent. They are also slightly more frequently cited by under-50-year-olds (13% vs. 6% among the elderly).

**Diagram 2.6. Main groups of associations with Russia, compared with national research**



A juxtaposition of the most frequent association-with-Russia groups named by respondents of the autumn 2012 omnibus survey and by the telephone interviewees reveals that associations involving history and problems in Polish-Russian relations are perceptibly more frequent among the area population, where the aspect of people-to-people relations, with emphasis on the cultural affinity of Poles and Russians, is also cited more frequently.

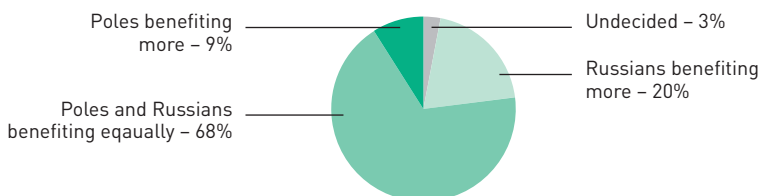
Summing up, the inhabitants of the area in Poland perceive Russia mainly through the prism of difficult and history-laden interstate relations. a conspicuous feature is the diametrically different assessment of interstate and people-to-people contacts. Associations are (for the time being) relatively weak, but they are more frequent in the area of intense Local Border Traffic.

# How Russian visits impact local community

## 3. Two-way benefits

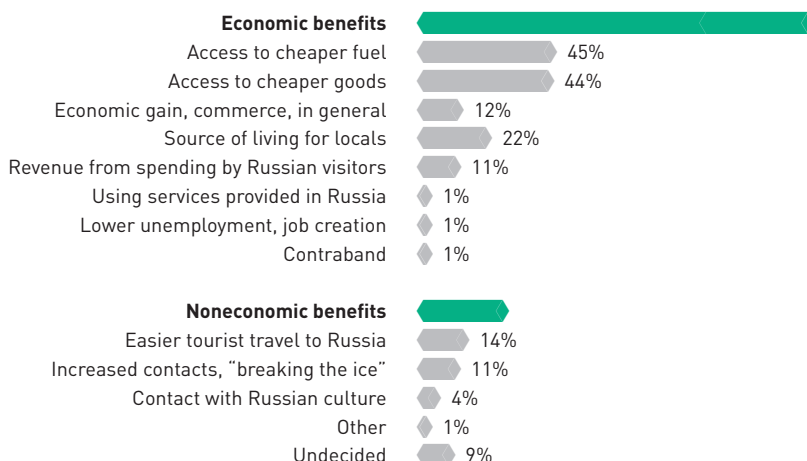
**Diagram 3.1. Scoresheet of benefits**

*What do you think of Local Border Traffic:*



**Diagram 3.2. Benefits for Poles**

*In your opinion, what benefits are gained by Poles as a result of Local Border Traffic with Russia?*



Most respondents (two-thirds) find the benefits to be shared equally between Poles and Russians. This opinion is held more frequently by those who:

▶ witness the practical aspects of the area on a daily basis: cars with Russian registration, Russians shopping and walking around in Poland,

▶ benefit in person, e.g. by buying cheaper petrol or other goods, or by themselves crossing the border under simplified procedures.

▶ *They come here, shop, drive our taxis, check in hotels – it's obvious that things get better as a result. (Taxi driver, Gdańsk)*

Among the remaining respondents the dominant view is that the Russians benefit more (20%). But social and demographic correlates of such opinions are hard to pinpoint.

All respondents agree that the benefits for Poles primarily have to do with access to cheaper fuel and cheaper goods, such as cigarettes and alcoholic beverages, which in practice are distributed through the "shadow economy". The conviction is held, though, that the border provides a source of living for many families and a means of easing up the social consequences of unemployment – and this opinion is shared by common people and by the officialdom in borderland municipalities. Consequently, all those

questioned are at one that the shadow economy should not be combated (e.g. by imposing monthly limits on border crossings or quantities of fuel taken into the country).

▶ *As we see it, this may be the reason why there are no dole queues and people can bring home the bacon. And this is supported, I once heard, by Goddap mayor, too.*

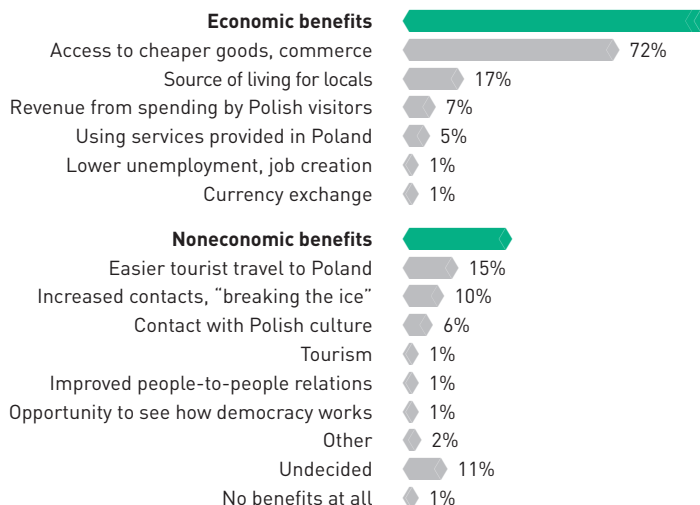
When discussing benefits, the focus is primarily on commercial exchanges, sales growth and job creation/retention. Other aspects are of much lesser importance.

The most likely venues where the average borderland inhabitant can meet a Russian are: a grocery, a radio/TV/household-appliances store, or a clothing/footwear shop. In public imagination, the Russians come with such attributes as a shopping cart (filled to the brim with purchases) and a high-class car parked outside a shop. Asked where one can meet Russians, Bartoszyce residents instantly point to one of the town's four discount stores, and Gdańsk inhabitants to the Galeria Battycka shopping mall.

This finds reflection in the pattern of perceived benefits which, respondents believe, are derived by the Russian. Economic benefits are firmly in the fore.

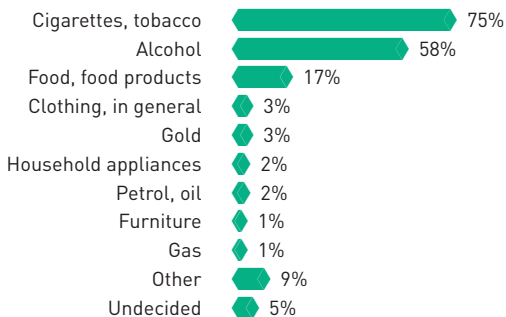
**Diagram 3.3. Benefits for Russians**

*In your opinion, what benefits are gained by Russians as a result of Local Border Traffic with Poland?*



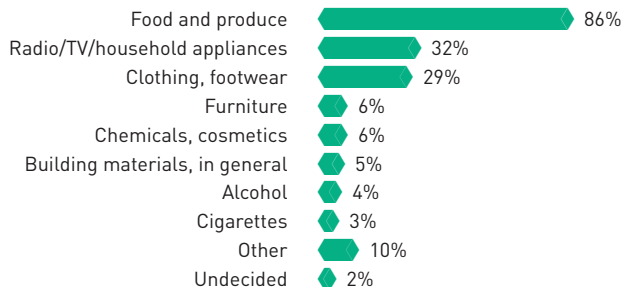
**Diagram 3.4. Goods purchased by Poles in Kaliningrad region**

*Which products do Poles buy at lower prices in Kaliningrad region?*



**Diagram 3.5. Goods purchased by Russians in Poland**

*Which products do Russians buy at lower prices in Poland?*

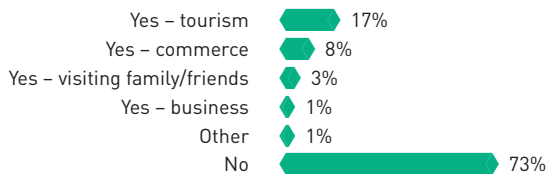


# Interest in visiting Kaliningrad/Russia, post-visit impressions

## 4. One-way traffic

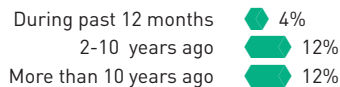
**Diagram 4.1. Visits by Poles to Kaliningrad region**

*Have you ever been to Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation? If so, for what purpose?*



**Diagram 4.2. Last visit – how long ago?**

*When were you in Kaliningrad region last time?*



For Poles living in the area, the Kaliningrad region is not an attractive commercial or tourist destination.

According to the available statistics and the common knowledge of those interviewed in the field part of the research, there are huge asymmetries within area: first, there are much more Russian visits in Poland than Polish visits in Kaliningrad region, and second, the former

are a bit more diversified, involving several different destinations (smaller localities near the border, Gdańsk/Gdynia/Sopot, Mazury lake region, Baltic coastline). Regarding the Polish traffic, as local lore in the area has it, Polish cars go as far as “a first petrol station” and come back after “filling her up”.

This illustrates the previously mentioned one-sided nature of the practical Polish-Russian

contacts, which are confined to commercial relations. If Local Border Traffic is expected to generate better neighbourly relations, then changing this state of affairs should certainly be a goal.

For the time being, though, as e.g. the two previous diagrams indicate, residents of the Polish part of the area districts are not widely known for going on tourist excursions to the Kaliningrad region – actually, the conversations held on the spot reveal that they are usually not interested in such visits. They would have problems answering why they should take a tourist visit to Kaliningrad region, they are not familiar with any tourist attraction on the other side of the border, and if they have some knowledge about these, it is not encouraging.

Low tourist attractiveness of Kaliningrad region and the absence – whether actual or perceived – of tourist infrastructure there was a theme present in many conversations with local residents. The few interviewees' accounts of their visits to the region (usually to its capital) were about "antediluvian" times, and were hardly enthusiastic. What those tourists remembered were Kaliningrad's greyness and neglect. But those of them who later repeated the visit – to Kaliningrad or to another location – emphasised the dynamics of welcome change in this respect.

► *Everybody knows that those who go there come back with fuel. Kaliningrad hasn't much to offer. The city was destroyed during World War II, and it stays unreconstructed. (Private tourist agency – owner)*

► *Q. How about the other direction? Is the Kaliningrad-bound traffic of the same in-*

*tensity? – My sense is, it is smaller in scale. Q. Aren't Poles interested? – And what would they watch there – nuclear submarines? ... I haven't been there, but from what I hear there is nothing to watch. (Amber Gallery, Gdańsk)*

► *Two, three or four years ago, when we were invited to Pionersky, ours were one-day visits because they had no hotel accommodation. Now there are three hotels there. I was greatly impressed by how Pionersky looks today.*

The potential Polish tourists think they would not find adequate hotel accommodation of diversified standard. A widely-held belief is that hopes of a likable meal should be abandoned. One would rather expect poor servicing standards, and prices higher than in Poland. But what predominates is security-related fears, e.g. about organised crime (including a "police mafia"), and there is the deeply-rooted belief that a visitor's car would be pulled over by the police, under any pretext, for as long as a bribe is not paid. It must be strongly emphasised that in the local residents' opinion, Russia is not a safe country for a traveller.

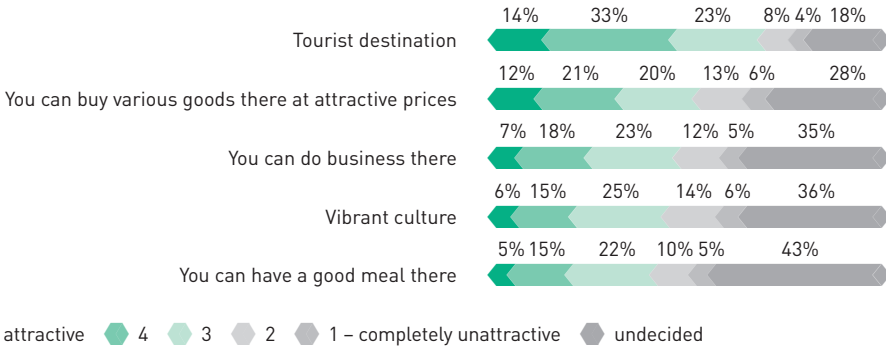
► *Q.: – Don't you feel the pull [of Kaliningrad]? – No, we don't.. – You should expect quite many surprises there. (Solid Security agency's patrolmen)*

These comments are confirmed by findings of the telephone survey (below).

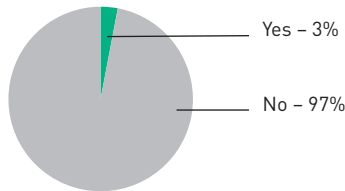
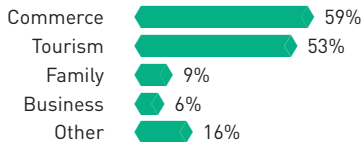
In the sample surveyed, 3% declared to have been crossing the border under simplified procedures. For the most part, these were visits of a commercial or tourist nature; in some cases both these purposes were indicated simultaneously.

**Diagram 4.3. How attractive Kaliningrad region is, by various criteria**

*Based on your own experience or opinions you have heard, how do you assess the attractiveness of Kaliningrad region, by the following criteria.*

**Diagram 4.4. Crossing the border under Local Border Traffic procedure**

*Did you cross the border with Russia under simplified Local Border Traffic procedure?*

**Diagram 4.5. Purpose of visit involving border crossing under Local Border Traffic procedure**

We can thus see that perceptions of Kaliningrad's tourist or cultural attractiveness rarely have a chance of being confronted with the reality. What is unquestionably lacking is informational/promotional effort by Russian business, which would target potential Polish tourists and seek to encourage them to visit. The website <http://kaliningrad.ru>, for one, has no Polish-language version and no content targeting Poles

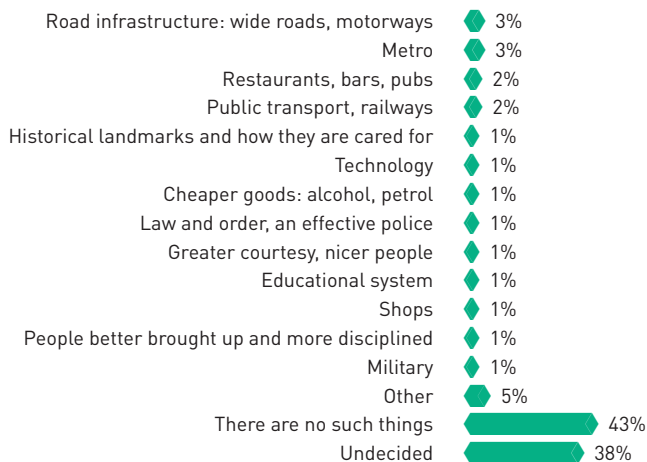
(whereas the Gdańsk website does have a version in Russian, although this is not the case with, e.g. Bartoszyce).

► *Our restaurants were very quick to adjust, coming with all those Russian-language menus, offers and websites. But there is no such thing on the other side.*



**Diagram 4.6. Things which respondents believe are better run in Russia than in Poland**

*Do you believe there are things in Russia which are handled in a better way than in Poland? If so, which*



Among those who have been to Kaliningrad region, most either are unable to identify, or question the existence of, elements which would impress them, which they think would be worth transplanting to Poland, or which

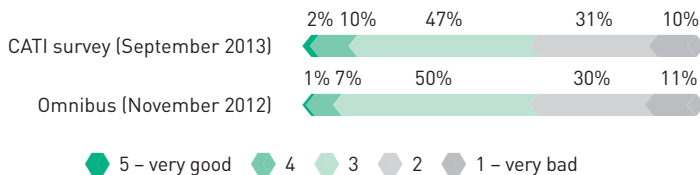
would indicate higher standards of living there. Sporadically, a good condition of the roads and the Kaliningrad metro were mentioned in this context.

# Overall assessment of Polish-Russian relations and prospects for their development

## 5. It will take time, but the direction is right

**Diagram 5.1. Opinions about Polish-Russian relations**

*How do you assess the current Polish-Russian relations?*



The findings of the telephone poll among residents of the area are nearly identical with those of the national research conducted in the autumn of 2012, as far as the general assessment of Polish-Russian relations is concerned. As already mentioned, the weight of ongoing relations between the two countries is pretty high, and many top-of-mind associations with Russia are precisely about the mostly difficult issues involved in ongoing politics.

Most respondents are convinced that these relations are bad ("1" or "2" on a scale from 1 to 5) or present a mixed picture (this is how the "3" mark can be interpreted). The relations are perceived as good by only 12% of those surveyed.

The general conclusion is about a nexus being found between the poor assessment of Polish-Russian relations, large numbers of negative associations with Russia, negative emotions, and a perceptible social distance to Russians. These are constituent elements of the complex image of Russia and its inhabitants. The Local Border Traffic experiment may be seen as a step towards changing the state of play, but as of now – given short duration so far, and the one-sided, one-dimensional character of everyday Polish-Russian contacts – such change has yet to materialise.

# Annex – Case studies

## Business people / Merchants

### A building materials store on the outskirts of Gdańsk (stair and floor elements, finishing materials)

Respondent: store manager, responsible for supplying both domestic and foreign customers (dozen-plus-year experience in the sector).

► Foreign customers who come to the store to buy or watch the merchandise are mostly residents of Kaliningrad (5-6 people a week). They inspect the stuff and compare prices. The choice in Polish shops is wider and the offer more attractive than in Kaliningrad region.

► For the most part, they are wealthy individuals who often come to Poland, mostly for shopping. They are not demanding customers.

► They speak English, Russian and also Polish.

► The company has a website and leaflets in English, but no Russian-language material is planned to be added, for the time being.

► The purchased products are sent by delivery company .

The respondent clearly delineates her private contacts with Kaliningrad region residents from the business contacts. She speaks highly of her friends, and with respect. As for her business experiences with Russians, she describes them as positive. In her business environment, she would accept Russian employees, but perhaps not a boss.

► *I have been friends with a lot of people from the East for many years, and this friendship stands firm and solid.*

► *We are a company with partners at Kaliningrad. I was there twice. [Responding to question: How did you like there, business-wise?] It was fine in business terms, we had*

*no major problems. [How about private impressions?] – I will not discuss this subject. I wouldn't like to criticise them. Because I have very good relations and wonderful cooperation with people from Kaliningrad, I wouldn't like to criticise the politics and all that is going on there.*

► Her opinion about Local Border Traffic is highly positive, businesswise (more customers, higher sales); she would not name any drawbacks.

### A store with upscale furniture from Polish producers, on the outskirts of Gdańsk

Respondent: salesperson representing a Polish period furniture maker, with several-year experience in the industry; working for the Gdańsk store for a year and a half.

► Foreign customers mostly come from Scandinavia and also from the East. Frequently, these are regular private customers.

► Customers from the East usually speak Russian. This may pose some problems with ordering and filling in the papers (which are in Polish).

► They like the Polish products and find them to be better than in Kaliningrad region – even if they have different tastes.

► *The regulars are private individuals, with pretty wide differences in age. ... They like our merchandise. They certainly like glitz, tinsel and bric-a-brac. What we regard just as a small addition they display all over the house. We may have one golden chair at home, but they will bring entire golden furniture sets. ... The customers who come to us, they do have the money.*

► From the business standpoint, larger-scale cooperation with Kaliningrad region (exports) would be pretty complicated, given the procedures involved in moving the merchandise across the border (logistics and transport). Because of the costs of transport (and bribes), such venture would be unprofitable, troublesome and risky. The best solution is when the customers themselves organise transportation, or when it is handled by a Russian company.

► *I once spoke to a man who had been there and he said he would never go back. He lost more than he earned. ... This is a financial problem. He said he had to leave wads of money along the way: in every village, on every street – it's just mind-boggling. From what I heard, the bribes were not only for bureaucrats or some other officials, but also for common people in the street, like for example a group of kids who would not let him pass... .*

### A private tourist agency in Gdańsk (Old Town sightseeing)

Respondent: Owner of the agency employing a dozen-plus tourist guides; five-year experience in the trade.

► He notes that Local Border Traffic was supported by promotions run by the Gdańsk Tourist Organisation, Pomeranian Chamber of Tourism, and Pomeranian Regional Tourist Organisation. They advertised Poland as a tourist destination in Kaliningrad region media – radio, TV, the internet, and the press – which, in the respondent's opinion, has influenced the tourist traffic (whereas the opening of the border had a greater impact on shopping visits).

► The respondent's business offers the services of Russian-speaking tourist guides, and these services are in great demand, especially because Russian senior citizens typically do not speak foreign languages. Young people from Kaliningrad region know (western) foreign languages, but not Polish.

► The respondent has watched a whole cross-section of Eastern visitors: families, school groups, individual excursions and package tours; excursions by private car and by coach. In his opinion, these are mostly weekend stays for the purpose of shopping – and while here, visitors also take interest in tourist attractions.

► He believes that mentally, Poles and Russians (both Slavic peoples) are closer to one another than, for example, Poles and Germans. He is very positively disposed towards Russians, and he expects stereotypes to die away and attitudes towards the other to change with time, due to positive experiences from commercial and tourist contacts. He compares the present situation in the area to that on the country's western border in the past (prior to EU accession).

### A hotel with a restaurant, surrounded by a park in a former manorial estate, outside Bartoszyce

► Since the launch of Local Border Traffic, the numbers of Russian visitors have grown many times over.

► For some Russian visitors, this is a stopover on their way back, after doing their shopping. They dine at the restaurant and take a stroll in the park. Some visits involve overnight stay (mostly on weekends), and may be linked to events such as the New Year's Eve party.

► The Russians are an important target group for the hotel, which has been taking decisive measures towards them, such as:

- advertising in Russia and in venues where Russians stay or through which they pass (including outdoor ads);
- employing a person with a fluent command of Russian, to take care of the Russian visitors;
- posting a full Russian-language version of the hotel's website;
- presenting event offers where Russians are the prime target.

### **A car-repair and transport company, Bartoszyce**

► The company is often shown as an example of how the opportunities related to Local Border Traffic can be tapped.

► The company's garage is one of several such outlets in the town – Russians bring their cars for repair, or they buy parts. The labour costs are roughly the same as in Russia, but the parts are available at much lower prices. And Russians customers believe that Polish mechanics work more reliably and more efficiently, giving them a higher value-for-money.

► The repair shop's owner also provides passenger transport services: his fleet of several large vehicles carries Russians to retail establishments and back home.

► Currently, this businessman is encountering problems caused by Polish authorities' arbitrary decisions to cap vehicle crossings at certain levels per month. For example, when applying for thirty vehicle-crossings, he was granted permission for only two. This greatly affects his business activity and credibility among Russian customers.

## Notes



It would be hard to imagine a better laboratory of social change than the districts in the northern Poland which form a Local Border Traffic area, together with the adjacent Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. This initiative gradually eliminates barriers to people-to-people contacts with neighbouring country on this section of the Polish state border. Given the difficult relations between Poland and Russia, it is hardly possible to exaggerate the experiences gained from this somewhat experimental project, which facilitated travel across the Polish-Russian border.

Population of Local Border Traffic area was surveyed a year after the new travel rules were introduced. The present report sums up the findings of both qualitative and quantitative. Some survey findings were additionally compared to data of the November 2012 national survey of Polish-Russian relations, carried out by CBOS polling agency to a commission from the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding.



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