Summary of the Dissertation

This study seeks to understand the diverse ways in which a transnational identity is lived and experienced at the Polish-German border, and how it was affected by the border closure evoked by the pandemic in the spring of 2020.
This study also attempts to better understand the degree in which a crisis allows for a sharper view onto the phenomena of trans-categorical identity; and what that sharper view can show concerning who and under what conditions finds sources of identity in the liminality of the trans-categorical.

Thousands of people live and work across the Polish-German border, as do 'border-landers' all over the world. As national or regional governments reacted to the Covid-19 pandemic by closing their borders in early 2020, the lives of these border-landers became particularly disrupted: going to work, going to school, visiting friends and family, doing shopping, access to the nearest hospital – all of that became nearly impossible. This study examines the extreme nature of that experience as an amplifier to a phenomenon, trans-national identity, that in everyday life might be more difficult to articulate as it is not challenged by external circumstances.

This study sets out with these specific questions as a starting point:

1. In which ways have persons who live in the Polish-German borderland experienced the pandemic-related border closure and how has it impacted their identity?
2. What is the impact of crises on grassroot/bottom-up European identity? Does it foster or weaken it; or perhaps does it not have an impact at all?

Drawing on a qualitative approach, 32 interviews with persons living and working across the Polish-German border were conducted. 21 were Polish citizens, 8 were German citizens, and 3 were socialized in both countries, holding double citizenship; 14 interviewees live in Poland

and 18 in Germany; 9 interviewees work in Poland, 23 in Germany. A total of 15 women and 17 men participated. The methodological approach focused on subjective self-descriptions and storytelling. Participants shared their stories of how they came to live a transnational life and how they experienced the border closures. They reflected on and answered the question: 'who are you?', and shared their perspectives of what it means to live a life across a border. This way, rich accounts about the participants personal and subjective experiences were gathered and their own analysis of what these mean to them documented.
Emerging from the analysis, four transborder phenotypes could be identified. These are differentiated by benefits or disadvantages they derive from their transborder life on one axis, and the degree to which they have an ideological and emotional involvement with the trans-national aspect of their life are proposed:

1. Transborder Actualizers (persons who report high benefits as well as high emotional and ideological involvement with the transnational),
2. Transborder Believers (persons who suffer some hardships and disadvantages from their transborder life, but report a strong emotional and ideological connection with the trans-national aspects of it),
3. Transborder Workers (persons who report many disadvantages besides monetary benefits, and have a stronger emotional attachment with the immediate life surroundings than the transnational),
4. and Transborder Harvesters (persons who reek many benefits from the transborder life yet are emotionally more concerned with their immediate surrounding than the transnational aspects of their life).

These phenotypes are described in detail in this dissertation.

The study concludes that transnational identity is a real, expressed, and consciously lived experience of at least some of the participants in this study. There are, however, traces of a transnational identity in all the responses. Transborder identity is strong and multidimensional, and a majority of the participants associate it with Europe, which they

took for granted until the pandemic related border closures. The openness of borders allows for permeability to a degree that an inter-woven borderscape becomes a lived reality in which ‘Europe’ is a daily experience. The dissertation introduces a new term to describe mechanisms shaping transborder identities that pays tribute to the systemic, dynamic and contextually embedded nature of this phenomenon.