



GERMANY/POLAND

SLUBFURT A DOUBLE EUROPEAN DREAM

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View from the German side of the bridge over the Oder river connecting Frankfurt (Oder) to Słubice. According to statistics, in 2016, about 2000 Poles lived in Frankfurt and about 500 of them cross the bridge every day to go to work.

- ▶ In 1945, following the fall of the Third Reich, the city on the Oder was divided in two: Frankfurt an der Oder (Germany) and Slubice (Poland)
- ▶ In 1999, twenty years ago, German artist Micheal Kurzwelly brought the two towns together to create "Slubfurt"
- ▶ In Europe there are 36 cross-border towns
- ▶ In December 2007 Poland became part of the Schengen area and borders disappeared
- ▶ The town of "Slubfurt" does not exist officially but it does have a council body



A man stands on the roof of his pickup at a car wash in Słubice.



Joanna Józefiak, CEO of Brandmed, the first cross-border medical centre, which opened in Słubice in 2016. All the medical staff can speak both Polish and German. Patients from Germany and Poland, whether they are covered by private or public health insurance, can access all the treatments.



Afghan asylum seekers in Brückenplatz (Bridge Square), the open space that is the heart of the Słubfurt community. The site, which also includes a gym, was completely renovated with the help of the large community of asylum seekers together with people from both Frankfurt and Słubice.



Michael Kurzwelly wrapped in the flag of Nowa Amerika. Kurzwelly is the German born creator of Słubfurt. He himself calls his work a "construction of reality", i.e. a way to bring art into the public sphere. Słubfurt has real boundaries, a parliament, a postcode and a currency. Słubfurt is also the capital of Nowa Amerika, a virtual country located on the German-Polish border, but it's likely that its boundaries will soon include other border towns all around Europe.

An hour by train from Berlin, a blue bridge connects the destinies of two cities: Frankfurt an der Oder (Germany) and its “younger” sister Slubice (Poland), the most famous of Europe’s 36 cross-border towns. Up until 1945, in fact, the two cities were part of a single urban conglomerate within the Third Reich. Following the post-war agreements, the neighbourhoods to the east of the river – the future Slubice – found themselves in Polish territory and German inhabitants were forced to flee by night, camping on the western bank of the river.

Slubice became a ghost town so the government decided to repopulate it by forcibly bringing in thousands of new inhabitants from the east of Poland. Since then the destinies of the two towns divided and in the following decades, crossing the bridge over the Oder meant strict controls and hours of waiting. This changed in December 2007, however, when Poland became part of the Schengen area and the remains of the border posts were dismantled: the relationship between the two cities intensified, giving life to a model of cross-border development that touched on sectors such as urban planning, services and education as well as tourism, and even creativity.

In 1999, in fact, exactly 20 years ago, German artist Michael Kurzwelly came up with the idea of “Slubfurt”: the virtual union of the two towns (although a real council body exists), a concept aimed to fight the stereotypes that had developed over 60 years of separation. At the heart of the Old Continent, Slubfurt today is arguably the best antidote to the growing anti-European sentiment.



An outdoor dance lesson in front of Collegium Polonicum in Słubice.



Dorota Rutka, librarian, teacher and coordinator of Polish-German projects, is employed at Zbigniew Herbert Comprehensive Secondary School in Słubice. Since 1994 she has been encouraging teenagers from Słubice to participate in initiatives aimed at the integration of people from the Polish and German banks of the Oder. One such initiative is the Building Bridges project that every year, for almost 20 years, has involved 40 students from Poland, Germany, Israel and Palestine.



Slubice. What remains of the 1924 art-deco facade of the "Kino Piast" movie theatre, which is now closed for good. The damaged sign now reads "No Past" which can be interpreted, given the history of the Polish-German borderlands, as a wish for the future. The poster at the entrance refers to a charity event for "Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy", the biggest, non-governmental, non-profit, charity organization in Poland.



Children playing at Brückenplatz (Bridge Square), the open space at the heart of Slubfurt social life. The site, which also includes a gym, was completely renovated with the help of the large community of asylum seekers together with people from both Frankfurt (Oder) and Slubice.



Robert Reuter, since 2009 has been the director of the HanseStadtFest festival also known as "Bunter Hering", the largest cross-border summer event that takes place between Frankfurt and Słubice. Concerts by international artists, DJ sets, historical re-enactments and fireworks attract around 100,000 people each year.



Stübice. A mural depicting the silhouette of the blue bridge on the Oder incorporating the European flag. The mural appeared on the night of 26 April 2019.



In Słubice it is now common to see German cars, especially Mercedes, with Polish license plates. At the beginning of the millennium the average Polish salary was about one tenth of the average German salary. Today the ratio is about 1/3. It is also estimated that around 2000 Polish citizens live and work in Frankfurt, while around 500 people cross the bridge every day to work in Germany.



Georg Gauger, born in Stuttgart, is a law student at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). He is the chair of the student representatives and a Senator. He says, "Frankfurt is place of possibilities. Rents are cheap, institutions are supportive and there is space. Frankfurt and Słubice have space for ideas".



A child falls from his bicycle next to a huge cigarette advertisement on a tobacco shop in Słubice. The trade in cigarettes, alcohol and fuel is part of life in border towns. Vendors on the Polish side claim that about 90% of their customers are Germans, who can save up to 50% compared with Frankfurt (Oder) prices.



A fisherman and his car on the Polish bank of the Oder river in Słubice.



Barbara Weiser-Lada, music teacher and choir director. 1986 she founded the first Polish-German choir made up of 30 children from Słubice and 30 from Frankfurt. In 1990 the project evolved into the Adoramus chamber choir which still involves adults from both sides of the Oder.



Urban landscape in Słubice.



Janine Nuyken, Vice President of European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). The University has developed a cross-border education system with Collegium Polonicum of Słubice and Adam-Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Around 6500 students from more than 100 countries are currently attending classes at Viadrina. An increasing number of students from both Poland and Ukraine choose to study in this border region.



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Krzysztof Wojciechowski has described the current collaboration between the Polish and German people as "a miracle". He is the President of Collegium Polonicum in Słubice, a joint university involving Frankfurt (Oder)'s European University Viadrina and the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. It hosts about 500 students from both sides who study law and international affairs. Many programmes focus on Polish-German issues within the European context. Graduates receive a Polish-German double degree.



View from the Polish side of the bridge over the Oder river that connects Frankfurt (Oder) to Słubice.



Zigaretten Welt is the best stocked cigarette shop in Słubice. The trade in cigarettes, alcohol and fuel is still one of the main attractions for German customers. Jacek claims that at his shop 90% of customers are German.



Aleksandra Biniewicz, PhD student at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Her book *Contemporary Identity and Memory in the Borderlands of Poland and Germany* is an anthropological study that includes interviews with the inhabitants of Ślubice and Gubin (a border town on the Polish bank of the Neiße river).



An Afghan asylum seeker in Brückenplatz (Bridge Square), the open space at the heart of Słubfurt social life. The site, which also includes a gym, was completely renovated with the help of the large community of asylum seekers together with people from both Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice.



A man walks across the bridge from Frankfurt to Słubice.



Jacek has been working for 6 years as a salesman at Zigaretten Welt, Słubice's best stocked cigarette shop. The trade in cigarettes, alcohol and fuel is still one of the main attractions for German customers. Jacek claims that at his shop 90% of customers are German.



The countryside bordering the Oder river on the Polish side.



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