

Covid-19 and Cross-Border Shopping

An Analysis of the influence of the restrictions related to Covid-19 towards the Dutch-German cross-border shopping based on the case of Bocholt

Name: Moritz Friederich (s2401614)
Date: 01.07.2021
Educational programme: Public Governance across Borders
University: University of Twente, Enschede
Word Count: 9575 words

Abstract

Cross-border shopping is a topic that was studied intensively by several researchers for many years. The researchers focused on different areas such as the economy or socio-cultural to examine cross-border shopping. However, this thesis examines the impact of the Covid-19 related restrictions on cross-border shopping based on the past work from the researchers in this area. The research question of this thesis is "To what extent do the Covid 19 related restrictions imposed during the first wave influenced the cross-border shopping at the Dutch-German border region based on the case of Bocholt?". In order to answer the research question, three sub-questions were raised to answer the research question and data were collected by documents and the "Stadtmarketing of the city of Bocholt". This thesis shows that the impact of the restrictions imposed by the European Union and the German government had a significant impact on cross-border shopping.

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1. Introduction

In a globalising world, the borders become more open, and the economic and cultural exchange increase fast. (Mohanty et al., 2018) Especially the economy between the countries interweaves with each other. (Mohanty et al., 2018) The European Union (EU) and its Member States benefit particularly from this development. Open borders within the European Union were an essential key for growing economically. However, the branches of trade of the different countries, especially in Europe, built up dependencies between each other regarding the distribution chains, the production of goods and the availability of specific products in different countries etc. Furthermore, The EU decided to harmonise different aspects regarding the retail economy in Europe (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019), and the EU is trying to support this economy by developing strategic dependencies and capacities. (European Commission (1), 2021)

The impact of cross-border shoppers on the retailers in the border region has been studied extensively by researchers and from different perspectives since cross-border shopping is a phenomenon that has been studied at least for over 90 years. (Leal et al., 2010). Furthermore, while previous research focused on economic and monetary aspects (mainly taxes and customs duties) since the beginning of 2000, other factors such as socio-cultural aspects have also come into focus. The various perspectives of these studies are discussed in the theory section of this thesis.

In early 2020, a global pandemic broke out, caused by the Coronavirus or Covid-19. Until the 25th of March 2020, more than 150 countries confirmed to be affected by the virus, including Germany and the Netherlands. (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021) In the course of this pandemic, various measures were taken by the state's governments to contain the virus and protect the population from it. During the first wave (from March 2020 to June 2020), the European Union and its member states passed amongst other restrictions a travel ban within its internal borders with the aim to minimise the travelling between the countries. (European Commission (2), 2020) This reduced cross-border activities such as retail trade between the EU countries to a minimum. Border regions are particularly affected by the border closures, as people in these areas are used to travel to the neighbouring country to shop, work, for leisure, or visit relatives and friends. Also, the distribution of goods in those areas are often dependent on neighbouring countries. So can be said that the Covid-19 related border restrictions not only affected the people personally in those regions. They also have an impact on the retailers since cross-border shoppers were not able to move from one country to another,

and the employees from across the border had specific terms on which they were allowed to travel to work.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Coronavirus had and still has a significant impact on our society's social and economic life. Specific sectors of the economy are more affected than others. One of them is the retail sector. Therefore, this thesis examines the impact of Covid-19 related restrictions on cross-border retailers. For this thesis, an explanatory research question was chosen: "To what extent do the Covid 19 related restrictions imposed during the first wave influenced the cross-border shopping at the Dutch-German border region based on the case of Bocholt?". In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions are imposed. First, "What are the main criterions for a functioning cross-border shopping?". The answer to this sub-question formulates a theoretical insight about what criteria must be present for effective cross-border shopping. Secondly, "To what extent do the Covid 19 related restrictions influence the cross-border shopping?". Addressing this sub-question should summarise the restrictions, which were made because of Covid-19 and what impact they may have on the cross-border movement. As mentioned before, this thesis wants to examine the impact of the Covid-19 related restrictions on the cross-border shoppers based on the case of Bocholt. In order to examine the consequences for cross-border cities in the European Union such as Bocholt due to the restrictions related to Covid-19, a third sub-question is created: "To what extent are cities close to the border such as Bocholt are dependent on cross-border shoppers?".

The closing of the borders within the European Union has an impact on the retailers in the border regions but also on the daily life of the people who live there. Especially in the cross-border areas, where people from both sides of the border commute to work, buy something or visit friends and family. Since 150 million people live in border regions within the European Union and the border regions represent 40% of the EU's territory, the border regions are an essential part of the internal economic market and the socio-cultural European identity. (European Commission (3), 2017). Furthermore, a quarter of the Gross Domestic Product is produced in the cross-border regions within Europe. (European Commission (3), 2017) As mentioned earlier, the trade sector of the European Member States has built up dependencies with each other. Especially in the field of supply and production processes. The European Union has supported this process by harmonising specific rules in this area. (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019). Particularly the retailers in the border regions suffered from the restrictions, including the temporary closing of certain shops and the missing of cross-border shoppers. This thesis

aims to investigate to what extent the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 impact cross-border shopping and the lives of people who live in the border region.

Due to the novelty of this kind of situation – pandemic and border closures - in the world, there is not much literature about the effect of the restrictions related to Covid-19 on cross-border retail. Though, the results of this thesis are vital as they provide for filling the gap in the academic literature. The case study to which we apply the theoretical framework is based on Bocholt. The Methodology section will be elaborated the reasoning behind this choice.

2. Theory

This section provides the theoretical framework for this thesis and is divided into three subsections. First, existing shopping theories are discussed, and the key characteristics are pointed out. Subsequently, possible threats or external factors which can affect cross-border shopping are discussed. Finally, there will be a discussion related to the topic of this thesis which summarises the key points about cross-border shopping.

2.1 Cross-Border Shopping Theory

In the 2000s, the works on cross-border shopping have a relatively economical approach and concentrate more on taxes (Ferris, 2000) and the relationship between the more significant and smaller states (Marcos et al., 2010). Kovacs (2013) studies the characteristics of cross-border retail trade and formulates four critical requirements for a successful cross-border retail trade, including free movement and the security of service, but also the security of the goods and the potential shoppers can make a surplus with the help of the three factors mentioned before.

The more recent researchers combine the economic approach with a socio-cultural aspect. For example, Szytniewski, Spierings and Van der Velde (2015) examine the experiences of Dutch cross-border shopping tourists who live close to the German border in case of comfort and familiarity. What made this research remarkable is the combining of "shopping tourism and exotism", and the "everyday routines and the mundane [...] are closely intertwined" (Szytniewski et al., 2015). Furthermore, the investigation of other economic sectors such as, for example. In combination with cross-border shopping, the tourism sector has increased (see:

Makkonen, 2015). Amongst other researchers, the focus lays on the articles of Martin van de Velde (2013) and Andras Kovacs (2013), since they concentrate in their research on the European Union, while most of the other researchers focus on cross-border shoppers in North America, Asia, or South America; therefore the results of their theories differ a little from those who focus on the European Union.

Several events, developments such as the “Schengen Agreement, the fall of the Iron Curtain, the enlargement of the European Union and the development of the EU’s single market have all contributed to elimination of formal border barriers” (Bygrva, 2018). Also, it has made people's lives in the border region much more comfortable because certain items become available to them, mostly FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) like shampoos or food, which did not exist before. Additionally, the products became cheaper and the opening hours for shops were extended. (Kovacs, 2013). These benefits led to an increase in different cross-border activities, including retail trade between the countries. (Kovacs, 2013). However, free movement is just one of the essential requirements to provide a cross-border retail trade. Therefore, cross-border shopping is also influenced by government policies. (Kim & Sullivan, 2003). According to Kovacs (2013), goods, services, and profit surplus for the participants are just as important. To provide a good service, many retail companies have employees, who can communicate with foreign customers in their language or by using signs and symbols of the neighbour country in their names, street advertisements etc. (Szytniewski, Spierings and Van de Velde, 2015).

Furthermore, the introduction of the Euro in 2002 obtain the removal of the exchange rates within the countries of the Eurozone, which is also an essential factor for cross-border shoppers as well as for the retailers because it provides more comfort and less charge of exchanging money. (Azmi, 2015). Besides the exchange rate, there are other economic factors and government policies, such as sale taxes and inflation, which influences cross-border shopping. (Kim & Sullivan, 2003). In addition to the market-related criteria, which were just mentioned (lower price, more choice of goods and better service/location), many people also combine such trips with tourism and recreation (Bygrva, 2019). Makkonen (2015) also points out the influence of attractive shopping opportunities in border regions on people's decision for a tourist trip to this region.

Furthermore, cross-border shoppers tend to be more adventure-seeking by discovering other cultures. (Mulvey& Lever, 2017). Kim and Sullivan (2003) described it in their research that there are four types of these tourist shoppers: the “cross-border tourism shopper”, the

“traditional shopper”, the “traditional outshopper”, and the “inactive shopper”. The “Cross-border tourism shopper” who values hedonic and utilitarian characteristics of such shopping trips wants to use such trips to combine seeing sights and for leisure purposes but also to buy certain goods which are not available in their own country. Next, the “traditional tourist” is not interested in shopping because the “traditional tourist” is more interested in cultural and leisure opportunities than buying anything in the vacation destination. However, the traditional shopper is keen on buying some souvenirs or cultural gifts. Thirdly, the Traditional Outshopper focuses more on shopping rather than on touristic destinations or actions. Attractive prices and good merchandising can attract this type of shopper to buy goods at a particular store. The last type of shopper is the inactive tourist, respectively shopper. The inactive shopper is loyal to his or her local stores.

As seen here, there are more factors for functioning cross-border shopping than economic factors such as taxes and prices. However, there is a consensus between most of the researchers that the ability to move between the countries is the critical requirement or at least one of the critical requirements for functional cross-border shopping (see Kovacs, 2013; van de Velde & Spiering, 2013; Bygrva, 2019).

By reflecting the research about cross-border shopping, it attracts attention that most researchers focus on several different principles they consider crucial for good cross-border shopping or at least for functioning cross-border shopping. Some have a more economic perspective and focus more on the economic benefits, and others focus more on socio-cultural criteria. Nevertheless, there are four principles or four key motivations which at least one of them were mentioned by the researchers in their work about cross-border shopping. The most crucial point is the ability to move between the borders, as mentioned before. If this is not the case, the other principles become obsolete. Another principle is the variety of goods, which means if the products are available in the shops across the border and if the item is not available in their own country (Uniqueness). Also, the price is vital since many people decide to buy certain goods if they are cheaper in the other country. The last key motivation which most of the researchers focus on is the attraction of the shopping destination for the cross-border shoppers. As mentioned before, many shoppers use such “shopping trips” to visit the city and discover new cultures or for leisure and recovery.

2.2 Possible external shocks

There are some possible shocks that can harm cross-border shopping. First, beginning with the closing of the borders due to such things as a pandemic have a massive impact on cross-border shopping because, as mentioned before, there is no cross-border shopping if the borders are closed.

However, sometimes the border is just closed for certain groups of people, distributors etc. For example, if the border is closed for tourists is problematic for retailers in the cross-border area, because on the one hand, the retailers miss the turnover from the cross-border shoppers and on the other hand, a lot of the retailers focus on cross-border shoppers too regarding their product range, advertisement, and service. (Bygrva, 2019). Furthermore, the closing of borders for the distributor is potentially dangerous for cross-border shopping since many goods are delivered from different countries, and if the distribution chain is blocked, there will be some products not available for a particular time. Additionally, some people live in one country close to the border but work for a retail company on the other side of the border. If they cannot work due to border closing measures, they do not have a job anymore, and the companies lose a good worker, which can affect the service performance.

Nevertheless, this is not just a problem for the retailers but also for the people who work in these cities because many jobs are dependent on cross-border shoppers. Also, certain products might not be available in their own city, but they are available in a city across the border. However, other border restrictions or measurements influence cross-border shopping as well. Firstly, the ability to move across the border can be limited by requiring a visa or by passport control at the border. Secondly, stricter customs duties checks at the border can delay the distribution of goods to the shops, which can lead to a shortage of popular products in the shops.

As mentioned earlier, government policies such as sale taxes are also crucial for cross-border shopping because if Germany, for example, increased taxes, retailers would make less profit. In order to remain competitive with, for example, competitors from the border region of the Netherlands, shops would either have to lay off employees or cut their wages to avoid raising their prices. Additionally, the retail economy in the border region of one specific country, e.g., Germany, can benefit from subsidies of the government. In contrast, the retailer in the border region of another country does not receive any support from the government, this can also lead to an unequal competition, and this would be problematic for the cross-border shopping of the country which does not provide subsidies. Since similar to tax increases, the country's retail sector without substitutions would suffer a competitive disadvantage, and the disadvantaged firms would have to try to compensate for this issue by redundancies or salary cuts.

Indeed, the development of e-commerce is a risk factor for cross-border shopping which should be mentioned as well. Since a lot of different and sometimes more exotic products are available in online shops most of the time and the prices are sometimes cheaper than in the local stores, the e-commerce sector can have an advantage compared to the local shops. (Khatwani, 2017)

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The table below presents the main criteria or requirements for people to visit a certain city for a cross-border shopping trip (free movement, variety of goods, good customer service and attraction of the shopping destination). As mentioned before, most researchers have chosen different approaches from each other such as socio-cultural or economic approaches to examine cross-border shopping; however, at least one of the four criteria were mentioned in most of the research. Therefore, these four criteria built the foundation to examine whether a city has a good condition for a cross-border shopping event or not. In order to answer the first sub-question, "What are the main criterions for a functioning cross-border shopping", and to provide the theoretical framework for this thesis, the table below mentions the criteria and explains them. The first column presents the name of the requirement. The second column gives an explanation of what this requirement means in this case. Furthermore, the third column mentions possible threats to the requirements due to what cross-border shopping will not be successful in this city. And the last column explains what results follow if the cross-border shopping requirements will be threatened.

The first requirement -free movement- is considered the most important one because it influences the other three requirements.

Table 1

Requirements	Explanation	Possible threats	Results
Free Movement	This means the ability for people to visit the country whenever they want without any barriers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Border closing → • Special visa requirements → • Long and insensitive checks on persons and goods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the border is closed, foreign visitors are not able to visit the city → Cross-border shopping is not possible. • If there are special requirements and special checks, people think twice before visiting this city → People lose interest in this shopping destination = fewer foreign people come to the city.
Good customer service by the shops and salespeople.	This means that the service is generally good and prepared for cross-border shoppers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign currency will not be accepted by shops. • No communication possibility between customer and salesperson (language barrier) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopping will not be that comfortable → People lose interest in this shopping destination = fewer shopping tourists come to the city.
Variety of Goods	This means that the location provides a different kinds of goods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply bottleneck → • Diversity of stores are missing → 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough products in the store → people lose interest because not everyone gets what they want = fewer shopping tourists visit the city. • The tourist can presumably buy those products in their home country as well → The possibility to find exotic products will be omitted, and people lose their interest = fewer

		shopping tourists come to this city.	
The attraction of the shopping destination	This point combines besides service and variety of goods also the urban development and the development of the infrastructure and opportunities for tourists (see: four different types of tourist shoppers Kim and Sullivan, 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The possibilities to reach the city and to park within the city are limited. (Bad infrastructure) → • Not enough accommodation options for tourists → 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day tourists might stay away because of the difficulties to reach the city → fewer shopping tourists come to the city. • Tourists who want to explore the city and the region choose another city to sleep in. They will not visit Bocholt at all = fewer shopping tourists come to the city.

This table was made by myself.

3. Data and Documents

This section elaborates the methods, namely the research design and the data selection and collection. Also, the operationalisation of the variables is described based on the theoretical background.

3.1 Research design

In order to answer the research question, there are three sub-questions formulated, which should be answered before addressing the main research question. After the introduction of the topic, there is a literature review of existing theories on cross-border shopping to have a theoretical framework for this research. Due to this pandemic, literature research will take place only online, either by Google or in the online libraries of the Universities of Enschede and Münster, by using certain keywords such as "cross-border shopping theory" or "theories about cross-

border retailers". On the basis of the theoretical framework data about the cross-border movement, which refers to the monthly Dutch visitors to Bocholt and the turnover of retailers from these tourists before the first wave and during the first wave, the first wave from the 16th of March 2020 until the 30th of June 2020 is collected to answer the sub-questions. The data is provided by the city marketing of Bocholt. Additionally, data about the turnover of the Bocholt retailers by Dutch citizens in the same period is collected as well. All statistics are provided by the "City Marketing" of Bocholt, which is a municipal organisation that is subordinate to the town.

3.2 Case selection and sampling

In order to answer the research question, three relevant restrictions which were imposed due to Covid-19 will be explained to operationalise the first variable. Also, data on the yearly visitors from the Netherlands and the turnover, which retailers is collected. Furthermore, the share of yearly visitors from the Netherlands in 2018 is collected as well in order to operationalise the second variable. The population which will be observed for this thesis involve every adult citizen from the Netherlands who visits Bocholt. Since only adult Dutch people were selected, it was because children usually buy nothing, or their parents pay for it. Furthermore, the decision for Bocholt is based on the fact that it is located right on the Dutch border. Furthermore, it is part of the European Village Dinxperwick together with the city of Aalten (B.I. Dinxperwick, 2021). Both municipalities work closely together in several areas such as culture, economy, and events (BI. Dinxperwick, 2021). One of the main key data for retailers is the turnover, and a good method to find out about the human border traffic is to take a look at the visitors of the city; therefore, this data suits perfectly to answer the sub-questions. However, it is necessary to get the statistics before and during the first wave. Since there are different definitions of when the first wave starts and when it ends, the timeline for the first wave in this thesis is defined by the start and end of the travel restrictions (16. March 2020 - 30. June 2020). In order to make a reasonable comparison, the data before the first wave will cover the same period one year earlier (16. March 2019 – 30. June 2019)

3.3 Operationalisation of the main concepts and data collection methods

This section explains the operationalisation of the variables. There are three main variables that must be constructed. The first variable is the restriction due to Covid-19, which assembles three relevant restrictions for this topic. Firstly, the temporary travel ban for non-essential travels between the countries within the European Union from the 16th of March 2020 until the 30th of June 2020. Secondly, the decision of the German government to close certain retail shops such as non-food stores, and thirdly, the limitation of people who are allowed to be in the stores at the same time.

The second variable is the percentage of Dutch cross-border shoppers who are visiting Germany respectively Bocholt per year. In order to make the amount of Dutch people who visit Bocholt measurable, all the percentage of adult Dutch visitors from the year 2018 (on open Sundays and during the week) are added together and divided through two to have the average of Dutch people who were visiting Bocholt during 2018. This gives you an overview of how many visitors from the Netherlands come to Bocholt each year.

The third variable is the retailers in the border region. In order to measure the impact of the three restrictions (imposed by the European Commission and the German Government), the turnover of the shops in 2018 will be compared with the turnover of 2020. Since this thesis concentrates on the case of Bocholt, this variable includes every retailer (food, clothes, furniture, cosmetics etc.) from Bocholt.

3.4. Data analysis

In order to draw a conclusion for the research question, four things will be checked. First of all, the average of yearly border visitors from 2018 will be compared with the visitors during the first wave by using a frequency table. Next, the data on human cross-border traffic and retailer turnover before and during the first wave are compared. It will also be checked which of the cross-border requirements were threaten during the first wave. Since both of them are descriptive statistics as well, a frequency table will be used for the comparison.

4. Background Information

This section provides the background information on which the following analysis will be conducted. Therefore, it starts with the "Schengen Agreement", which is considered as the foundation of the free movement within the internal European borders. Then there is a summary

of the Dutch-German relation. After that, there is some background information about Bocholt, on which this case is based on. Lastly, there is a summary of all relevant Covid-19 related restrictions which influence cross-border shopping between Germany and the Netherlands.

4.1 “The Schengen Agreement “

In 1985, the Benelux countries, Germany and France, signed the "Schengen Agreement" as part of the European integration process. This Agreement laid the foundations for the progressive dismantling of checks on persons at the borders of the contracting parties. (Federal Foreign Office Germany, 2019). Most EU member states and other European states such as, for example, Norway and Switzerland joined the Agreement and, in addition to the abolition of border checks on persons, other measures were added like the harmonisation of the visa policy. (European Parliament, 2020). Due to this Agreement, there were no checks on persons at internal borders within the European Union and the citizens, e.g., from the Netherlands, are allowed to visit, work, or live in Germany without any restrictions. This Agreement supported the development of the "Single Market" within the European Union and the development of cross-border activities. (Bygrva, 2018).

4.2 Dutch-German Border Region

Certainly, there are differences between the EU-member states. By taking a deeper look into a statistic from the European Commission, retail companies in countries in the middle of Europe like Germany, France or the Netherlands are more likely to sell goods to other middle EU-states than, e.g., the Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Finland to other middle EU-states because of the short distance between these countries (European Commission (4), 2016). Also, they are part of the industry region "blue banana."¹, therefore these middle European countries clearly benefit more from open borders than, for example, the Northern European countries. The Netherlands shares a border with the German “Bundesländer” North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony. However, this thesis focuses only on the relationship between North Rhine-Westphalia and the Netherlands. In the case of the Dutch-German relation, there is a cooperation between the "Bundesland" of North Rhine-Westphalia and the provinces

¹ Blue banana is an industrial region in the middle of Europe, which extends through the countries of Italy, Austria, Switzerland, (West) Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Great Britain. Among other things, this region is characterised by a well-developed infrastructure and a densely populated area. (Ellrich & Pape, 2019)

Overijssel, Gelderland, and Limburg of the Netherlands to support cross-border activities, which is called the “Arnholter Beschlüsse”. (Landtag NRW, 1991). In addition to their geographical proximity, North Rhine-Westphalia and the Netherlands have other similarities. Both states have similar numbers of inhabitants (NRW: about 17.95 million inhabitants (IT NRW (1), 2021); Netherlands: 17.4 million inhabitants (Federal Agency of statistics, 2021). Both countries also have a comparatively similar economic strength, North Rhine-Westphalia with a gross domestic product of approx. 720 billion euros (2019) is about 90 billion euros behind the gross domestic product of the Netherlands of approx. 810 billion euros. (IT, NRW, 2021 (1); Federal Agency of statistics, 2021). Furthermore, North Rhine-Westphalia’s most important export and import trade partner is the Netherlands, before other EU countries and China. (IT NRW (2), 2021). Besides, there are organisations such as "Euregio", which promote cross-border collaborations in the fields of social development and economy. (Euregio, 2021). There are three bilateral Euregios between North Rhine-Westphalia and the Netherlands and one trilateral Euregio where Belgium is participating too. (Ministry for Federal cooperation, Europe, and Media of the Land North Rhine-Westphalia (1), 2015). Furthermore, in 2008 the Dutch Government and the North Rhine-Westphalian government agree on the "GROS-Initiative", which is a list of measures that should reduce barriers for the people who live in the border area and support the cross-border labour market. (Ministry for Federal cooperation, Europe, and Media of the Land North Rhine-Westphalia (2), 2015).

4.3 Bocholt

Bocholt is a city located in the district of Borken, which is based in the western part of the German “Bundesland” North-Rhine Westphalia close to the Dutch-German Border. It has ca—75,000 inhabitants, which makes Bocholt the largest city in the district of Borken. (Bocholt (1), 2021). Furthermore, Bocholt is embedded in two industrial centres, the Rhein and Ruhr area on the German side and Enschede and Arnhem on the Dutch side of the border. (Bocholt, 2021). The borough Suderwick of Bocholt and the Dutch town Dinxperlo constitute a "European Village" called "Dinxperwick". (BI. Dinxperwick, 2021). Notable is the street "Hellweg", which is located in Germany, but if the German citizens want to drive to another German city or village, they have to cross the Dutch border. (BI. Dinxperwick, 2021). Furthermore, the Municipality of Aalten and the Municipality of Bocholt cooperate closely on a cross-border basis. (BI. Dinxperwick, 2021). In order to provide enough space for shoppers to park, there are about 20 major parking lots and three parking garages in the city centre of Bocholt to provide enough space for cars. (Bocholt (2), 2021). Furthermore, there is a train station close to the

shopping mall of Bocholt, and the trains are arriving from German cities as well as from the Netherlands. (Bocholt (3), 2021). Additionally, the “Autobahn” A3 from Arnhem heads through Bocholt. (Bocholt (3), 2021). Even though the infrastructure of Bocholt is well developed, there are also enough and especially different possibilities to stay overnight in the city with a four-star hotel, some smaller hotels, several holiday flats, and farms that rent rooms for tourists. (Bocholt (4), 2021).

4.4 Covid-19 restrictions on the Dutch-German border

As I mentioned in the introduction, cross-border activities were difficult due to the pandemic during the first wave in the first half of 2020 (16th of March until the 30th of June) because there were certain restrictions, which contained the temporary reintroduction of the internal border controls between the EU-members. (European Commission (2), 2021). This restriction was introduced by the European Commission in cooperation with its member states and started from the 16th of March 2020 and should have lasted a maximum of 30 days. However, it was prolonged until the 30th of June 2020. During this time, non-essential travels such as vacations, visiting friends and family and buying goods across the border were restricted for every EU citizen (European Commission (2), 2021). These restrictions caused some problems at the borders because they were introduced too quickly, and the national border patrols were not prepared for these checks. This led to a lot of traffic at the border, which was problematic because the trucks with the products were intensively checked at the border, and this led to a delay of the distribution chain. (ADAC, 2021). Also, the fear of the people, which led to "panic buying", boosted the distribution issues for the supermarkets. (Eppel, 2020). Furthermore, the member states implied further restrictions on their own, e.g.; the German government decided to close certain businesses such as fashion stores, shopping malls and other non-essential shops for a period of 2½ months from the 17th of March until the 6th of May 2020, only the essential store like supermarkets and drugstores were allowed to stay open. After this closing period of non-food stores, there were certain measurements like a limit of people allowed to be in shops implied to ensure health security (Bundesregierung, 2020). A lot of people found these actions clog the shopping experience, and they just buy the daily goods (Genth S, 2020).

4.2 Bocholt and Cross-Border shopping

As mentioned earlier, Bocholt is located close to the Dutch border in a European area. The borough Suderwick and the Dutch village Dinxperlo form a European Village. (BI.

Dinxperwick). Additionally, the infrastructure in Bocholt is well developed, and the city can be reached easily from the Netherlands as well as from other German cities.

Furthermore, free movement between the borders without any checks on people is possible for citizens of a European country such as the Netherlands due to the Schengen Agreement. The market area of Bocholt, which is a geographical area or region beyond borders where companies located in this area can sell their products to people who live within this area (Economic Glossary, 2008), includes several municipalities from Germany and from the Netherlands with an overall number of 453.129 citizens. However, 125.082 people live in the Dutch municipalities. (CBS, 2021). In the city centre of Bocholt is a mall located with different shops which provide different products such as huge chains like “Peek and Cloppenburg”, “Snipes” or the “Mayerische Bookstore”. However, there are also other local stores in the city such as “Der Nähkasten”, “Schuhhaus Reekers” or the “Käse und Feinkost Nicole Sicking”. (Bocholt (2), 2021). There is also a marketplace where people can buy fresh food and handmade accessories; this should support the shopping experience for local citizens and tourists. (Bocholt (2), 2021). This shows that there are varieties of goods to buy in Bocholt. As mentioned before, there are different possibilities to visit Bocholt by bike, car, train, or bus since there is a good infrastructure. Furthermore, there are parking lots in the city centre and several parking garages for tourists. (Bocholt (2), 2021).

The table below shows the type of stores which are located in the city of Bocholt and how many of them are located there.

Table 2.

Type of store	Quantity	Examples
Fashion stores	81 stores	Der Nähkasten, Peek & Cloppenburg, Purzelbaum Kindermode
Shoe stores	10 stores	Schuhhaus Reekers, Schuhhaus Dissmer
Food stores	10 stores	Netto, Aldi, Käse und Feinkost Nicole Sicking
Jewellery stores	12 stores	Juwelier Schönecke, Die Schmiede
Sport stores	2 Stores	Intersport, Runners Point

Furniture stores	23 stores	Kunsthalle, Hemsig GmbH
Toy stores	1 store	Eisenbahn Modellbau Bocholt
Drug stores	7 stores	DM, Douglas

This table was made by myself.

The city also benefits from its cross-border shopping tourists. Since parts of Bocholt and Dinxperlo form a European village, both cities receive funds from the European Union as part of an integration area and moreover to encourage the integration process. (B. I Dinxperwick, 2021). Therefore, the whole city benefits on the one hand from the money they receive from the European Union, and on the other hand, it raises the prestige for potential tourists and shoppers. Additionally, other border cities within the European Union can benefit from such projects if they apply it to cities with a similar environment, because the integration of the EU will be developed and the cities which are involved can develop as well, this supports the integration process of the European Union too. As mentioned earlier, the urban development was influenced by the cross-border shoppers, as you can see by the infrastructure and the service offer of some shops and the city tourist officials to serve the customers in Dutch as well (Bocholt (2), 2021), which certainly raises the attraction of the city as a tourist and shopping destination for Dutch citizens.

The table below shows and summarises whether Bocholt fits the cross-border shopping criteria or not.

Table 2.

Requirements	Explanation	Does Bocholt fulfil it?	Why?
Free Movement	This means the ability for people to visit the country whenever they want without any barriers.	Yes	Due to the "Schengen Agreement", Member states of the European Union disclaim checks on persons and goods at their internal borders; therefore, the people in the EU can move to

			another country whenever they want
Good customer service by the store and the salespeople	This means that the service is generally good and prepared for cross-border shoppers.	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several stores provide for their customers to speak Netherlands and English. • As a Member of the Eurozone, the Euro is the currency which is the currency of many other EU member states, including the Netherlands.
Variety of Goods	This means that the location provides different kinds of goods	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broad offer of different shops.
The attraction of the shopping destination	This point combines besides service and variety of goods also the urban development and the development of the infrastructure and opportunities for tourists (see: four different types of tourist shoppers Kim and Sullivan, 2003)	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good infrastructure in and around Bocholt (several parking spots, easy to reach with the car and train) • Enough accommodations for tourists who want to stay overnight. • Leisure activities for tourists who want to go shopping and have some leisure as well.

This table was made by myself.

As seen here, the formal criteria for functioning cross-border shopping are existing in Bocholt.

5. Analysis

This section deals with the analysis of the situation before and during the first Covid-19 wave. First, the situation before the first wave will be analysed, and after that, the situation during the first wave will be analysed to see what impact the restrictions related to Covid-19 have on cross-border shopping.

In order to analyse if the Covid 19 pandemic had an impact on cross-border shoppers in the cross-border region, the situation before the pandemic must be analysed as well. As mentioned in the background chapter before, Bocholt fulfils the four criteria for cross-border shopping (free movement, good customer service, variety of goods and attraction of the city). In 2018, the yearly turnover by the retailers of Bocholt was about 515 million Euros. At the weekend, on average, the share of Dutch people due to the visitor's frequency in the city of Bocholt is between 15% and 22% and between 20% and 35% at opening Sundays.² (Stadtmarketing Bocholt, 2021). As seen here, there is a potential that one quarter to one-third of the city's visitors is coming from the Netherlands, which is slightly above the share of Dutch citizens of Bocholt's market area. This shows that there is a big potential for cross-border shoppers to visit Germany for shopping. Furthermore, there were around 96.500 tourists stay overnight in Bocholt during the year, mostly from the Netherlands. (Stadtmarketing Bocholt, 2021). However, there is still potential to increase the turnover to over 2,75 billion Euros in the whole market area, which includes the catchment areas of the Dutch municipality Aalten, Winterswijk, Oost Gelre, Oude IJsselstreek (Stadtmarketing Bocholt, 2021), with around 1250,82 inhabitants. (CBS, 2021). This means there is a potential of 2,25 billion, which is not used yet. By comparing this to the Hochrhein Bodensee region, which is another region in the south of Germany where cross-border shopping is relevant, it attracts attention that there are risks and potential as well in both directions because the Suisse cross-border shoppers are responsible for 1,5 billion Euros turnover in the municipalities of Lörrach, Konstanz and Waldshut in 2019. (IHK Hochrhein Bodensee, 2020). However, during the first wave, they had a decrease of 30% to 60% of their turnover compared to the year before, and the domestic population could not compensate for this. (IHK Hochrhein Bodensee, 2020).

By looking at the first Covid-19 wave and the EU-restrictions related to the pandemic which started on the 16th of March with the closing of the borders for unnecessary travelling (visiting

² Usually, the stores in Germany are not allowed to open on a Sunday (with a few exceptions such as petrol stations). However, the shops can request to open on a Sunday for advertising purposes and to compete against online shopping at least four times a year depending on the "Bundesland" (Bundespresseportal, 2020)

families, cross-border shopping, going on vacation etc.) (European Commission (2), 2020) and the closing of certain retail shops such as fashion stores, furniture stores or shoe stores by the German government (Bundesregierung, 2020) the situation for the retailers in the border region changed. Every non-food retail sector, from fashion over toys to jewellery, lost in March and April between 75% and 13% of their turnover compared to 2019. (Handelsverband Deutschland, 2020). However, the situation stabilised in May and the non-food shops made some profit, but in June the situation stagnated again. (Handelsverband Deutschland, 2020). Some experts said that the turnover profit in May was because of the reopening of non-food stores by the German government. (Genth S, 2020). Yet, by looking at the overall numbers for the retail sector (including the food segment), this economic sector lost only in April 2020, around 5,5 per cent compared to 2019. (IT NRW (2), 2021). In the other months, the retailers generated a turnover surplus compared to the year before. (IT NRW (2), 2021). A reason for this can be the short national lockdown of Germany during the mid of March to the end of April because, during this time, over 200000 non-food stores had to close their shops. (Handelsverband Deutschland, 2020). Also, during this time, more than 470.000 people had to go into the "Kurzarbeit."³ Especially in the retail sector and the hospitality industry. (Agentur für Arbeit, 2020). Additionally, general shopping trips lost 12% (from 19% to 7%) compared to 2017, and specific shopping trips won 21% (from 63% to 84%) compared to 2017, which is an important factor regarding daily tourists (Handelsverband Deutschland, 2020) because if potential cross-border shoppers decide to buy a specific item, they will buy it in the city which is the closest to their own because of several restrictions (Handelsverband Deutschland, 2020), e.g., in Bocholt the amount of cross-border shopper from the Netherlands were between 15% and 35% depending on the day which matches approximately the average of 19% for general shopping trips, but if it drops to 7% the cross-border shoppers may decide to buy their products in their home town or in a city closer to their home town. Additionally, the share of online shoppers increased during the first wave, especially at the end of March (from around 25% to 35%) and April (from around 20% to around 40% - 45%) (Handelsverband Deutschland 2020), which can be resulted by the restrictions of the German government to close non-food respectively non-system relevant shops and after the reopening they established certain rules and hygiene guidelines such as a personal limit in the stores, the distance between the people inside the stores etc. (Bundesregierung 2020). Therefore, the shopping adventures sink. As

³ "Kurzarbeit" is a temporary measurement from the German government for companies to reduce the working time and the salary under certain circumstances. The government pays 60% or 67% of the last net salary (this depends on whether the employee has children or not) for the missing working hours. The company only pays for the working hours which were provided by their employees. (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2016).

mentioned earlier, the increase of online shopping is also considered a threat to cross-border shopping because if the people do not necessarily have to visit other cities beyond their own borders to buy certain goods which are not available in their country, they will not go on a cross-border shopping trip. However, the loss of 21 million Euro to 39 million Euro in city centre relevant trade branches in 2020 compared with 2019 cannot be compensated by online shopping; this shows that even if the share of online shopping increases, they are not able to balance the fading stationary retail. (Handelsverband Deutschland, 2020). Since the Covid-19 pandemic has an impact on every economic area, people tend to save their money instead of spending it in the retail sector because of the fear of losing their jobs; this led to a decrease in private consumption and an increase in personal savings. (Handelsverband Deutschland, 2020).

Also, at the beginning of the first Covid-19 wave, the transportation of goods to the stores were problematic because of the checks at the borders and the resulting traffic. (WDR, 2020). Furthermore, a lot of the people did "panic shopping", especially in the food retail sector, because they panicked and wanted to be prepared. (Eppel, 2020). However, this led, for example, that the toilet paper supply was limited. (Eppel, 2020).

Due to the border closing by the EU restrictions related to Covid-19, citizens from other EU-member states were not allowed to visit Germany without any necessary reasons such as working. However, they had to follow certain guidelines, which were implicated by the German government, the Dutch government, and the European Commission as well. Additionally, the accommodation of private people through hotels and rental apartments were not allowed either (Tourismusverband Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e.v, 2021); therefore, it was nearly impossible to visit Germany for a longer cross-border shopping trip.

Table 3 summarises the possible threats to the requirements of cross-border shopping. It also explains whether a threat occurs or not and examines what the results are.

Table 3.

Requirements	Possible threats	Do these threats occur?	Results
Free movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Border closing • Special visa requirements 	Due to the restriction of the European Commission, there are checks on persons and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary border closing for certain people such as

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long and insensitive checks on persons and goods 	goods at the border, and non-necessary travel is forbidden.	<p>cross-border shoppers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checks on persons and goods at the border lead to longer waiting periods and traffic
Good customer service by the store and the salespeople	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign currency will not be accepted by shops. • No communication possibility between customer and salesperson (language barrier) 	It does not occur due to the covid related restrictions. However, some people had trouble driving to their work across the border.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less staff, especially those who are fluent in the Netherlands
Variety of Goods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply bottleneck • Diversity of stores are missing. 	There were panic shopping of the citizens and supply delays due to the checks at the borders. Also, certain shops had to close because of the German government guideline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were a supply bottleneck of certain products (e.g., toilette paper) • Only system relevant stores (e.g., supermarkets) were allowed to open → diversity of shops shrunk
The attraction of the shopping destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The possibilities to reach the city and to park within the city are limited. (Bad infrastructure) 	Due to the covid related restrictions, it was not possible to reach the city unless it was a necessary travel trip. Also, the accommodation for overnight visitors was limited, that vacation for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-border shoppers could not visit the shopping destination, nor could they stay overnight → loss of attraction, cross-border residents buy

		cross-border shoppers was impossible.	their products in their own country.
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This table was made by myself.

As mentioned earlier, a lot of people panicked during the beginning of the first wave. Many people feared that they would lose their jobs, especially in the non-food retail sector, which had to close temporary 200.000 stores in Germany. (Handelsverband Deutschland, 2020). However, with the beginning of the Covid-19 restrictions, Dutch people were not allowed to travel, and German people were allowed to travel to the Netherlands neither. Also, the domestic population were not able to compensate for this loss for several reasons, such as hygiene concepts. (IHK Hochrhein Bodensee, 2020). Yet, there were certain products that were not available in their own countries; thus, these people decided to buy online, which explains the rising of the share of online shoppers. (See: Handelsverband Deutschland, 2020). But this can lead to a problem for the cross-border shopping because if many people decide to buy their goods online whether it is more comfortable because they do not have to leave their house or the prices are lower than in the shops or the product range is wider, and every item is available there, many shops will lose their customers, and the cities may not see any reasons to develop or to build their city more friendly for cross-border shoppers. Also, many people, who worked, e.g., in Germany but lived in the Netherlands, had problems going to work since the checks at the borders took time and produced traffic. (ADAC, 2021). As you can see in table three, the main issue for cross-border shopping is the free movement restriction because the people were not able to visit other countries, whether for shopping purposes nor for vacation trips. However, this constrained other requirements too, such as the supply chain for the shopping items, which can restrain the shops from providing special goods for their customers. Also, if there is no need to travel, certain infrastructure projects become obsolete, and this decreases the attraction of the city. Furthermore, some items are cheaper in other certain countries, which can lead to higher prices for the people who live in the border region, because they were used to buy cheaper products in other countries. Another issue is the opening hours of shops in the border region, for example in the Netherlands the many shops are open on Sundays while in Germany they are closed, this might be an issue for people who have to work on Saturdays because they will buy their products on Sunday across the border.

In order to answer the second sub-questions, “To what extent do the Covid 19 related restrictions influence the cross-border shopping?” there are two parts to answer this question.

Firstly, the threats of the main criteria of cross-border shopping occurred due to the restrictions. Secondly, the economic and social results of them. As mentioned before and in table 3, the main issue of these restrictions was the temporary closing of the border for unnecessary travels and the reintroducing of checks on people and goods at the border. This had an impact on the other three criteria as well, the variety of goods and the attraction of the shopping destination and the customer service. The economic impact of these restrictions is huge since the loss of city centre relevant branches were between 39 million and 21 million. Especially during the first two months of the first wave, the non-food sectors lost up to 75 million turnovers compared to the year before. However, during this time, the German government imposed certain restrictions such as the closing of non-system relevant shops, which were also a factor for this loss of money. Furthermore, the social impact of these restrictions is mentionable, because nearly 200.000 shops had to close during the first wave and some people lost their jobs and a lot of employees were in the "Kurzarbeit". Also, the shopping motivation changed during this time, because before the pandemic, 19% of the people made general shopping trips without any motivation, but it dropped to 7% after the first wave and the specific shopping trips increased by over 21% to 84%.

This table summarises the relevant numbers to describe the impact of the Covid-19 related restrictions on cross-border shopping.

Table 4.

Turnover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of 21 million to 39 million for city centre relevant branches compared to the year before. Particularly non-food stores lost between 75% and 13% of their turnover during the first two months of the first wave.
Shops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almost 200.000 retails had to close because of the Covid-19 related restrictions.
Shopping motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General shopping trips dropped from 19% of the shoppers to 7% compared to before the first wave. Specific shopping trips increased from 63% to 84% compared to before the first wave.
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than 470.000 employees had to go into "Kurzarbeit", especially in the retail sector and hospitality industry.

This table was made by myself.

The third sub-question, “To what extent are cities close to the border such as Bocholt are dependent on cross-border shoppers?” can be answered by looking at the visitors of Bocholt in

2018, which were during the week around 15-22% of the whole city visitors and at special occasions such as opening Sundays between 25-35% of the whole city visitors during the first week these visitors were not allowed to visit Germany for shopping purposes. (Tourismusverband Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2021). However, as mentioned earlier, other cities and areas in the border region suffer from the restrictions as well, e.g., the municipalities of Lörrach, Konstanz and Waldshut made a turnover of 1,5 billion through cross-border shoppers from the Suisse in 2019, and the turnover decreased by about 30% to 60% in 2020. (Hochrhein Bodensee, 2020). Therefore, cities in the cross-border region such as Bocholt are dependent on cross-border shoppers and suffer from a huge economic loss because of the Covid-19 related restrictions.

6. Conclusion

This section summarises the results of the thesis and answers the central research question from the beginning.

In order to answer the research question “To what extent do the Covid 19 related restrictions imposed during the first wave influenced the cross-border shopping at the Dutch-German border region based on the case of Bocholt?” the results will be summarised and then connect to the research question.

As mentioned in the theory section, the theoretical framework for this thesis is the four key requirements (free movement, variety of goods, attraction of the shopping destination and good customer service). During the background section, it was examined if Bocholt fulfils these requirements for functional cross-border shopping. The results were that Bocholt fulfils these criteria. In the analysis section, the threats which occur due to the Covid-19 related restrictions were analysed, and the results show that the restrictions had an impact on all four requirements. However, not every requirement was affected the same way, e.g., the free movement which is provided for EU citizens through the "Schengen Agreement" were massively limited, and this had an impact on the other three criteria, and without free movement between the countries, a functioning cross-border shopping is nearly impossible. (Tourismusverband Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e.v., 2020). Yet, the restrictions had an impact on the daily lives of the people in the region as well, since, for a lot of cities in the border area, cross-border shoppers are an important economic and social factor. A lot of shops in these cities prepare themselves for foreign shoppers by providing certain customer service, e.g., they hire people who speak the

language of the people across the border, such as Dutch. This becomes particularly clear when you consider how many Dutch citizens come to Germany to shop, for example, the percentage of people who shop during the week in Bocholt is 15%-22%, and on special occasions like open Sundays even 20%-35%, which is slightly higher than the share of Dutch residents in the market region of Bocholt or other regions such as the Hochrhein Bodensee where the Swiss citizens are responsible for 1,5 billion Euro turnover. During the first wave or as a result of the measurements during this time, 200.000 non-food shops had to close, and 470.000 employees -most of them in the retail sector and hospitality industry - had to go into the "Kurzarbeit", which means they did not receive their regular salary. Also, the turnover of the retailers decreased during the first wave, especially the non-food retail sector lost between 75% to 13% in the first two months after the restrictions were imposed. However, the food retail sector was not that affected by the restrictions for several reasons, such as the panic shopping at the beginning of the first wave and different to the non-food shops they were allowed to open usually during that time. But there were not only the measurements of the European Commission responsible for the decreasing of the turnover. The German government imposed its own rules, such as shop closing for non-food retailers during this time.

This thesis had the aim to answer the central research question "To what extent do the Covid-19 related restrictions imposed during the first wave influenced the cross-border shopping at the Dutch-German border region based on the case of Bocholt?" and besides that to give a first insight about what impact such things like a pandemic have on cross-border shopping. The impact of the Covid-19 related restrictions which were imposed by the European Commission and the German government on cross-border shopping was enormous, both economical and social as well because, as mentioned earlier, most of the retail companies lost a lot of their turnover and some shops even had to declare bankruptcy. Also, some people lost their jobs or must go into "Kurzarbeit". Moreover, cities and areas in the border region lost some of their attractiveness for cross-border shoppers due to the closure of shops. Therefore, the Covid-19 related restrictions had a huge impact on cross-border shopping.

Furthermore, the results of this thesis can be used as a foundation for other work on Covid-19 and cross-border shopping.

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7. Data Appendix

