

SMUGGLING AT THE POLISH-GERMAN BORDER IN THE
1930S. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

Tadeusz Janicki

This contribution examines social and economic aspects of smuggling in the Polish-German border area during the 1930s, employing a broad base of archival sources to paint a picture of a region characterised by complex interdependencies. The Greater Polish section of the border created in 1919 saw intensive illegal goods traffic that formed a supraregional part of everyday life and the local economy, contributing to the individual livelihoods of many. A “moral economy” of smuggling developed here, framing the activity in economic as well as ethical terms in the eyes of the local population. On the other hand, in the southern regions – which had already been separated by a border before 1919 – smuggling was not primarily an individual practise. Based on a longer tradition, it instead reproduced patterns originating before the First World War. A professional organisation of gangs geared towards maximising profits earned their respective leaders considerable social prestige and likely made smuggling the severest problem related to organised crime in the Polish-German border region.