

Bordering, Political Landscapes  
and Social Arenas:  
Potentials and Challenges of  
Evolving Border Concepts in a  
post-Cold-War-World



**NEWS-  
LETTER**  
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## Welcome to EUBORDERSCAPES, an international project on Borders and their impacts

Whether we have desired to do so or not, almost all of us have dealt with borders during our lives. Part of this experience relates to the need to flourish passports and maintain serious demeanour at border-crossing points. However, just crossing seemingly invisible municipal, regional, provincial and state boundaries can also involve adjustments to our behaviours. Moving between US-American states, for example, usually means dealing, among other things, with different laws, regulations, sales and income taxes, university tuition fees and, oftentimes, with local cultures.

Since the beginning of the new Millennium, spectacular events, such as the terrorist attacks on New York, Madrid and London, have heightened our sensibilities to borders. International borders that used to be relatively relaxed have become militarized and highly guarded spaces. While border controls within the European Union have been generally relaxed, most people crossing the US-Mexican and US-Canadian borders now require passports and for these persons passports have become part of everyday life. In many areas of the world borders have also become more visible, with barriers, fences, walls,

border patrols and sophisticated surveillance infrastructures marking the landscape - the US-Mexican, Spanish-Moroccan and Israel-Palestine border fortifications are a case in point. And while many European borders have become less obtrusive, border cum identity controls appear to have expanded to the entire territory of the European Union and have become quite tight at the EU's external boundaries, as evidenced by stricter visa regulations. In our contemporary world it would therefore seem that even if we don't intentionally visit borders, borders will eventually visit us.

Beyond the obvious political and guarded borders we often cross, borders exist at a more basic level of everyday life and we negotiate them in our cities, neighbourhoods and in most public places. Social, cultural and ethnic borders crisscross our daily action spaces and travelling, say, from one particular urban district to another can involve entering very different worlds where new rules and codes of conduct apply. An obvious example of such informal yet highly powerful borders is Belfast, Northern Ireland, where boundaries between Loyalist and Irish Republican neighbourhoods

are clearly marked by signs, murals, protective barriers and political uses of the townscape.

EUBORDERSCAPES, financed through the EU's 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, is a new international research project that tracks and interprets conceptual change in the study of borders. The total budget of the project, which will run until May 2016, is 6,9 Million Euros. It is thus a large-scale project and the consortium includes 20 partner institutions from 17 different states, including several non-EU countries. The EUBORDERSCAPES project will study conceptual change in relation to fundamental social, economic, cultural and geopolitical transformations that have taken place in the past decades. In addition, major paradigmatic shifts in scientific debate, and in the social sciences in particular, will also be considered. State borders are the frame of reference, rather than ethnographic/anthropological boundaries. However, this approach emphasises the social significance and subjectivities of state borders while critically interrogating "objective" categories of state territoriality and international relations. The research proposed here will, furthermore, not only be focused at the more general, at times highly abstract, level of conceptual change. This approach will also allow us to compare and contrast how different and often contested conceptualisations of state borders

(in terms of their political, social, cultural and symbolic significance) resonate in concrete everyday life situations.

During the next four years we will keep you informed about EUBORDERSCAPES through our website, newsletters and reports. Welcome!

*James Scott, coordinator*

## **A Sister Project: EUBORDER-REGIONS**

EUBORDERREGIONS - European Regions, EU External Borders and the Immediate Neighbours. Analysing Regional Development Options through Policies and Practices of Cross-Border Co-operation (Topic: FP7-SSH-2010-2) Duration: 03/2011 – 02/2015

The University of Eastern Finland is co-ordinating a further FP7 project. Whereas EUBORDERSCAPES is focused on concepts of borders, EUBORDERREGIONS is more directly targeted at questions of regional development, European Cohesion and cross-border co-operation at the EU's external borders. This project, which began in March 2011, investigates the manifold consequences of increasing cross-border interaction for the development of regions at the EU's external borders and, in this way, contribute to scientific and policy debate on the future

of economic, social and territorial cohesion within the EU. Importantly, the project will contextualise development issues in selected EU “Borderlands” with regard to interaction between the EU and countries of the immediate “neighbourhood”. Within the context of these challenges, the regions at issue here are struggling to define new opportunities for social and economic development and are also attempting to create greater capacities for territorial cooperation with other regions. Despite all criticisms levelled at the European Commission, the EU as market and political institution has been absolutely essential in preparing the ground for greater economic and political interaction. Much will therefore depend on how EU policies and policy discourses translate into political capital for local/regional cross-border cooperation in the new borderlands. At the same time, the issue of capacity building and exploitation of the benefits of strategic cross-border co-operation must be clearly addressed at the local and regional level. As such, these border regions will be treated as interfaces between development dynamics and policy frameworks operating within the EU, on the one hand, and in neighbouring countries, on the other. In doing this, the project will also contribute to the state of the art of policy-oriented research on regional development and cohesion within Europe. For further information, please go to [www.euborderregions.eu](http://www.euborderregions.eu)

## Kickoff meeting in Berlin, June 2012

In Berlin, in a multicultural area of the Kreuzberg district only metres from the former Wall, the 20-member consortium of EUBORDERSCAPES had its first project meeting. The central purpose of the meeting was to discuss the overall rationale, philosophy and work programme of this large-scale collaborative project, the first of this kind in the area of border studies. The main point about the project is that it approaches conceptual change and borders from the perspective of major societal changes that have taken place in recent history. As the proposal clearly states, EUBORDERSCAPES will explore different modes of conceptual change and their societal consequences, including:

- Borders and the constitution of EU-Europe
- Geopolitical shifts and the political, social, cultural significance of borders
- The conceptual borders of Neighbourhood
- Border crossings (gender, family, work, culture)
- Cross-border co-operation and securitisation
- Borders, Identities and cultural expression

As several members of the team pointed out, these focal areas raise a number of ethical issues, for example regarding the status of



migrants and asylum seekers and the effects of restrictive visa regimes. New class divisions between those that are cosmopolitan border crossers and those who are "stuck" are also emerging. The project operates from the assumption that "border" is a relational concept (even though this might be open to dispute) and that the process of "bordering" – the active creation of socio-spatial categories of distinction – is our means of developing a cohesive research programme. Discussion also focused attention to the fact the EUBORDERSCAPES directly responds to the SSH 2011 Call in which evolving concepts of borders are associated with a variety of societal challenges facing the European Union; in this way both "evolutionary" perspectives as well as social/political contestations will inform our notions of borders and bordering).

Immediate project tasks include back-ground archival research, producing a "state of the art report", dissemination and planning for fieldwork in 2013.

*Jussi Laine, Coordinator*

## The Borderscapes III conference in Trieste

During the International Conference *Borderscapes III* (Trieste, 28-30 June 2012), the overall contents of the EUBORDERSCAPES project were presented



by James Scott (University of Eastern Finland) in the panel "Exploring the Critical Potential of Borderscapes. A Multi-disciplinary Inquiry into the Euro/African Border Nexus", organized by Chiara Brambilla (University of Bergamo) and Martin Lemberg-Pedersen (University of Copenhagen). In addition to the presentation of the contours of EUBORDERSCAPES, the panel, chaired by Henk van Houtum (Nijmegen Centre for Border Research), constituted a starting point for reflection in the project's Work Package 5 "Post-Colonial Bordering and Euro-



African Borderscapes” of the project. Xavier Ferrer Gallardo (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) and Chiara Brambilla (University of Bergamo), who both participate in WP 5, presented their research work respectively titled “Straits of Gibraltar: Unfolding the Virginal Dialogue between Europe and Africa” and “(In)Visible Mediterranean Euro/African Borderscapes: Participatory Video and New Forms of Political Belonging at the Blurring Border between Politics and Aesthetics”.

In line with the general objectives and the rationale of WP 5, the panel inquired into the Euro/African border nexus by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach, able to highlight borders

as complex multi-dimensional entities. Such an approach offers us opportunity to adopt a kaleidoscopic looking glass by assuming, at the same time, a multi-sited approach not only combining different places where borderscapes can be observed and experienced - both in borderlands and wherever specific borderscaping processes have impacts, are represented, negotiated or displaced - but also different socio-cultural, political, economic, legal and historical settings where a space of negotiating actors, practices, and discourses is articulated at the intersection of varied and differentiated encounters. Part of this means, on the one hand, interrogating the “normative dimension” of the Euro/African borderscapes,



that is, critically assessing the ethical, legal and empirical premises and arguments used to justify particular reconfigurations of the EU borderscapes. On the other hand, this implies considering that borderlands involve struggles that consist of multiple strategies of resistance against hegemonic discourses and control practices within EU border and migration regimes.

In conclusion, taking the borderscape as a methodological angle, the panel offered the chance to investigate these discursive premises using the relational geographies between EU(rope) and Africa as a critical backdrop in multiple ways. Both theoretical-conceptual reflection and empirical work in WP 5 will push forward with the exploration of the critical potential of Euro-African borderscapes started here in Trieste.

*Chiara Brambila (Università degli studi di Bergamo)*

## Commentary

### The War of the Evros

*Based on “La Batalla del EVROS” (published in Público.es). The original is available at: <http://blogs.publico.es/dominiopublico/5687/la-batalla-del-evros/>. Text translated by James Scott*

**Xavier Ferrer-Gallardo** (*Nijmegen Centre for BorderResearch, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen and Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*)

**Henk van Houtum** (*Nijmegen Centre for Border Research, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen and Università degli studi di Bergamo*)

Ebro. Evros. They are not written the same way but the two words sound very similar. Two fluvial landscapes upon which territorial lines of violent separation between human beings have been inscribed. We begin with the Ebro. There, at the end of June 1938, began the bloodiest battle of the Spanish Civil War. What happened at the Ebro would mark the last phases of a deadly confrontation between neighbours. As a result, the Ebro would also be inscribed by almost four decades of a meandering fascism on the Iberian Peninsula, accompanied, if not abetted, by the indifference of a significant number of Western democracies.

Almost seventy years later, in today's Europe and at the other side of the Mediterranean, the River Evros has also begun to emerge as an arbitrary and aggressive line of separation between people. What is happening there – and above all the political echo about what is taking place there – could strengthen the fascist renaissance that looms ominously over Greece and the rest of Europe.

During the first week of August, in the Dog Days of Summer, the Greek government inaugurated operation “Zeus Xenios”, an operation that resulted in the detention of more than 7500 “undocumented” and thus “irregular” immigrants. The Greek Minister of Public Order Nikos Dendias, publicly declared that the objective of Zeus Xenios was to resist an invasion of “historic” proportions. Consequently, Amnesty International denounced the racist character of the operation.

The operation as well as the official justifications given for it are revealing. They give evidence of a government *impetus* to the overdose of xenophobia already injected into Greek society and Greek politics by the Golden Dawn (Chryssi Avgghi) movement. The 18 fascist representatives in the new parliament appear to be conditioning in no small measure the character and the policies of government in Athens.

Regardless of the outcomes of the financial crisis, the xenophobic excesses that plague Greece cannot be attributed to the poor economic management of a single European Union member state. Similarly, the political and economic crisis that afflicts the EU cannot be understood in a fragmented manner. The same can be said about the tendency towards increasingly discriminatory policies of border controls and the exclusionary management of

migration flows that such controls engender. Increasing poverty does not by itself explain the phenomenon of xenophobia. In order for racism and the discrimination of foreign “others” to take concrete shape, a specific political climate is necessary. Europe’s border regime and border management practices appear to be doing just this.

With practises and discourses that increasingly militarise the situation at the EU’s external frontiers, Europe’s borders are being used as weapons against neighbours and as territorial lines of exclusion between equals/brothers/sisters. Particularly since the opening of the EU’s internal borders, the EU is fighting an unequal battle against undocumented travellers who seek to enter the EU through its external borders. But no single border appears to be high enough to stop those who desire to find work; the migrants simply keep coming – across evermore dangerous road, river and sea passages. As part of a constant attempt to avoid EU border controls, the focus of border tensions has gradually shifted eastwards. These tensions at the external border began on the coasts of Andalucía, Ceuta, Melilla and the Canary Islands. With the fortification of these border segments, border crossing attempts increased at Italy’s borders. Later, Greece became the principal battleground in the battle against irregular immigration, with its epicentre along the River Evros.

Apart from its surprising lack of effectiveness, this moving border war provokes and legitimises a climate of xenophobia. What we are witnessing in Greece is a toxic mixture of failed economic policies and tolerated discrimination of the poorest foreigners. Nevertheless, the proliferation of racist practices and attacks in the streets of Greece, as well as the introduction and normalization of a rhetoric of xenophobia in Greek politics, cannot be reduced to the country's internal problems and financial crisis. The ground is being prepared for a worrying resurgence of authoritarianism in Europe.

Perhaps we should remind ourselves of one of the more evocative propaganda slogans that graced the posters of the Spanish Republican government – and which was set to music decades later by the Welsh rock band Manic Street Preachers: “If you tolerate this, your children will be next!”

Ebro. Evro. Two rivers marked by struggles at borders. Two rivers that reflect both the past and present of democracy and fascism in Europe.

## Upcoming Conferences

Georgia Conference on Regional Cooperation and Borders 2013

Borders, Cooperation and Regional Conflict in

Post-Soviet Contexts: Between Integration and Disintegration?

Tbilisi, Georgia, 28 – 30 April 2013

### Conference Themes

The end of the Cold War has fundamentally changed the nature of borders within the emerging political spaces of the former Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union created thousands of kilometres of new state borders which have been redefined in terms of national sovereignty, as frames for free and sovereign action, but which also have become sites of hardening, closure, of new visa restrictions and, perhaps most seriously, of territorial conflict. This conference will focus on Post-Soviet states and their borders. But it is not simply about state borders as such – it is also about border conflicts, patterns of economic, political and social interaction, and actual and potential projects of regional cooperation and the geopolitical role of the European Union in contributing to regional stability.

This conference is timely in that it will bring together researchers who have been studying regional issues in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Black Sea. Furthermore, a major objective of the conference is to debate the role and aims of the EU in redefinition, negotiation and conflict



over post-Soviet space. This includes local perceptions of the evolving quality of the EU's social and political influence within Post-Soviet contexts, e.g. in countries such as Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

Possible topics for panels and papers include:

**Post-Soviet nation-building:** e.g. through the renegotiation of state-society relations, new interpretations of history, identity-politics, etc.

**Post-Soviet politics of borders:** e.g. in terms of visa restrictions and the shrinking of CIS free visa areas, migration policies, local border regimes, etc.

**Regional practices and political language of cooperation** within different regional contexts (in particular Caspian Sea, Black Sea, Southern Caucasus and Eastern Europe)

**Natural resources, borders and interstate conflicts** within different regional contexts

**Europeanization and Neighborhood relations:** e.g. as manifested in discourses and practices of regional co-operation and institutional engagement (partly within the context of potential EU membership) between the EU as a political actor and its neighbors.

**The Black Sea as political/economic region** and shifting Black Sea geopolitics

In addition to this research focus, we will welcome panels and papers that address borders and border-related issues more generally.

#### Organizers:

Georgian Institute of Public Affairs

University of Eastern Finland – Karelian Institute and VERA Centre for Russian and Border Studies

University of Warsaw - European Institute for Regional and Local Development (Euroreg)

Carleton University - Centre for Governance and Public Management

Fees: Participation fees of ca. 100 USD per person (75 USD for students) will be charged in order to cover local organization costs.

Participant number will be approximately 40-50

Conference days are 28 and 29 April 2013

Excursion: Starting on 30 April there will be a 1 - 1,5 day excursion to border regions (TBA)

## Deadlines and abstracts:

Proposals for panels as well as individual presentations will be accepted. Please include the following information (max. 300 words per paper)

- Name of authors/contributors
- Institutional affiliations, titles
- Contact: telephone, fax, email, mailing address
- Title of the paper
- Abstract: Subject, empirical frame, analytical approach, theme

Send your proposals via email in Word format to [james.scott@uef.fi](mailto:james.scott@uef.fi) and [gorzelak@post.pl](mailto:gorzelak@post.pl)

## Conference Deadlines and dates:

November 15<sup>th</sup> 2012 : deadline for submitting abstracts and proposals

December 2012 : proposals selection and notification sent to presenters

March, 15<sup>th</sup> 2013 : submission of papers to discussants

April 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> 2013: Conference in Tbilisi.

## Association of Border Studies World Conference

June, 2014 (Joensuu, Finland – St. Petersburg Russia)

The Association of Borderlands Scholars (ABS) has promoted the study of borders and borderlands for more than 25 years. While its initial geographical focus was largely on North American borders, ABS has in recent years expanded its European, Asian and African networks and can now be said to be a truly international organisation. This ABS conference, which is still in the planning stages, will be the first truly globally oriented event sponsored by the Association. It will be organised in Finland and Russia and will involve a fascinating field trip to the historical borderland of Karelia. Local organizers are the VERA Centre for Russian and Border Studies at the University of Eastern Finland, the European University at St. Petersburg and the St. Petersburg-based Centre for Independent Social Research.

Updates regarding this conference will be made available through the project website.

Visit the ABS website at [www.absborderlands.org](http://www.absborderlands.org)  
Become a member!

## New Book Announcement

*A Companion to Border Studies*, edited by Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, introduces an exciting and expanding field of interdisciplinary research, through the writing of an international array of scholars, from diverse perspectives that include anthropology, development studies, geography, history, political science and sociology. The book

- Explores how nations and cultural identities are being transformed by their dynamic, shifting borders where mobility is sometimes facilitated, other times impeded or prevented
- Offers an array of international views which together form an authoritative guide for students, instructors and researchers
- Reflects recent significant growth in the importance of understanding the distinctive characteristics of borders and frontiers, including cross-border cooperation, security and controls, migration and population displacements, hybridity, and transnationalism

For more information see: <http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1405198931.html>

