

Borders from the Perspective of Good Neighbourhood

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Over the course of history, the functions and roles of borders have continuously changed. Borders have been actively contested and negotiated for centuries; they are shaped by history, politics, and power as well as cultural and social changes. Borders are not static or invariable but should be understood as highly dynamic.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period shaped by imperialism and the First and Second World Wars, the first generation of border scholars was motivated primarily to delimit, demarcate, allocate, and categorize state borders. Borders were categorized according to their morphology, natural features, origin, and history. The historical circumstances surrounding their allocation and delimitation were also examined. The knowledge gained from these studies was mainly used to relocate post-war state borders in Europe as well as to demarcate colonial possessions in Africa and Asia.

In the 1960s, borders were still mainly equated with the territorial limits of states and border scholars continued to focus on the physical aspect of borders, that is, on the material lines which represented these borders. These lines were seen as lines of (natural) differentiation, containing (natural) entities. However, in the 1970s border scholars discarded the widespread

conceptualisation of borders at that time as being a given, natural phenomenon and began to understand that borders were always 'artificial,' anthropogenous constructs. This shift can be understood in the context of the politicisation of 'natural' or 'organic' characteristics of borders influenced by Friedrich Ratzel, for example, during the first half of the 20th century. Since the 1980s, borders have been studied as to their influence on the perceptions, relations and (inter)actions of groups living in borderlands and their effects on the evolution of territorial identities (Newman 2006, Paasi 2005). The past twenty years have witnessed an exponential growth of border studies, predominantly in Europe and North America (Newman 2007). This period is characterised by two major shifts which are influencing the field to a major extent. The first occurred with the fall of the 'Iron Curtain' and the second after 11 September 2001. The quite surprising fall of the 'Iron Curtain' was celebrated as a rupture in what was perceived as an eternal global division, with the expectation of a bright globalised 'borderless' future. With the terrorist attack in 2001, the period of opening borders in some parts of the world changed completely and the free flow of goods and people was again hindered. This perspective, however, depends greatly on which part of the world we are talking about. What appears true for most of the western world looks very different in the African or Asian context.

The questions remain as to whether and why we need borders and how we can live with them, using them productively and managing them for the sake of well-being of populations and for peaceful good neighbourhoods. The paradigms in border studies

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have diversified and moved from a predominantly morphological and functional approach to a wide range of interdisciplinary studies, from economics and international relations to sociology, anthropology, and geography.

SHIFTING CONCEPTS OF BORDERS

Today we realise that borders are artificial, shifting as a result of political struggles, often in the form of wars and negotiations. In addition, borders can be paradoxical: they can be simultaneously physical and mental, stable and transient, heavily secured and open; they may exclude and include, liberate and entrap, divide and unite. Borders are indeed Janus-faced. Although borders do have a material morphology, it is crucial for us to understand as well how borders are interpreted by political actors, who change frequently, and those who construct, reconstruct, and transform borders by their everyday practices.

In the Prologue to their book *B/ordering Space*, Henk van Houtum, Olivier Kramsch and Wolfgang Zierhofer argue first that 'a territorial b/order is a normative idea, a belief in the existence and continuity of a territorial binding and differentiated power that only becomes concrete, objectified and real in our everyday social practices.' (2005: 3) and later, that '(b)oundaries must be understood as important constitutive elements of practice and narratives by which social groups and their identities are constructed and governed.' (2005: 5) In other words, if we want to understand the functioning and impact of borders, we need to go to the local level, study the operation, meaning and interpretation of the border in its local context (which means in many cases inner-urban borders) and see how the population deals with it, perpetuating it or changing the quality of the border in their narratives and everyday practices.

GOING BEYOND POLITICAL BORDERS: BORDERS IN CITIES

Borders confine territories, whether they are political or social entities. The idea of social segregation is not new, but the interest of border scholars in comparing the operation and management of the mental aspect of political boundaries with the more or less invisible boundaries in cities is quite recent.

A particularly interesting case of 'neighbourhood' arises in border cities (or twin cities, constructed at both sides of borders) or cities at borders or, for more special cases, cities divided by borders. Here we find physical, national, and political border manifestations, but also the informal, cultural and social borders of cities.

Related to the above-mentioned paradigm-shift, an ongoing project, financed by the European Union and entitled SeFoNe (Searching for Neighbours) explores and compares models of 'translocal' neighbourhoods, focusing on emerging discourses and good practices along material political borders in and at the margins of the new EU. The project rests on the assumption that it is impossible to understand the processes which create obstacles to and opportunities for good neighbourhood across state borders if the obstacles created by mental and symbolic divisions are not understood and challenged wherever they occur. (www.sefone.soton.ac.uk).

To ensure an empirical foundation for knowledge-based future political measures, the aim is to explore the dynamics of socio-cultural and physical borders of the newly enlarged European Union, as experienced by people of culturally diverse backgrounds and with a view to strengthening people's competence for cultural understanding and exchange. The core objectives of this new approach are:

- To understand the interdependency of 'physical' and 'mental' borders in the creation and obstruction of good neighbourhoods;
- To understand the ways in which 'neighbourhood' is experienced by diverse groups of people in Europe, and to compare what motivates them in different contexts;
- To compare visions of and obstacles to good-neighbourhood building by exploring people's self-perception, in-grouping and out-grouping in various contexts;
- To identify—and evaluate through expert interviews—existing policies and official/civil society activities for good-neighbourhood building;
- To compare the success of self-determined, 'bottom-up' activities with responses to 'top-down' measures;
- To strengthen or put into practice innovative, sustainable initiatives for good neighbourhoods.

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The research project takes its initiative from the fact that current models of Europe as well as citizens' experiences of Europe can no longer be limited to the logic of the nation-state and its external borders. While the external borders of nation-states comprise still-significant institutions by which the politics of inclusion and exclusion are regulated, on the local level, for example, in cities, other logics prevail. These alternative logics advocate that integration be based on local forms of co-operation that lie beyond the (often divisive) logic of the nation-state. Local cross-border relations and neighbourhood activities, along with forms of integration that arise from them, are not merely confined to the territories adjacent to state borders but spread across regional and national space. Thus, for many of Europe's citizens, the question of local (dis)integration has become related to the effects of movement and mobility in their everyday lives at the level of local communities or cities.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION AND THE BUILDING OF GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD IN BORDER CITIES

Referring to border cities as 'neighbouring cities' and 'cross-border cities' seems more appropriate than the more common appellation 'twin cities' or 'sister cities.' These cities can also be considered 'border-crossing cities' when people cross the border and interact with each other, when cultural events are jointly organized, and when joint strategies or plans are developed to rearrange the physical or built-up landscape and institutional frameworks (see Sikos and Tiner, 2008). This means that two cities at a border are integrating, the city spaces are overlapping each other, and the inhabitants constitute a single community.

Ehlers has distinguished between spatial, institutional, economic, social and cultural integration (2001, 26f). The forces behind such integration are political decisions, although even greater forces for integration are individual daily routines, mobility and general economic activity, each of which follows its own logic but has spatial side effects. All these activities are related to concepts of the self and the other, as well as representations and imaginations of the space as shared or separated. It is of great research interest and political relevance to discover how inhabitants imagine their

cities, what they envision when it comes to depicting the future of their cities and their integration into a regional context, and where the border plays and will play a determining role. Houtum and Ernste (2001: 102) understand the challenges for border cities as a 'matter of rereading, revisualising and rewriting space. Intertwining. Intertextualisation. Unwinding. Reimagination. Idealisation. Utopianisation.' This leaves us with the question of to what extent inhabitants are prepared and willing to become part of a project of constructing a border-crossing city (Kofler 2005a). And with that we need to consider Buursink (2001: 17) who affirms that the linking up of people and integration 'is not merely to be deduced from spatial adjacency, it is far more a matter of social relations and mental proximity.'

The following arguments are based on the empirical evidence of four case studies of border cities (or villages) on the German-Polish border (Frankfurt an der Oder in Germany and Ślubice on the Polish side); the German-Swiss border (Constance in Germany and Kreuzlingen on the Swiss shore of the Lake of Constance); the Austro-Hungarian border (Moschendorf in Austria and Pinkamindszent on the other side of the former Iron Curtain), and the U.S.-Mexican border at Ambos Nogales (Nogales, Sonora, in Mexico and Nogales, Arizona, in the U.S.) (Kofler 2005a; Wastl-Walter, Varadi and Kocsis 1993; Wastl-Walter and Varadi 1997; Wastl-Walter and Kofler 1999a and b; Wastl-Walter and Varadi 2004; Wastl-Walter, Veider and Varadi 2003; Wastl-Walter, Varadi and Veider 2002). In all contexts, along with the distinctions between two different national contexts (different norms, values, and traditions), people reproduced a 'here' and 'there': two nation states and a border, usually experienced physically, separating two systems. However, in their everyday geography-making (Kofler 2002; see also Hansen 2006 for the U.S.-Mexican context and Breitung 2001 and 2007 for China and the SARs) people also produce cross-border social spaces. Social spaces are relational and only exist as a result of interaction. Social spaces can be rather abstract, unbounded and without spatial references—depending instead only on the activities of people—or very concrete. At places such as kindergartens, schools and universities that are jointly attended by children and young people from both sides of the border, integration is, in a nutshell, lived. These are places

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where people meet, learn each other's languages and learn to interact with each other. Both in Frankfurt and Šlubice (at the University of Viadrina), and in Constance, a university exists that has the potential to function as a space of integration. The University of Viadrina is labelled bilingual, having a facility on each side of the border. Students experience a 'border-crossing learning experience,' and, at least for those attending the university, it is a place of interaction. The University of Konstanz has not yet become that much of a magnet for students from Switzerland; however, those who attended the university on the German side of the border stated that they had always felt comfortable crossing the border, had easily made contacts and had maintained them up to today (Kofler 2005a).

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In all settings, artists in particular have taken up the responsibility of making the border a place of interaction, thereby producing a variety of social spaces and building up a good neighborhood. They foster different imaginations of city space; they invite people to participate in their exhibitions and artistic activities. Even when their work provokes criticism and opposition, they are generally respected as key actors in cross-border cooperation and building up a good neighbourhood. They prove social competence and system know-how as they have learned to work within different settings and thus within different systems of norms, traditions and expectations (Kofler 2005b). Building up a good neighbourhood also means building up communities. In Constance and Kreuzlingen members of political parties promote communities by organizing joint protests. Members of the green parties discuss issues such as pollution that affect both

sides. In doing so, they understand the two cities as a single integrated space facing the same problem, and therefore requiring a common solution—even when in practice this is rather complicated because each side of the border has different standards and regulations. However, people in the selected border contexts were most critical about the lack of a unified information culture. A cross-border public space with broadcast programs and newspapers is still missing. If they exist, internet platforms and city maps communicated a border space that had, at the worst, mere blankness on the other side. Many people stated that a cross-border representation of city space was a minimum precondition for building up a joint mindset and, ultimately, a good neighbourhood (Kofler 2005a).

FROM CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION
TO A FUTURE GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD

The concept of 'cross-border cooperation' includes a lot: working together, carrying out joint projects, exchanging information, helping and sharing. The different people involved may understand and carry out cross-border cooperation very differently. In the beginning—and even after years of cooperation—people may misunderstand each other or be unable to overcome differences in values, customs, and beliefs. For those facilitating or engaging in cross-border cooperation, understanding the other side and those who live there is fundamental. This entails not only learning the language, but also the meaning of it (Charon 1998: 63). In Ambos Nogales, people on different sides of the border understand 'development' differently. Whereas 'development' for people in Nogales, Sonora, means investment in technical infrastructure such as roads and wastewater treatment plants, people in Nogales, Arizona, speak of it in a much more integrated sense as moving the city forward in many different respects. For people in Šlubice, joint activities are very important in all aspects of social life, whereas for people in Frankfurt only concrete, solution-oriented interactions are a priority, and there is no time for or interest in doing anything more than that which is necessary for business. Different mindsets, simple misunderstandings in interactions, and fear of competitive disadvantage on both a personal and institutional level influence cross-border cooperation. Thus, in order to achieve

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a shared symbolic space and meaning, qualified people—preferably bicultural people—should mediate the different sequences of interactions (Kofler 2005a). Vila (2000, 15ff: 21) stresses that there is a need for border knowledge, for knowledge about ‘structural conditions’ and ‘classificatory systems’ (Vila 2000, 15ff: 21). These interlocutors face the challenge of transmitting meanings and understandings across the border—of understanding personally, and translating between, two different cultures. In Ambos Nogales people stressed the need for friendly interaction, that is, for a specific tone of behaviour underlying all interactions to guarantee that people meet each other as equal partners (Kofler 2005a).

The argument here is for accompanied cross-border cooperation, for mediation and support on the personal level of interactions. There are many scholars and politicians who understand cross-border cooperation as a tool for improving people’s quality of life predominantly by making investments in technical infrastructure. I am not saying that there is no need for this kind of investment, or that these are not good reasons for people to cooperate with each other. However, in Europe we have learned that, for instance, the building of bridges and highways did not bring about sustainable cooperation. Gaps between people exist in the mind, and reducing physical distance does not automatically close these mental gaps. At the Austro-Hungarian border, Wastl-Walter, Varadi and Veider (2002) observed that the lack of collective memory and a shared past means the loss of narratives. Narratives that are interrelated

result in better knowledge of the other side, a better understanding of those from the other side, and, at best, in a kind of identification between people on both sides. At the Austro-Hungarian border, where people once lived together and shared the same history, the lack of interrelated narratives and common histories caused invisible borders and resulted in the demarcation of separate territories and social spaces.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper started with a look at paradigm shifts and the popular claim that borders should be overcome by cooperation. After examining an abundance of empirical evidence, it concludes with the argument that it is time for a new paradigm that draws on daily practices and narratives of constructing neighbourhoods at the local level, because it is there that people produce, reproduce and transform borders in the process of living with borders. Cooperation aimed at building up ‘good neighbourhood’ should therefore be local in scale; it should involve people’s everyday lives, and ideally should be bottom-up. This is the case not only for political boundaries, but also and especially for inner-city sociocultural boundaries. Borders, border functions, border landscapes, and border practices, on all scales and in all dimensions (political, economic, social, and cultural), will not disappear in the near future. But by investigating examples of best practice, we can find ways to overcome borders as barriers, both political and mental, and to develop good neighbourhoods. **RC**

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