

KONFERENCIJŲ APŽVALGOS



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Examining and Conceptualizing Contemporary Borderlands

The Overview

“The map is not the territory; the territory is you”.

Marcello de Souza

September 23–24, 2021 in Krasnogruda (Poland) took place ONLINE international conference “*Relations on the Borderlands: Old and New Inhabitants*” which was organized by the Institute of Sociology, University of Białystok (Poland) and the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute (Vilnius, Lithuania) in cooperation with “Borderland of Arts, Cultures and Nations Center”.

The main idea of the conference concerns social relations on various ethnic and national borderlands. Borderlands are areas affected by specific transformations and mirror global social, economic, and political processes in the local dimension. Borderlands are not only specific places but are also constituted of relationships among different communities that meet each other constantly or only temporarily. Borderlands are spaces of dialogue, but also of conflict. They are also the past, history, and everything that influences the present in a way that is invisible to the naked eye today. It will serve to strengthen and expand that cooperation by creating a permanent platform for communication and integration of researchers who study border issues (sociologists, anthropolo-

gists, social geographers, political scientists, philosophers, cultural studies researchers, etc.). The practical goal of the conference is also to develop research methodologies that are of particular importance in qualitative and quantitative research carried out in the borderlands. A workshop on good cultural and social practices related to research and work in the borderlands was an integral part of the conference. The workshop was conducted in cooperation with the “Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations Center” (Sejny / Poland).

The participants were from 17 countries present narrative and the visual situation on the 14 borderlands, including such as Caucasian, Chinese, Algerian, Russian, Norwegian, Spanish, Portuguese, Ukrainian, Belarussian, Polish, Lithuanian, and others. Some presentations concentrated on the social, cultural, religious, linguistic specify in the borderlands. The problem of ethnic minorities and their cultural identity was at the center of researching interest many of the conference participants.

1 Krasnogruda is a village in the administrative district of Gmina Sejny, within Sejny County, Podlaskie Voivodeship, in north-eastern Poland, close to the border with Lithuania. Krasnogruda manor and the park were in 2002 taken over by the “Pogranicze” Foundation, which after revitalization is the seat of the International Center for Dialogue.

Most of our researchers and social activists were young, ambitious, and with quick reactions to such hot subjects as pandemic and mass migration crises. Nevertheless, we were lucky that some names of participants of our conference were internationally famous: Thomas Lundén (Södertörn University, Sweden), David Newman (Ben Gurion University, Israel), Jan Selmer Methi (Center for practical knowledge, Nord University, Norway) and some more.

Relations in and between borderland communities were the subject of the first session. It includes such problems as the role of cultural diplomacy information of transcultural borderlands in the Caucasus, an analysis of the production of state mimicry and self-government discourse among ethnic armed groups in the China-Myanmar, urban communities of Istria, Slovenia, and challenges and threats to the security of the Algeria state, Azerbaijani minority on the Georgian borderland in the lens of the post-pandemic situation. Most of the presentations were dedicated to such borders and borderlands that were characterized by decades of ongoing conflict, and sometimes direct violence or silent war.

Based on analyses of a broader understanding of three concepts the following distinctive elements could be identified: for transculturality, it is blurring lines between intermingling distinct cultures, for contact zone – it is a space of cross-cultural interactions and for “cultural diplomacy” – it is an action, an exchange of different aspects of culture. The borderland’s cultural and artistic events were important part of the border’s existence.

Olga Dorokhina (Caucasus International University, Georgia) the paper analyzed a specific case – the international interdisciplinary festival “One Caucasus”; **Sneha Roychoudhury** (Ambedkar University Delhi, India) shows an exploration of the Baba Harbhajan sing horal tradition in the Sikkimese Borderland.

The second session was devoted to identifying needs among culturally diverse communities. **Oleksandra Deineko** and **Olga Filippova** (V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine) and **Aadne Aasland** (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) presented Ukrainian decentralization reform and social cohesion in the ethnocultural diverse border regions. They studied Ukrainian decentralization reform in terms of its multicultural and geopolitical context. Drawn on Jane Jenson’s theory of the multi-dimensionality and conflict theories presentation explores how ethnocultural diversity may affect social cohesion in border regions

Maurane Hillion (Université Paris Nanterre, France) presents social and economic practices in the trans-border space between Meghalaya (India) and Bangladesh through an ethnographic study of the economic and social practices of border inhabitants in the East Khasi Hills (Meghalaya, India). His attempt was to reconsider the border as a generator of a trans-border space that has its own cultural specificities. Analyzing the way in which the border has generated a space crossed by different types of presences, the presenter shows the visibility of a decisive way to build a bulwark between the economic (trafficking and illegal migration) and political (terrorism)

instability at a national level. His observation of everyday practices of illegal border crossings to reach the informal markets and concludes that mutations of the cross-border space have occurred.

Jørn Holm-Hansen and **Aadne Aasland** (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway), **Elena Dybtsyna** (Nord University, Norway) concentrated on the problem of cross-border cooperation between Russian and Norwegian grassroots organizations. They described how The Barents Secretariat's grant program helps in line with the overall aims of building trust and people-to-people cooperation in the Russian and Norwegian regions forming part of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. Also, they concentrated on the answer of the question to what extent is it affected by changes in the geopolitical atmosphere and explores the effects of these changes on Russian-Norwegian cross-border cooperation.

Tobias Wung-Sung (Copenhagen University, Denmark) shows and explains how Danish-majority precepted the German minority in Denmark after 1945. By the end of the twentieth century, minority-majority relations were strengthened so much that they served as a best practice example to others. This development happened neither automatically nor linearly; the German minority group always faced both acceptance and opposition from different parts of Danish society. The attention to the German-minority question generally decreased that explored these changes over time in Danish-majority perceptions. He shows how the changing official attitudes and policies toward the minority, mapping out political and legal decisions related to the minority.

Eduardas Spiriajevas (Klaipėda University, Lithuania) spoke about the formation of new identities for social tourism development in local communities of the Lithuanian-Polish borderlands. Social tourism is dedicated to an analysis of the participation of different social groups (inhabitants) in tourism-based activities in order to perceive the cultural and natural environment of the border areas. The communities of Lithuanian on Polish land became citizens of Poland, and local communities on Lithuania's borderland for many decades did not have strong relations with Polish local communities on Poland's borderland. He concluded that this situation affected the loss of permanent social relations and disturbed the development of common identities on Lithuanian and Polish borderlands. Newly developing identities with the promotion of social tourism development lead to better social cohesion among local communities.

Justyna Józowicz and **Małgorzata Skowrońska** (University of Białystok, Poland) presentation was attempting to give the answer to the question: what does minority identity want from the National Census of 2021? They concluded that the moment of completing the Census and presenting a set of personal declarations is crucial for every single citizen too. They try to answer some basic questions about how the activities of minority groups connected with the Census based on the findings of our preliminary research. They presented results of in-depth interviews in the Podlasie province, engaging the local leaders of three minority groups: the Orthodox minority, the local LGBT community as well as the Belarus minority.

The third session was dedicated to migrants and refugees in the borderland. As we know, the conference held in Krasnogruda is a village that is very close to the Lithuanian and Belarussian border. At the time of the conference, it was a hot spot on the Eastern EU border.

Catarina Inverso (SOAS University of London, United Kingdom) analyzed a situation which she named *Coming and going: Displaced South Sudanese in the borderlands with Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo*. The presentation addresses the life-changing trajectories of South Sudanese women refugees in northern Uganda, South Sudan's mass displacement during its renewed conflict (2013). Guided by a human mobility framework, it is argued that displaced households use their resources and networks to solidify a practice of maintaining a footprint on both sides of the border. This strategy, although not new, is juxtaposed with South Sudan's internal politics, and the regions' general security, contribute to increased movement along and across the borderland between South Sudan, Uganda, and Eastern DRC. Drawing from interviews and observation during a period of six months in Uganda, she identifies such disruptions as equally transforming the wider borderland's social and economic dynamics.

Hakan Ünay (GAV Migration Research Foundation, Turkey) presented an analysis of the border crossing experience and determination of irregular immigrants on the Turkey-Greece border. This study is based on a field study carried out with 23 irregular immigrants from 6 different nationalities at the Pazarkule Border Gate

on the Turkey-Greece border on 7-8 March 2020. Approximately 52% of the irregular migrants interviewed tried to cross the border and declared that they would try again and 48% who have not tried to cross the border again.

Katarzyna Winiecka (University of Białystok, Poland), makes an attempt to answer the question *Is Brexit a factor in the creation of a new borderland?* On the basis of interviews with Poles living in London and the media reports she concluded that Brexit became a new factor of borderland's creation, it reduced feeling of emotional and social connection with the host - society, raise nostalgia about Poland, to intensify anxiety and a feeling of otherness and some kind of ghettoization. In discussion was raised a question about self-isolation that start to be more visible after Brexit.

Charalampos Tsavdaroglou (University of Thessaly, Greece) try to explain the situation that he named: *reinventing a no border-right to the City*. Commoning practices and transnational struggles in Thessaloniki. His presentation devoted aims to fill this research gap by focusing on the impact of the transnational No Border camp in Thessaloniki in 2016. The border region of northern Greece is at the heart of the so-called refugee crisis and it is marked by a large number of solidarity initiatives. After the sealing of the 'Balkan corridor', the Greek State relocated thousands of refugees in isolated camps. As a result of numerous local and international initiatives the camps self-organized a transnational No Border camp in the city center. The paper is based on militant research and inspired by the *LeFebvrian right to the city*,

the autonomy of migration, and the common space approach.

Lola Luce Elena Aubry (University of Southern Denmark) in presentation spoke about how to get a sense of border: Welcome practices and the unfolding of Parisian *borderness* compared to the concept of bordering, which invites us to look at borders as practices, Green's concepts of sense of border and *borderness* Green's work makes a difference for it emphasizes situated knowledge and multiplicity. It invites us to look at the dynamics within senses of the border, how they develop and transforms locally, as well as how different border worlds come to cohere and coexist in a field. Based on long-term ethnographic work in the welcome network for refugees in the city of Paris conducted in 2020 and 2021, she illustrates the concepts' analytical relevance for studying the emergence and (re)production of Paris as a borderland.

Petra Kavrečič (University of Primorska, Slovenia) described everyday life in the borderland area between Yugoslavia and Italy after WWII. The aim of this paper is to study everyday life in the borderland between Yugoslavia and Italy after WWII. The territory that will be taken in close consideration, is the former zone B of the Julian March and of the FTT. She concentrated on the southern part of the Primorska region. The main interest is not to study the antagonisms and conflict, but the actual experiences of people who lived in this region after the war, focusing on the "east side" of the border. The topic that will be addressed is how people managed to adjust to the changed border circumstances. Besides the study of historical materials,

the methodological focus is going to be on oral history interviews.

The fourth session was devoted to the borderland's everyday life experience. **Ewa Dąbrowska-Prokopowska, Piotr Paweł Laskowski, Michalina Trochimowicz, Konrad Talmont-Kamiński** (University of Białystok, Poland), presented the analysis of relations between Catholic and Orthodox communities using identity fusion and social identity theories. The current relations between the groups can be used to diagnose the potential for intergroup conflict. The aim of the presentation was to show the results of a questionnaire study carried out on Catholic and Orthodox religious communities living next to each other in eastern Poland. The study is based upon identity fusion and social identity theories and has as its aim the diagnosis of the strength of the connections between the studied groups.

Teresa Nunes (University of Lisbon, Portugal), describes situation at Contenda of Moura – an undivided land on the Portuguese Spanish border (1805-1893) as the donation of the so-called land of Contenda by King Dinis to Castile in 1305. It event initiated a long cycle of a dispute between Portugal and Spain. The presentation intends to proceed to a detailed analysis of the deliberations undertaken by Portugal and Spain about the lands of Contenda, which resulted in the settlement of the borders around the perimeter of the territory in question. Presentation raises questions about the social environment, the economic dynamics, and the daily experiences of populations.

Tatiana Shaban (University of Victoria, Canada; currently residing in Minsk,

Belarus) spoke about Ukraine-Slovakia cross-border partnership: Democracy promotion and security concerns. How can we understand democracy promotion across borders? This presentation questions cross-border cooperation (CBC) trends on the Slovakia-Ukrainian border. It raises the research question of how efficient the Slovak involvement and participation in Ukraine is by analyzing CBC programs in the Zakarpattia region. Finally, the paper explores the relationship between Slovakia and Ukraine by examining the development and progress of programs and instruments in the area of foreign policy/security and regional.

Michalina Trochimowicz (University of Białystok, Poland) the subject of presentation was the invisible thread – a historical outline of the religious borderland. Her work presents the historical outline of a part of the religious borderland between Catholic and Orthodox communities in Poland. The border, between villages on the Czarna River in the Podlaskie Voivodship, has not moved for more than a hundred years despite wars, political changes, and mass deportations of the Orthodox population. Even today, with a high level of social integration, the religious border is still visible.

The fifth session was dedicated to narratives of new diasporas and cultural capital. **Bárbara Fernández Mellea** (University of Hong Kong) represent the migration from China to Puerto Rico and beyond. She shows the Chinese migrants life according Eduardo Lalo's novel "Simone". Eduardo Lalo (1960) wrote the novel "Simone" that was carefully set in the Puerto Rican capital,

San Juan. The novel also works as a guide map towards the development of a plot that brings ideas of island life and Puerto Rican identity. This paper seeks to analyze the way in which Lalo depicts the Chinese female character, Simone or Li. The study of the migrant Chinese character opens up a thought-provoking and necessary discussion on Sino-Latin American cultural relations.

Pedro Miguel Carmona Rodríguez (University of La Laguna, Spain) spoke about overlapping borders: communities on the 'Frontier' in David Bergen's novels "The Retreat" (2008) and "Stranger" (2016). Literal and metaphorical borders have been productively exploited in Canada in the last 50 years. While the Canadian nation-state has been visibly and increasingly challenged by the diasporic communities. This paper analyzes the problematic inter-communal boundaries that is dramatized in the narratives. Both novels are nurtured by border-building politics, which, in turn, is tethered to the creation of subaltern "waste communities", whose existence strengthens mainstream social groups through binary dialectics of self-opposition. Relying on Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer* premises, it is suggested then that Bergen's Ojibway and Guatemalan immigrants to the United dwell on a metaphorical border whose impenetrability minimizes that of the literal frontier. The improbable porosity of these overlapping borders counters official discourses of egalitarian boundary crossing.

María Alonso Alonso and Carmen Luna Sellés (University of Vigo, Spain) paper dedicated the borderland Noir and its brutal realism by Emiliano Monge's

novel “Among the Lost” (2015) as a case study. “Among the Lost” (2015), by Mexican author Emiliano Monge, is a *road novel* that takes the reader to the Mexican-Guatemalan border to explore the darkest side of humankind. In the novel, 74 migrants are kidnapped by a human-trafficking mafia. As an example of Borderland Noir, *Among the Lost* succeeds in portraying the border as a hostile and violent place. Drawing on Achilles Mbembe’s notions of ‘necropolitics’ and Sayak Valencia’s postulations around ‘gore capitalism’, this analysis will depict the borderland as a real state of exception, using Agamben’s famous terminology. Monge’s intention with this extremely cruel novel was to draw attention to what he refers to as the ‘Central-American Holocaust’.

Aleksandr Sautkin (Murmansk, Arctic State University, Russia) and **Elena Philippova** (Independent Researcher, Murmansk, Russia) present temporary border zones: creative potential, existential traps, and their comprehension through cinematography means. At the beginning of 2013, the international project “Kinopoyezd” “Cinetrain” was launched in Moscow 25 young filmmakers from 15 countries set off on a railway trip across Russia; their goal was to shoot and edit seven short documentaries on the way. The project was a peculiar experience of forming an internal border zone – both in the everyday and in the creative dimensions. The very mini-community of filmmakers traveling together in the winter across Russia can be viewed as a socio-cultural mix with a common “territory” of cinematography.

Maria Vittoria Lucarno (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Italy) shows the

situation of cultural tourism and pandemic borders as a new practice in the relationship between twin towns in Finnish-Swedish Lapland. The historical-cultural heritage is often an invitation to tourists interested in rediscovering and recognizing the traces of historical events and colonization. Local tourism is mainly based on the natural resources of the Arctic region. Today, it is beginning to propose the historical-cultural heritage related to the presence of the border that marked the history of the twentieth century. This paper analyses the case study of the twin cities of Tornio and Haparanda as examples of cultural heritage related to cultural and memorial tourism. The researcher also examines how the current health emergency due to the Covid 19 pandemic has unexpectedly complicated the daily relations between two communities.

Dorota Misiejuk (University of Białystok) concentrated on the borderland community in the context of educational needs and practices. The borderland of north-eastern Poland has a heritage of cultural diversity going back centuries. It is an example of a long-lasting borderland. Each historical epoch defined cultural diversity in its own specific way. The tradition of the borderland of northeastern Poland in the twentieth century brought the perspective of national identities, while the twenty-first century brought ideas of transculturalism and multidimensional cultural identities. The aim of the article will be an analysis of the educational process as well as the practices of socialization.

Olga Filippova and **Oleksandra Deineko** (V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National

University, Ukraine) spoke about education reform and politics of identity in the Ukrainian border region. In this study, they analyze how representatives of ethnically heterogeneous communities of two Ukrainian border regions— Kharkiv (eastern Ukraine) and Chernivtsi (western Ukraine) - reflect the state's vision of reform in Ukraine, including the new Language Law and particularly Ukrainian as a language of instruction at schools, which foster the legitimizing politics of identity. By focusing on the intersection of identity and influences, this study suggests that rather than being merely passive recipients of meanings of identity transmitted “from above”, ethnocultural groups are non-institutionalized actors actively involved in the politics of identity.

The first plenary session was opened with the presentation of **Jan Selmer Methi** (Center for practical knowledge, Nord University, Norway) who spoken about borderland and practical knowledge. Practical knowledge refers to the phenomenon that what we refer to using the term knowledge develops through human activity and is integrated into personality and used in action. We know-how, but we cannot give a reliable description of what is behind the “how”. In Gilbert Ryle's (1949) terms, it would be the distinction between knowing how and knowing that, or in Michael Polany's (1966) term, tacit knowledge. Nord University and Murmansk Arctic State University were institutionally located in the border zone. The goal is to show how practical knowledge was used to develop the concept of the “border zone”.

Elżbieta Opiłowska (University of Wrocław, Poland) presented the impact

of Covid-19 on the structures and strategies of cooperation in the German-Polish borderland. The temporary closure of borders has not only impacted the lives of borderlanders whose everyday practices are embedded in cross-border space, but also the functioning of institutional actors involved in cross-border activities. The aim of the paper is to investigate the reactions and new strategies of cross-border institutional actors in the context of (re)bordering. Applying the concept of resilience, she explores new modes of adaptation and coping mechanisms as well as structures developed to adjust to new circumstances.

David Newman (Ben Gurion University, Israel) reflects on the border agendas for tomorrow. The world has witnessed a global pandemic which has crossed borders with ease. No fences or walls have been able to prevent the transmission of the virus between neighboring territories. He emphasizes that many countries have implemented rigorous policies of entry and exit into, and from, countries in an attempt to prevent transmission. The key location of borders has switched from the fences and border patrols at the periphery of the country to the airports and other points of entry. What we have learned from the management of borders during Covid will change the way we think about borders and set new research agendas for the next generation of border scholars.

The second plenary session was dedicated to the pandemic and migration situations on the European borderlands. **Thomas Lundén** (Södertörn University, Sweden) presented the case of a twin city divided during Corona – a story of

unintended geopolitics. The aim of this study is to evaluate the legal measures taken after the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic and its effects on life in an urban area divided by a state border. The town of Tornio in Finland same as Haparanda in Sweden, inhabited by ethnic Swedes and Finns. The two towns have grown together and the image of the twins has been an example of a well-functioning, bi-ethnic and bi-lingual community. Suddenly in March 2020, a sharp line was created along the hitherto almost invisible border that total closure to local border crossing depending on citizenship. His preliminary conclusion is that state territorial decisions concerning spatial behavior are badly suited to the protection of health in areas of strong inter-state interaction.

Basia Nikiforova (Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, Lithuania) in the presentation concentrated on borderland in pandemic with an emphasis on such feelings as melancholy and hope. The European migration and pandemic crises pushed the borders' researchers a necessity of re-thinking the process of re-bordering, the change of European border functions, and the new role of the European borderlands. She analyzed the radically new phenomenon of refugees on the Belarusian - Lithuanian border that is the longest external EU border. Today Lithuanian state deals on its own territory with more than 4000 refugees, most of them from Iraq. The political situation in Belarus has to Lithuania open the border's door for represents of the Belarusian opposition. Both cases have owned different speed and the necessity to create adequate juridical legislation to the new

situation. Analyzing inhabitants' feelings that we have named "between melancholy and hope" gives possibility realistic looks on the borderland's everyday life.

Next day of international conference was opened from inauguration of "Terra Diversa" Laboratory. This laboratory is an initiative of researchers from the Institute of Sociology at University of Bialystok. Professor Małgorzata Bieńkowska - the coordinator of the project - presented the aims and mission of the Laboratory Terra Diversa, describing it as a research project and popularization of border and migration studies.

The Lab's mission presentation was followed by two debates with the program board. The first *Social Science Perspective*, the second *Social Practices Perspective* – was attended by NGO activists. They presented their long-term experience and referred to the current situation on the Polish-Belarusian border, where the state of emergency related to the migration crisis has been in place for a month. It was attended by Anna Dąbrowska from Homo Faber Asociacion (Lublin, Poland)

Later **Krzysztof Czyżewski** pronounces *The Borderland Manifesto* in which he invites border researchers to documenter and objectivize this difficult mass migration situation and makes it the public domain. He called for the establishment of new rules of interaction between civilizations on the ground of a post-colonial approach. Borderlands teach us how to overcome humanitarian crises. Only common hard work NGO, social activists, mass media, and, first of all, the state should solve this problem. The Borderland Manifesto was

also a summary of thirty years of activity by the Borderland Foundation. The third debate *Ethos of Borderland* was organized by the Borderland Foundation and moderated by Weronika Czyżewska-Poncyliusz.

In the last panel *Ethos of Borderland* spoke **Elżbieta Matynia** (New School for Social Research, New York), **Michael Steinlauf** (Gratz College, Philadelphia), **Chris Keulemans** (Amsterdam). They discussed such problems as a culture of tolerance, the social role of the cultural and artistic contest, and the figure of the migrant in contemporary political and cultural context.

BASIA NIKIFOROVA