

Introduction: How to assess territorial impacts through the representations of a borderscape

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This book was born thanks to a call for articles issued at the beginning of 2014 by the Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin. The call targeted studies with a subject of „*Phantom Borders – Historical borders as topics in border/space research*”.¹ The team of the European Institute of Cross-Border Studies of CESCO (Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives) aimed at contributing to the planned issue with an article on the phantom borders around Esztergom (Hungary) and Štúrovo (Slovakia). The two cities belonged to the Hungarian Kingdom for one thousand years and their relationships started to be developing again after the last bridge over the Danube which had been ruined in the World War II was re-inaugurated in 2001 with the support of the European Union. However, during the preparatory phase of the study, it became clear that the topic needs further analyses, interviews and surveys among the travellers at the border bridge, taking much longer time. Thus, the researchers made the decision to dedicate a book to the subject including studies focusing on different aspects of the changes triggered by the reconstruction of the Mária Valéria Bridge. The book was first published online, at the end of 2017. The current printed version contains smaller or bigger changes compared to the first edition: the studies have been re-edited, a new article has been added and the introduction has been replaced. At the same time, we did not change the scientific content and the conclusions of the studies.

The compilation is aimed at contributing to two, quite fashionable, discussions: a more theoretical one and a more practical one. On the one hand, the approach applied for unfolding the impacts of the bridge reconstruction fits into the mainstream way of human geographic thinking on borders, namely the so-called *borderscape theories*. On the other hand, the authors wanted to feed into the debate on the methods of measuring the *territorial impacts of cross-border investments and projects*.

Borderscape is a relatively new notion appeared and spread at the beginning of the 2000s. It was first mentioned in 1999 in a theatre performance² and this fact highlights the connection of the term with aesthetical and epistemological

1 For more details, please visit: <http://phantomgrenzen.eu/>

2 Namely, that was the performance titled *Borderscape 2000: Kitsch, Violence, and Schamanism at the End of the Century* directed by Guillermo Gómez-Peña and it was about the crossing points of different identities.

reflections. Since then, the term has gained at least three different meanings without achieving an undisputed definition (dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015; dell'Agnese 2015).

According to the first meaning, derived from the mentioned performance, borderscapes are territories affected by different flows (of ideas and images) where strict lines lose their absolute character and they are permanently reshaped along by these flows. So, in this perspective, border is a metaphor of being 'in-between' and this form of existence provides the borders with an unmaterialised meaning. Brambilla uses the term with a similar meaning when identifying borderscape as a "*common good for a geographical opposition to capitalism*" (Brambilla 2015: 6).

The second approach can be identified by the works of Arjan Harber (2003) and Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper and Marieke Kuipers (2004). In their view, borderscape is a physical place (border landscape) marked by the presence of an administrative border. "*In this definition, the borderscape is the material output of the difference in sovereignty marked by the international boundary.*" (dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015: p. 3) Here, nation-state plays a definitive role by creating the self-identification rules that define belonging and non-belonging, inside and outside, us and them; and through all these differentiations, nation-state organizes the human activities and the spatial behaviour of the human beings.

The third meaning is connected to representation and border-making. Anke Strüver (2005) puts that borders are created by imaginations, narratives and practices. According to this approach, borderscape is a representation of the space around a border, and the way of representation is determined by a more comprehensive discourse acquired by the individual. This third way of thinking is in harmony with the most recent stream of relational geography which was fertilised by Henri Lefebvre's thoughts.

Lefebvre published his most famous book titled *La production de l'espace* in 1974, but it acquired higher popularity after having been translated to English in 1991. For Lefebvre, space itself is a social product having three dimensions. At the first level, we have perceptions on the objects around ourselves from where our mind creates the 'frame of reference' of spaces (*espace perçu* = perceived space). As Werlen interprets Lefebvre's thesis: "*Space neither exists as a material object nor as a consistent theoretical object. It is – as I suggest – rather to be understood as a formal and classificatory concept, a frame of reference for the physical components of actions...*" (Werlen 2005: 52) This (let's call „neokantian") epistemological foundation leads us to the second level, to the level of representations (*espace conçu* = conceived space) when our mind conceptualises interpretations, theories based on previous perceptions.

Finally, these representations influence our identity and behaviour through the spatial imaginary of time (*espace vécu* = lived space) (Lefebvre 1974: 7–81).

Lefebvre's theory has provided ammunition for those geographers questioning the pre-existence of absolute space and arguing for a constructivist interpretation of space. As P.K. Rajaram and C. Grundy-Warr formulate: "*space and spatial relations should be considered in terms of processes of change, and of landscapes as always in the process of becoming rather than temporally fixed spaces.*" (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2005: xxiv original emphasis)

Accordingly, more and more border scholars consider borders as not physical facts, but creatures of human imagination, discourses and practices / actions / behaviour³. As Anssi Paasi states: "*political boundaries – as well as territories and their inherent symbolisms and institutions – are social constructs and processes rather than stable entities.*" (Paasi 2005: 19) "*A line is geometry, a border is interpretation*" – alleges Henk van Houtum (Houtum 2011: 50). He also indicates the active border-making role of individuals: "*... borders are first and foremost social phenomena. A border is not merely a line in space, it is a social process, contingent on continuous re-imagination and re-interpretation...*" (Houtum 2003: 39) David Newman highlights the re-active impacts of b/ordering processes to the spatial behaviour of the individuals. "*Borders are created by those who have the power to keep out those people and influences which are perceived, at any point in time, as being undesirable or detrimental to the home territory or group. [...] Once created, borders become transformed into reality, a default situation which impacts upon daily life patterns and social mores, determine the parameters of exclusion and inclusion, and creates the categories through which social and spatial compartmentalization is perpetuated.*" (Newman 2011: 35–36)

In this perspective, borderscape should be interpreted as *representation* and *creation*. Landscapes are perceived and re-shaped by the individuals in different ways: "*the landscape as a representation is far from being "objective": it does not have a pre-existing meaning, which can be understood in the same way by every kind of audience but, on the contrary, is the result of a sum of interpretations and re-interpretations.*" (dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015: 7) This sum of interpretations and re-interpretations of a borderscape can be aggregated by methods unfolding perceptions (*espace perçu*), concepts, narratives (*espace conçu*) and everyday spatial practices (Werlen, 2005), behaviour and spatial identities (*espace vécu*) of the border people.

The studies and the applied methods of this book reflect to this challenge and give a more or less comprehensive picture on the changes of perceptions

3 See Diener, A.C. and Hagen, J. 2012.

and spatial behaviour of the border people inhabiting the urban influencing zone of Esztergom and Štúrovo which is re-organised within the framework of a cross-border EU entity, the Ister-Granum European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

Considering the practical aspects of the volume, it is expected to feed into the debate on the appropriate method of *assessing cross-border impacts*. The diverse solutions developed so far have two main perspectives. On the one hand, they target the estimation of potential future impacts of a new legislation or policy. For this type of TIA, one can mention the guidance of territorial impact assessment issued by the European Commission (EC 2013) or the Cross-border impact assessments carried-out and published by ITEM⁴ on a yearly basis, since 2016 (ITEM 2016; ITEM 2017; ITEM 2018). These assessments target diverse (mainly national) legislations having impacts on border areas and border people's life.

On the other hand, several attempts have been made to establish a consequent and steady methodology for assessing the cross-border territorial impacts of the INTERREG CBC programmes and, more generally speaking, no matter what cross-border investments. The main motivation behind is the legitimacy of these investments and their financial background: what is the added value of cross-border developments? How could we identify this added value? Within the framework of the ESPON programme fewer projects targeted the question of TIA. Medeiros (2014b) analysed these attempts (nearly 20 reports) with a special focus on the projects TEQUILA (2006), STeMA (2006). EATIA (2012) and ARTS (2012). Within the framework of the last one, the experts have developed a tool, namely the TIA quick check which is based on the co-called vulnerability concept connected to the resilience to climate change. Regardless of the comprehensive data base and the impressive visualisation of the results through maps, the tool is not able to detect cross-border impacts.

The most recent ESPON project directly targeting cross-border impacts is ESPON CBC TIA started in May, 2018 and lasting one year. As it is set-out in the Inception Report of the project, one of the main problems the evaluators face when assessing cross-border impacts is the lack of data on cross-border flows. The data available and comparable at European level (at Eurostat) refer to different socio-economic indicators of NUTS II or NUTS III regions with a national focus (ESPON, 2018). Since the ESPON projects very rarely go beyond these territorial units (and national statistical offices do not compile

4 ITEM: Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross border cooperation and Mobility of the Maastrich University.

data on cross-border flows), while cross-border interactions happen on the ground, these projects cannot catch the real cross-border impacts, on the level of integration of a borderland.

However, CBC TIA project is the first attempt within the framework of ESPON to dig deeper in borderscapes. E.g., the list of indicators reflects among others on the quality of cooperation, the cross-border availability of services, even more, the citizens' mindset regarding the neighbouring region and its institutions⁵. These aspects have already been present in other initiatives coming from the ground.

The Northern Irish Centre for Cross-Border Studies (CCBS) has published several guides facilitating the development and implementation of better-quality projects across the borders. Among these guides, two have to be mentioned: the one compiled together with the Euro Institut of Kehl (2011) and the other published 4 years later (in 2015). Both guides give a comprehensive formal description on the assessment procedures of the effects of a cross-border project and identify four fields (social, economic, environmental, *cooperation*) of these potential impacts. In addition, the first publication also details those questions describing the level of cross-border cohesion and integration. The methodology contains questions related to the level of cooperation (institutionalisation), legal harmonisation, shared services, cross-border flows and mobility (Taillon, Beck, Rihm 2011). At the same time, the list of potential indicators still contains many factors reflecting to the general economic and social situation of the borderland without cross-border specificities.

In his most recent studies and articles, Eduardo Medeiros (e.g. 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2016) has gradually developed a new concept on cross-border TIA. The new methodology called TARGET TIA went the farthest in the way of measuring real cross-border impacts in a comprehensive and integrated way. It focuses on “‘barrier effect’ reduction” (Medeiros, 2014b: 52) in order to enhance territorial cohesion. The model provides a multi-dimensional (multivector) scaling tool by which the cross-border projects' impacts can be identified and benchmarked in space and time in a more or less calculative way⁶. The TARGET TIA indicators reflect on such important (often qualitative) aspects of cross-border integration like shared social equipment, language skills, functional complementarities,

5 The last one might be the most important aspect analysed most recently, e.g. by Decoville and Durand (2018) based on an Eurobarometer survey.

6 The model classifies the impacts with dichotomies of negative / positive; endogenous / exogenous; sustainable / short-term; multiplier / substitution. In addition, it evaluates and weighs the results by *policy intensity* and *regional sensibility* characters of the impact.

legislation differences. But still, there are indicators describing the economic, social and environmental conditions of a border area with less cross-border character.

The TIA model proposed by CESCI is based on the above mentioned borderscape concept. This is the approach that clearly define, in which degree the separating (or barrier) effects of the administrative border are reduced – thanks to the cross-border investment or activity.

When speaking about socio-economic indicators like GDP, number of enterprises, house incomes, etc. one can present the general development level of two regions along a border but will not be able to tell anything about the integration of the borderland itself. Similarly, cross-border cooperation programmes contain indicators like the length of cross-border roads, number of participants of a cultural event, increase in the number of cross-border passengers or overnights, etc. These indicators mirror something from the cross-border aspects of the programmes but are insufficient to identify the level of cross-border integration. Hungary and Romania have built 5 new cross-border roads during the last years but they are closed because of the delay of Romania's accession to the Schengen zone. Even if the border region has a great cultural festival without audience from the other side of the border, it is not a cross-border event. There are border crossings the traffic of which is paramount – but if the vast majority of the passengers are coming from a third country (e.g. Turkish employees travelling between Turkey and Germany), we have nothing to say about cross-border mobility. The increase in the number of overnights is interesting from the cross-border point of view if the guests arrive not from the US, Japan or China, etc.

Cross-border territorial impact assessment should describe the real and particular cross-border impacts. What does *real* cross-border impact consist of? On the one hand, indicators reflecting on cross-border flows (of goods, capital and people) generated within the territory of the border area such as number of cross-border commuters (and students); average distance of border crossing points; number of cross-border services, their cross-border clients and the frequency of their use by these clients; number of cross-border integrated institutions, their employees, their annual turnover and the (financial) contribution of cross-border services thereto; the number of cross-border SMEs and their employees; number of value of projects implemented jointly across the border; level of bilingualism in administration, business and everyday life, etc. All these indicators provide a picture on the level of integration of the borderland. But the final goal of cross-border investments is to create a new discourse on space, a new narrative on the border and a new borderscape in people's mind. The main objective is to

diminish the threat of the Other, to enhance mutual trust and to exploit mutual advantages available on both sides of the border. Borderscaping means the process by which the border people gain positive perception (*espace perçu*) on the other side of the frontier; create common narrative on the shared home (*espace conçu*); and start behaving as a citizen of the integrated borderland (*espace vécu*).

In this volume, the authors attempted to provide justifications to this new model with a geographic focus on the territory of the Ister-Granum EGTC. The first chapter summarises the different applied methods. The researchers made interviews with 25 key stakeholders of the region and performed a traffic counting and survey at the bridge in the summer of 2014 and in the spring of 2015. Another survey has been carried-out in 2015 with a view to detect local people's mental maps and linguistic skills. The authors also applied diverse methods known from human geography in order to analyse the processes across the border.

In the second chapter, Teodor Gyelník gives an overall picture on the improved permeability of the border since the bridge was rebuilt (2001) and Slovakia and Hungary joined the EU (2004) and the Schengen zone (2007). It is a shared view of the interviewees that the conditions for cooperation have remarkably improved. Although, the separating effects of the borders have remained in subliminal way and they have braking effect on cross-border cooperation and interactions. The author introduces a new definition for identifying these invisible and implicit distancing effects: he speaks about *polymorph and multivalent phantom limitations* since these invisible limitations crystalize and structure themselves in different variations and restrictions – hindering and slowing down cross-border interactions and integration.

Péter Balogh and Teodor Gyelník analyse in the third chapter the evolution of the general discourse of the two neighbouring states in relation with narratives of national identities, the *self* and the *other*. Based on the results of the content and discourse analysis, the authors conclude that during the last decade the narratives on the 'neighbour' have profoundly changed in both countries – in the right direction. It means that the political climate, the meta-level conditions for cooperation are much better, much favourable than one decade ago.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the history of the borderland with a special focus on its administrative boundaries and their changes. Zsolt Bottlik, Péter Nagy, Márton Pete and Tamás Telbisz give an overview on the geographical-administrative frames of the region from the mid-19th century until the era of the Ister-Granum EGTC. The authors interpret the new entity developed around the influencing area of the Mária Valéria Bridge and the twin-cities of 40,000

inhabitants as a kind of re-structuring process of the former urban functional zone. The EGTC itself can be considered as an indicator of cross-border territorial integration.

The fifth and sixth chapters deal with spatial impacts of the re-opened bridge. Mátyás Jaschitz evaluates the changes in the extension of the two twin-cities' theoretical hinterlands. By applying the Reilly-formula, the author can compare the directions of physical spatial interactions and, based on these, identify the real attracting power of the different urban centres in the wider regions. The changing spatial structures justify that the urban functional zones of Esztergom and Štúrovo has been expanding since the re-inauguration of the Mária Valéria Bridge; and this functional zone more or less cover the territory of the EGTC. It means that the territorial set of the grouping is organically defined and easy to maintain. Jaschitz also analyses the demographic and labour market consequences of the new spatial reality.

György Farkas concentrates on the changes of ethnic and linguistic borders during the two decades. Due to historical reasons, large Hungarian communities are living on the Slovak side around Štúrovo. With the help of current methods of ethnic geography Farkas analyses the movements of the linguistic frontier which has heavily been approaching the state border since 1991. The opening of the Mária Valéria Bridge did not change this process. On the contrary, the urban functions, the labour and education opportunities available on the Hungarian side, motivated Hungarian speaking people to move closer to the border or even to the other side of the border from Slovakia.

The seventh and eighth chapters are based on the results of the interviews. Márton Pete analyses the perceptions of the key stakeholders on cross-border cooperation and the role the EGTC plays in it. The theoretical foundation of the study is given by the changing interpretation of sovereignty and the new frameworks of governance. In these terms, EGTC is considered as a governance structure challenging national sovereignties. However, the interviewees are not convinced that the grouping can fulfil its mission.

Márton Pete and Zsolt Bottlik's contextual analysis accentuates the picture given in the seventh chapter. The authors cite Houtum's classification of border studies and state that the third type of these studies (namely that focusing on cooperation) is rather lacking from Hungarian literature. Using tag cloud method, Pete and Bottlik intends to compensate this shortage. Based on the analysis of the terms and attributes mentioned the most by the interviewees,

the authors characterise the major directions and perspectives of cross-border cooperation within the region.

In the next chapter, György Farkas gives an overview of the results of traffic counting and surveying of the cross-border travellers. More than 1300 questionnaires brought usable data on the destination and purposes of travel, and the frequency of border crossings. The results picture the territorial behaviour of the borderland's citizens: how they use cross-border functions, what is the extension of their movements on the other side and how frequently they cross the border?

The last chapter adds further supplements to the picture drawn by Farkas. András Morauszki és László Letenyi scrutinize the mental maps of citizens of Esztergom and Štúrovo and two other twin cities (Mosonmagyaróvár and Šamorín) where the border is not crossable. Perceptions of otherness, frequency of interactions and language skills determine the level of familiarity with the neighbouring region, the way how the people behave in the borderland, how they use the facilities available and how they are willing to travel across the border instead of doing their business at home.

As it can be seen, the studies of the book complement each other and provide a comprehensive picture on the impacts of the re-opening of the Mária Valéria Bridge. The physical infrastructure has a definitive effect on the re-shaping of the borderscape which can be interpreted as a frame of reference of creating a common home – across the border.

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