Transcending Borders and Boundaries through Dialogue: The 2023 Cross-Border Review

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With the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine showing no signs of letting up, a certain exhaustion might be emerging that distracts our attention regarding what is at stake. It is, perhaps, overstatement to characterise this conflict as "civilisational", but is certainly about some stark choices in terms of governance and personal freedom. It is not simply about democracy understood as a pluralistic system that adheres to the rule of law. It is also about social development, innovation and the use of knowledge for the greater benefit of society-at-large. Cohesion can be constructed through cooperation and dialogue or it can be imposed by brute force and autocracy. In the latter case, cross-border cooperation, horizontal processes of social innovation and development are seen as threats to the existing power structure. Social innovation often entails challenges to the status quo: it can raise uncomfortable questions that mainstream politics has either been unwilling or unable to address.

For several decades now cross-border cooperation (CBC) has flourished within Europe as a form of knowledge-exchange and co-development that has benefitted among others local governments, civil society organisations, planners, business communities, environmentalists and promoters of sustainable tourism. While cross-border cooperation has certainly been exploited as a profit-taking exercise, its overall societal benefits are undisputed. The impacts of CBC are particularly evident if we go beyond direct territorial referencing and think of CBC in terms of boundary transcending as a ubiquitous phenomenon – one that happens even without the support of INTERREG. This issue of the Cross Border Review focuses on broader understandings of boundary-transcending through cooperation and dialogue. By this we not only suggest overcoming the constraints of nationally bordered thinking, for example by creating new cooperation spaces beyond territoriality, but also to enlarge our existing social boundaries in order to attain greater understanding of how the world works. One way to frame this perspective is to characterise it in terms of community-building at different levels and within different contexts. Ultimately, borders are not only constructed by states, they are also made and re-made by everyday individuals as well as defined by patterns of interaction and exchange.

The insights that the contributors to this volume provide are both conceptual and practical in nature. Moreover, they indicate that the main resource for border-transcending is that of knowledge exchange. The examples that they provide range from of civil society activism, artistic production, special education and local experiments in local democracy. In their different ways these examples indicated how the promotion of horizontal learning processes by gathering knowledge from diverse local, national and European spaces where social innovation is being practiced. Social processes such as the creation of communities of practice across borders could also work against fragmentation by promoting a sense of common cause in areas such as climate change, social inclusion and equality.

Overview of the volume

This year's CBR is divided into four sections. The first highlights results of a number of civil society-oriented projects that have brought together various perspectives on social development and cohesion. The second section delves into conceptual debate regarding processes of social innovation and democratic participation, both of indispensable resources in the expansion and extension of existing social and cultural boundaries. The third section is then dedicated to research notes that offer complementary perspectives from the study of socio-political borders. Finally, the year's CBR offers two extensive reviews of recent publications from the realm of border studies and territorial cohesion.

The first report from the world of project-based cooperation focuses on the link between place-making and subjective urban borders. Building on previous research, as well as insights from participatory place-making projects that have been carried out in the Wedding neighbourhood of Berlin, **Martin Barthel** indicates how border-making is implicated in urban development processes and, as a result, can be interpreted as an important urban planning resource. Based on evidence from the Berlin district of Wedding he documents how place border narratives represent vital knowledges of place and how these knowledges reveal themselves in different forms of participatory place-making. As Barthel argues, these place narratives reveal the creation of new spaces of encounter and identification as well as tensions and contestations related to perceived disruptions of place coherence and familiarity. Perhaps the main message that emerges from projects such as participatory place-making is that they potentially create new spaces of encounter where shared feelings of belonging to a community can be expressed.

Art and artistic production is another field of activity where commonality across cultural difference can be achieved. This idea is developed by **Kata and Krisztina Keresztély.** In their contribution to CBR, they demonstrate how visual art can be used in a teaching and training context to enhance the social inclusion of people with migrant and minority backgrounds, supporting them to overcome their borders of communication in the host countries, on the environmental, social and individual levels. As the authors suggest, if art is able to generate feelings similar to love and belonging and therefore supporting social inclusion, visual art and visual creativity are particularly able to support the inclusion of people with difficulties of communication and understanding by supporting them to overcome their barriers of language and other forms of self-expression. Visual art, similarly to performing art, is a form non-verbal expression helping people create bridges without speaking. However, contrary to performing arts, visual creativity can be realised on different scenes: it can be a reflective activity based on individual creation, and it can also open up to a wider scene: a group work or a public community. As a result, visual art is a fundamental tool for individuals to understand and overcome barriers isolating them from their physical and social environment, their communities, but also helping them overcome their own 'inner barriers' linked to psychological issues, trauma, fear, cultural and educational backgrounds etc. Following an overview of the artistic and theoretical background, some best examples of teaching and educational practices developed in the frame of 3 different adult education projects recently conducted in this topic will be provided. At the end some concluding reflections will be added on how culture and art based projects can generate real social change, and how this change might be evaluated.

Magdalena Klarenbach and Kamila Franz shed light on the crucial nexus between European youth, climate activism, and the art of debate. While youth activism holds significant promise in addressing the climate crisis, one pressing sociological problem is understanding and bridging the generational divides in climate crisis perceptions and activism. Through surveys, we aim to uncover the nuanced motivations, strategies, and perspectives that drive this generation of climate activists. We seek to understand how the shared concern for our planet has become a bridge over the borders that once divided us. Central to our exploration is the notion that dialogue is not just about talking, but about listening, learning, and building bridges of understanding. It's about recognizing that the climate crisis affects different regions and communities in unique ways as well as acknowledging the necessity of cooperative action. European youth have embraced this ethos, leveraging their passion, determination, and digital connectivity to foster dialogue that transcends cultural, linguistic, and political boundaries. This dialogue is essential to ensure that local, national, and international efforts are coordinated and that the most vulnerable populations are protected.

Another perspective on social innovation through transcending social boundaries is provided by **Alicja Fajfer's** observations on the Erasmus+ network project PISH. PISH stands for *problem-based learning* (PBL), *intercultural communication* and STEM (*science, technology, engineering and mathematics*)" in higher education. While PBL has established a place for itself in STEM curricula across many schools, its implementation in the classroom is marked with the same challenges already known from the office. A diversifying classroom is one of these challenges. As European universities try to increase the enrolment of international students, effective intercultural communication becomes a highly desirable element of a PBL setting. These were the rationales guiding PISH. The aim of the project was to provide university teachers and students with intercultural communication training materials for culturally diverse STEM classrooms. Teamwork in diverse groups is a highly desirable but scarce skill in employees. Tech jobs offered by international companies are often project based, so employees need to be able to find their way in transnational teams. The PISH team was made up of seven partner organizations (universities and NGOs) from six countries, which meant that intercultural communication skills were also relevant for the project team. The PISH team developed four results (intellectual outputs): 1) library of best practices on intercultural practices, 2) PBL-based toolkit on intercultural communication, 3) an online course, 4) an online platform. All results are openly available online, on the PISH website. The work took 36 months. Although the project successfully completed the plan, the process design had certain shortcomings. This paper is also an attempt to address these cul de sacs and propose alternative methods for designing successful group work experience.

Following these practical insights into cooperation and dialogue, discussion continues with more conceptual contributions from European research networks. With her paper **Kadri Kangro** seeks to position social innovation within a relational worldview and look for the essence of social innovation from the configuration of relations of actor-centred perspective. The conceptual framework discussed here highlights the importance of co-evolution as an important step in the crafting of accordingly dynamic case study designs. She frames transformative social innovation in terms of complex, multi-layered processes of institutional change, including further empirical exploration of specific mechanisms and process stages in ongoing and historical cases of social innovation. Kadri's paper also reminds us of the need to pay more explicit attention to the cultural, geographical, political and social contexts of transformative social innovation initiatives. As her three cases substantiate, national and regional path dependencies matter greatly. Transformative

social innovation theory should develop the capability to explain how differences in context influence the dynamics of how social innovation unfolds over time and space. Such theory should, for instance, account for the implications of welfare state arrangements being dismantled in some places, whilst being developed further and extended in others. Kangro mentions an additional challenge for future research, that of making these co-evolutionary understandings productive for actors. We assume that actors can increase the transformative potential of social innovations by playing into such co-evolutionary processes; cleverly playing into apparent "game-changers", connecting to ongoing (calls for) "system innovation", and linking up with multi-layered narratives of change in both mainstream and grassroots movements. This can be further developed in terms of specific sets of practical challenges, such as governance, social learning, resourcing, and reflexive monitoring. In line with our understanding of distributed agency, such empowering insights should serve the full range of potential social innovation agents, including social entrepreneurs, activists and policymakers.

Leszek Koczanowicz and Wojciech Ufel focus on democratic processes. As they indicate, their engagement with the EUARENAS project and its interdisciplinary community of academicians and practitioners from different sectors provides opportunities to spot current trends in deliberative democratic theories and conceptualizations. In this article the authors point to several key problems that we identified in the theoretical literature in the field of the project and analyse - Theoretical, methodological and ethical discussions and disagreements in the field of deliberative democracy are profound, and with more and more empirical observation and practical experimentation, they reinvigorate anew. The discussions and controversies surrounding deliberation clearly indicate that it is an extremely complicated process that requires consideration of many cultural, psychological and social factors. This radically changes the picture of deliberative processes, which were initially viewed mainly from the perspective of the rationality of communication. Models of collective conversation drawn primarily from the ideas of Jurgen Habermas and John Rawls primarily considered the control of factors that could disrupt the communication process. The emphasis was on ensuring the rationality of the discussion in accordance with the principles of universal pragmatics developed by Jurgen Habermas in his seminal essay "What Is Universal Pragmatics" (1979).

It is now clear that adherence to abstractly conceived rules of communication is not enough to ensure the success of the reaching agreement process. Numerous factors are listed that affect the quality of discussions. First, it is important to remember the need to take into account not only agreement, but also disagreement, misinterpretation and distrust. This is acknowledged, for example, by one of the leading theorists of deliberation in the early times of the theory development, James Bohman: 'many philosophical approaches to public reason still have very little to say about reasonable disagreement; they suggest that contentious issues simply be excluded' (Bohman 1996, 241). Disagreement, of course, does not necessarily mean that the deliberation process is doomed to failure; on the contrary, it can enrich the discussion if we are able to address it properly (Gutmann and Thompson 1996). However, this requires conscious work by those who organize the deliberative process.

Three research notes from the border studies community follow. In the first of these **James Scott** discusses the development of border studies in interdisciplinary and "evolutionary" terms. As her argues, this is evidenced by a greater appreciation of the complexity of borders that enriches our

understanding of space-society relations, cutting through 'crusts of convention' theoretically, conceptually and empirically. In this case, interdisciplinary approaches are best thought of as tools that link territorial, social and affective understandings of borders. In other words, it is about the interrelated nature of ontological, territorial and political borders. Moving beyond, but without leaving behind, the traditional focus on state borders, border studies can reveal everyday mechanisms through which borders, understood in a holistic manner, are constantly created, confirmed and transcended. The discussion that follows begins with a brief review of the present state of the art in border studies as reflected in the 'bordering' and 'borderscapes' approaches; then some of the major questions that emerge from these approaches will be addressed as well as important tensions in the interpretation of borders and their significance. Discussion continues with cognitive aspects of border-making and in the latter part of this discussion paper, concrete examples of thus use of cognitive approaches as part of interdisciplinarity in border studies will be presented.

The second research note is offered by **Maxine Salmon-Cottreau** who delves into socially divisive processes of "othering" sexual minorities. Her account of the right-wing Polish government's encouragement of local "LGBTQ+ free" zones is a stark reminder that despite the lessons of 20th Century history the extreme right has a low threshold in implementing quasi-fascist politics of ostracism. As Salmon-Cottreau writes, such zones have cast a shadow over the LGBTQ+ community, igniting conversations and debates that transcend Polish borders and resonate across the international community. In her analysis, the author provides a discourse analysis of LGBTQ+ advocates and the anti-LGBTQ+ narratives in order to reflect on whether dialogue can help overcome resolve Poland's divisions. She examines the methods of Polish LGBTQ+ organisations and individuals that have sought to transcend boundaries, reshape perspectives and challenge the existence of "LGBT-free zones". She also argues that it is imperative that we question the international community's and the European Union's stance on the matter. Hopefully, the recent electoral victory of Poland's liberal opposition provides hope for substantial change.

In their research note **Gyula Ocskay and Teodor Gyelnik** discuss the Slovak-Hungarian cooperation project #ACCESS (Promotion of legal accessibility across the Slovak-Hungarian border). The project aims at unfolding and eliminating cross-border legal and administrative obstacles to cross-border integration and mobility in a systematic way, and in compliance with the first Interreg Specific Objective (ISO 1: better cooperation governance). The project fits into the process which started at European level with the Cross-Border Review project and, at national level, with the Legal accessibility initiative. The project involves extensive promotional and awareness-building activities in order to reach as many border citizens as possible, disseminating information through online articles, social media posts and 16 bilingual billboards. In addition, #ACCESS partners draw attention of national authorities to specific situations at the border, hence making them more open towards the articulated problems by the citizens.

The review concludes with two book reviews authored by **Teodor Gyelnik**. The first deals with a recent work edited by Sabine von Löwis and Beate Eschment that deals with "post-Soviet borders." With this edited volume we are reminded that the fundamental root of the current border problems in the post-Soviet space go back to the late Russian Empire and the early Soviet Union. The second review is that of a volume edited by Eduardo Medeiros dealing with "Public Policies for Territorial Cohesion." This book explores territorial cohesion, its achievements, its deficiencies and ongoing policy attempts to improve the conditions for territorial cohesion within the EU.