

# **Borders in the European Memories - A typology of remembered borders in today's Europe**

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Reported by Aleksandra Borkowska

An international conference was held in March 2015 at the European University in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany with the participation of 23 scholars working on the topic of „Borders in the European Memories. A typology of remembered borders in today's Europe“. The conference was organized by Thomas Serrier (Paris VIII / European University Viadrina) and Mike Plitt (European University Viadrina). ALEXANDER WÖLL (President of the European University Viadrina) opened the conference, pointing out the significance of the border topic at the European University Viadrina and the function of Frankfurt (Oder) as a bridge between Germany and Poland.

Following, THOMAS SERRIER (Paris VIII / European University Viadrina), organizer of the conference, emphasized the deep connection between Europe, European history and the issue of borders. Due to the sheer number of former borderlines in Europe, it is a huge challenge to grasp the topic of borders in the European memory.

In his keynote address, KRZYSZTOF CZYŻEWSKI (Fundacja Pogranicze) demonstrated how memory can be a bridging border between communities by using the example of the Polish-Lithuanian borderlands. He particularly emphasized that critical memory shall not only be negotiated at the level of intellectuals, but include the whole community and embrace all kinds of memories.

The first panel dealt with memories and other forms of durability. The presentation held by DIANA MISHKOVA (CAS Sofia) gave an insight into historical conceptualizations of European regions and boundaries that emerged during key periods of the 19th and 20th century and proposed a reflexion on their impact in the *longue durée*.

Afterwards, BÉATRICE VON HIRSCHHAUSEN (CNRS) addressed the question whether geographic spaces have a memory. The 2010 voting map of the Polish presidential elections clearly exemplifies how former borders still have a big impact on today's society. It has clear boundaries that line up perfectly with the former partitions of Poland. Thus, maps shall be treated as palimpsests that are several times rewritten and conserve traces of former borderlines over hundreds of years.

ETIENNE FRANÇOIS (Berlin) discussed the impact of the reformation on German society and culture from the perspective of *longue durée*. The creation of a new kind of confessional border in the 16th century shaped architecture, monument landscapes, and family traditions. Manifestations, as for instance in the inner

decorations of churches, are still visible. The durability of the borderline is attributed to its direct impact on individual and group identities.

The second panel was devoted to two of the most emblematic borders in Europe: The Rhine and the Iron Curtain. SAGI SCHAEFER (Tel Aviv University) demonstrated that the bordering process in divided Germany was longer, more gradual, and involved a more diverse set of agents than usually portrayed. These lingering disparities between history and accepted notions of inter-German bordering can be explained by the superpower centered framework of Cold War studies, the dominance of Berlin in the study of German division as well as the predominant ascription of the agency and responsibility for the process of division to the GDR and the Soviet Union.

MARION DETJEN (Center for Contemporary History Potsdam) presented her depiction of how Marxist-Leninist historical thinking remembered the Berlin Wall after 1991. By interviewing former GDR-historians and analyzing their publications, internal papers, protocols as well as diaries, she came to the conclusion that these historians contributed to the collapse of the discourse and the GDR from their own Marxist-Leninist premises. Although these reform communists did not participate in the civil rights movement of the "peaceful revolution", they also had to abandon their teleological ideology and the belief in the infallibility of the party and take part in the disempowering of the leadership.

The following presentation by MANFRED WICHMANN (Berlin Wall Memorial) discussed the transformation of the Berlin Wall from an Icon of the Cold War to a symbol of freedom. He pointed out two contrasting tendencies in the memory culture: The fast demolition of the Wall and the disappearance of its remains in 1989 on the one hand and the establishment of a vivid memorial landscape during the past 10 years on the other hand.

BIRTE WASSENBERG (University of Strasbourg) studied the Rhine as a border of peace by presenting the memories of key players in the Upper Rhine Region.

The goal of the third panel was to discuss the topic of borders and memories on the level of culture and civic society as well as to present innovative projects dealing with borders and memories. SIMON BRUNEL (Atelier Limo) showed how the border topic can be approached by cinematographic and documentary means. STEPHAN FELSBERG (Institute for Applied History) gave an insight into the projects of the Institute for Applied History, a Frankfurt/Oder-based association which acts as a mediator between academia and civil society. Both lectures raised the question how the cooperation between cultural and civil society initiatives and scientific institutions can be stimulated in order to create a productive exchange.

The second conference day was opened with a panel devoted to the construction of transnational remembrance. NENAD STEFANOV (Humboldt University of Berlin) spoke about the remembrance of political violence in the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border region between 1920 and 1956. Using personal letters as sources, he examined how individuals processed their lived experience of violence. It becomes clear that the border between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia drawn after the First World War was not a hermetically sealed border, but rather the occurrence of new realms of possibilities.

ONDŘEJ MATĚJKA (The Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Prague) analyzed the post-war developments in the Czech border region Sudetenland. After the German population had been expelled in the course of the Second World War a new society had to be built up from scratch. The remaining German cultural capital has often been neglected by the local communities. This process becomes especially clear when comparing photos from the pre-war period to those from the present. However, during the past years a positive development can be observed: Local actors take great efforts to restore abandoned houses, destroyed churches, and long forgotten monuments and thus incorporate the German heritage into the Czech society.

The following presentation by NICOLAS OFFENSTADT (University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne) approached the Western frontline of the First World War as a border and as a subject of memorialization and muzealization. The front became a subject of interest for war tourism already during the War. Afterwards, traces of battle were preserved in order to reinforce the national discourse against the enemy. Post-war battlefield tourism served veterans as a way to both re-experience and denounce the war. The fact that even events of reconciliation between German and French soldiers took place at the former frontline shows how a space formerly loaded with connotations of hate and violence was transformed into a place of European peace making and reconstruction.

CAROLIN LEUTLOFF-GRANDITS (University of Graz) gave an example for competing border narratives in post-conflict regions. Her study revealed the highly emotional dynamics of possession and repossession in the region of Knin, Croatia, where unlike the previously discussed cases of forced migration, a part of the Serbian expellees has returned to reclaim their ownership. By claiming and commemorating it, the returnees challenge the current borders and exert influence on the space.

The fifth and last part of the conference was an exploratory panel dedicated to borders in the global dimension of European memories. DRAGO ROKSANDIĆ (University of Zagreb) studied the Adriatic „Triplex Confinium” as a European lieu de mémoire, underlining the theoretical challenges of an analysis of collective memories at the crossroad of three imperial histories: Venice, the Habsburgs and the Ottomans.

LUISA PASSERINI (University of Torino/ EUI Florence) presented her current Oral and Visual Memory project which deals with intercultural connections and processes of identity formation in contemporary Europe. The study aims at understanding new forms of European identity as they develop in an increasingly diasporic world by means of Oral and Visual History. Using maps drawn by illegal immigrants living in Turin that show their individual migration histories (through the Mediterranean Sea or Southeastern Europe), Passerini illustrated the liquid character of borders and the changing representations of the European geography.

#### **Conference overview:**

**Welcome:** Alexander Wöll (President of the European University Viadrina)

**Introduction:** Thomas Serrier (Paris VIII / European University Viadrina)

**Keynote:** Krzysztof Czyżewski (Fundacja Pogranicze): Memory Bridging Border – Critical, Common, Good.

**Panel I: Memories and other forms of durability**

Diana Mishkova (CAS Sofia): Historical conceptualizations of European regions and boundaries.

Béatrice von Hirschhausen (CNRS): Phantom borders in Europe or Has a space a memory? Revisiting an old question.

Etienne François (Berlin): Religious borders in Europe: "Prisons of *longue durée*" or permanent reconstructions from below?

Chair: Claudia Weber (European University Viadrina)

**Panel II: The Rhine and the Iron Curtain: two emblematic borders**

Sagi Schaefer (Tel Aviv University): States of Division in Germany and the Problem of Duration.

Marion Detjen (Humboldt University Berlin): The Wall in the Marxist-Leninist historiography after 1989/1990.

Manfred Wichmann (Berlin Wall Memorial): The Berlin Wall remembered. From an Icon of the Cold War to a Symbol of Freedom.

Birte Wassenberg (University of Strasbourg): The Rhine, a border of peace. Memories from key players in the Upper Rhine Region.

Chair: Catherine Gousseff (CERCEC Paris)

**Panel III: Border experts in the areas of culture and civic society: Atelier Limo and the Institute for Applied History**

Simon Brunel (Atelier Limo)

Stephan Felsberg (Institute for Applied History)

Chair: Mike Plitt (European University Viadrina)

**Panel IV: Across borders: The making of transnational remembrance cultures**

Drago Rokсандić (Zagreb): The Adriatic „Triplex Confinium" as a European lieu de mémoire.

Nenad Stefanov (HU): Serbian-Bulgarian Border 1920-1950-Traumatic memory, media and publicity.

Ondřej Matějka (The Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Prague): Sudetenland or The function of a borderland from bulwark to junction.

Nicolas Offenstadt (Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne): Memorialization/muzealization of former frontlines: The Western Front 1914-2014.

Chair: Werner Benecke (European University Viadrina)

**Panel V: Borders in the global dimensions of European memories**

Carolin Leutloff-Grandits (University of Graz): Contested border narratives in present day Knin, Croatia: local, national and European dimensions. Wichmann

Luisa Passerini (Torino / EUI Florence): Borders With/in Europe: Oral and visual memories.

Chair: Klaus Weber (European University Viadrina)

<https://www.pol-int.org/en/conference/borders-european-memories-typology-remembered-borders-todays?j5Q6rewycZ5HtUDXTWpx7UZE=1&cr=2689>