

## Narratives of Europe in uncertain times

### Book of abstracts

#### **Ádám Labáth, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE)**

##### *Spaces of Liminality in Northern Ireland: Identities, Politics and Symbolic space*

The marking of the Irish-British border had ended the 800-year Irish anti-colonial and independence struggle in 1921. However, the new border that divides the Isle of Ireland has opened a new chapter, that is known as the Northern Ireland conflict or the Troubles. The Troubles is often misinterpreted and described as a nationalist or religious conflict, but the main question was always about the affiliation of Northern Ireland. This research seeks to examine the Northern Ireland conflict based on Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's concept of liminality. Liminality reveals the tension between continuity and transformation in contested national spaces. I argue that Northern Ireland is stuck in a temporariness, caused by the Northern Ireland border. This liminality still appears in identities, in local politics and even in the shaping of the urban symbolic space. Brexit highlighted that despite the good example of the peace process, the struggle of Northern Ireland has not ended. They are moving ever closer to a referendum on the Irish unification, driven by the changing demographic and political patterns, while two ideas clash: the Irish nationalist 'Unfinished revolution' and the British unionist 'no surrender' idea.

#### **Alessandro Ambrosino, Zentrum für Regionalgeschichte Brixen / Centro di Storia Regionale Bressanone**

##### *Everyday Mobility in the Alps-Adriatic Borderscape: The case of the Propusnica (1955-2009)*

Nineteenth and early twentieth-century nationalisation processes dis-integrated communities living in the Alps-Adriatic Region, that is, the space across Italian, Austrian and Yugoslav borders. Cold War militarisation intensified this fragmentation, with central authorities systematically controlling frontiers and transforming the territory into a symbolic space of ideological confrontation between East and West.

Using the case of the 'propusnica', a permit that allowed locals to cross the border with greater ease than other citizens, this paper analyses how border communities challenged this imaginary. In particular, the propusnica created a cross-border mobility regime that nurtured shared territorial belonging, transcending national divisions. The study analyses how such mobility practices, alongside cross-border cooperation initiatives from the 1960s onward, enabled regional actors to articulate the 'Alpe-Adria' idea, depicting the borderland as a transnational space promoting reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. By making use of the concept of 'borderscape', that is, treating the border as a landscape of everyday cultural negotiations and experiences, the paper reveals how local communities generated alternative heritage narratives that challenged Cold War territorial imaginaries and demonstrates the agency of border populations in constructing counter-hegemonic sentiments of territorial belonging.

#### **Alexandra Budabin, Eurac Research**

##### *Museum Strategies for Re- or De-bordering Minority Groups in a Borderland Region*

Within borderland societies, museums are key institutions in the symbolic landscape that narrate the history of past or ongoing conflicts over territorial borders while contributing to debordering processes. This contribution explores museums in borderland areas that contextualize minority relations amid legacies of earlier conflict and ongoing tensions. Looking



at three representative museums in the Tirolo-Südtirol-Trentino region, a borderland characterized by ethno-linguistic dynamics, we argue museums can play a critical role in processes of debordering in ways that affect minority relations. This research draws on previous work that has explored the role of cultural institutions and expressions in perpetuating or ameliorating tensions and social cleavages in post-conflict situations (Bryan 2015; Fontana 2013; Lozic 2011). We analyze the esthetic, interpretative, and participatory strategies of three museums, looking closely at museum locations and mandates, exhibition elements, maps, and display texts, paying attention to the use of dominant, alternate or counter-narratives. We identify specific strategies that contribute to debordering or rebordering, either by recontextualizing debates or sustaining divisive understandings of minority relations. The purpose is to gain new insights into how museums in borderlands can confront difficult legacies around border-related issues related to minority groups and work towards fostering dialogue, cooperation, and inclusion.

**Alice Buoli, Politecnico di Milano, Italy**

### *Functional or Social Proximity? Everyday Narratives from Italian Cross-Border Regions*

Paper co-authored by Ingrid Kofler (Free University of Bozen/Bolzano) and Raffaella Coletti (CNR-ISSIRFA)

Border regions are shaped not only by political and institutional frameworks but also by the everyday practices and narratives of those who inhabit them. This paper explores how functional proximity—based on infrastructures, mobility, and services—and social proximity—rooted in language, identity, and belonging—interact in three Italian border areas: Bardonecchia–Modane, Innichen/San Candido–Sillian, and Gorizia–Nova Gorica. Drawing on interviews, participatory mapping, and local stories, we examine how borderlanders negotiate difference, cooperation, and mutual perceptions in times of uncertainty marked by crises, migration, and changing governance. The findings reveal how institutional integration may coexist with persistent symbolic boundaries, and how narratives of familiarity and distance shape local imaginaries of coexistence. By focussing on functional and social dimensions of proximity, the contribution highlights borders as lived and narrated spaces where infrastructures, memories, and relationships continuously redefine the meanings and paradox of togetherness and separation.

The article is part of the PRIN project "Italian borderscapes after 2020. Mapping, Unfolding, and re-framing border territories in response to the Covid-19 pandemic" funded by the EU - Next Generation EU - PRIN 2022 Call for proposals - D.D. No. 104, February 2, 2022 - M4 C2 Inv.1.1 Prot. No. 20225TN2R9 - CUP: D53D23010950006.

**Andrzej Jakubowski, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland**

### *Cross-border mobility under external shocks: the experience of Poland's eastern border*

Tomasz Komornicki, Rafał Wiśniewski, Andrzej Jakubowski, Barbara Szejgiec-Kolenda, Eugenia Maruniak

Over the past three decades, the external border of the European Union between Poland and its eastern neighbours — Russia, Belarus and Ukraine — has undergone profound functional transformations. These shifts, closely linked to geo-political developments, have directly influenced the intensity and structure of cross-border mobility. In recent years, this border region has been strongly affected by two major external shocks. The first was the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed strict mobility restrictions and disrupted previously dynamic flows related to labour, education and tourism. The second was the humanitarian crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in the large-scale opening of EU borders to Ukrainian refugees while simultaneously tightening entry restrictions for citizens and businesses from Russia and Belarus.

The presentation will analyse the effects of these crises on border traffic and three key sectors in Poland's eastern border regions: the labour market, education and tourism. It will also examine how these changes have significantly impacted

borderland communities, affecting employment structures, demographic dynamics, access to services and everyday cross-border interactions. The analysis covers 2019–2023, highlighting how crisis-driven migration and evolving border regimes have reshaped the scale, direction and structure of cross-border flows.

### **Angelika Burtscher, Lungomare, Italy**

#### *Through the Prism of Borders - Five artistic interventions within the collaborative research project B-Shapes*

For: Borders and museums panel

Through the Prism of Borders - the artistic research project, which is part of the European Research and Action Project B-Shapes - conceptualizes borders not as fixed territorial markers but as contingent spaces where power, memory, and identity are continuously contested. The project employs artistic strategies—sound, counter-monuments, material metaphors, archival practices, and film—as research tools that unsettle dominant imaginaries and foreground embodied, affective, and marginalized perspectives.

A central arena of this work is the museum, an institution that often stabilizes hegemonic memory by reproducing national, linear, or exclusionary narratives. Intervening in such spaces is significant because museums are not neutral repositories but active sites of cultural memory, where societies negotiate what is preserved, what is silenced, and how collective identity is constructed.

By inserting alternative voices and sensory practices into these institutional frameworks, art reveals the mechanisms through which borders are legitimised and stabilised in collective consciousness. This raises key questions: How can artistic interventions expand border studies by addressing the experiential and affective dimensions of bordering? And how can they disrupt official scripts of museums to open more plural, contested, and dynamic understandings of memory?

The curatorial strategies of Katia Anguelova, Angelika Burtscher, and Marion Oberhofer, and the site-specific works of Bogdanov/Missirkov, Esra Ersen, Ivan Moudov, and ZimmerFrei in the travelling exhibition Through the Prism of Borders, exemplify how artistic practice can transform museums into contested terrains where hegemonic memory is unsettled and alternative imaginaries of borders are collectively rehearsed.

### **Aniela Bochenska, University of Warsaw, Poland**

#### *Biographical Interviews as individual paths of big change: The Post-State Agricultural Farm Space in the Experiences of Women from the Pieniężno Commune*

In 1991, State Agricultural Farms (PGRs) were liquidated in Poland. This change was part of the political transformation taking place at the time. This process left such a profound impact on the former State Agricultural Farm (PGR) areas that, even at the beginning of the 21st century, E. Tarkowska was still writing about these spaces as "enclaves of poverty." In July and September 2023, as part of a seminar led by Professor Dr. hab. Agnieszka Kościańska, I conducted fieldwork in one of these areas, the partially transport-excluded commune of Pieniężno, which was once State Agricultural Farm (PGR). During this research, I conducted 28 interviews with professionally active women of various ages. Through biographical interviews, I heard about the consequences of social change from the perspective of individuals directly experiencing its effects. In my presentation, I will analyze how the consequences of political change were described by my interviewees.

### **Anna Glew, University of Liverpool**

## ***Ukrainian Popular Music After Russia's 2022 Full-scale Invasion: Placing Ukraine on the Map of Europe***

From the first days of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the topic of war has been extensively covered by Ukrainian popular music across a range of genres, featuring multiple themes. This paper explores how Ukrainian popular music construct narratives of Ukraine as a European country (through its lyrics and music videos, as well as through collaborations with European musicians), and argues that popular music plays an important role in meaning-making in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war.

The paper is guided by academic literature on narrative analysis, and it will examine the lyrics and music videos of Ukrainian popular songs that were created after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and have a significant number of views on Youtube. For analysis, I will utilise my database of war-themed Ukrainian popular songs created from 24 February 2022 until the present (currently 570 songs). While Ukrainians use a range of platforms to listen to popular music (such as Apple Music and Spotify), YouTube is used here as the main platform for analysis, in view of its accessibility to all strata of the population, and its additional value as a source of music videos and audience's comments accompanying the songs.

### **Artur Boháč, Technical University of Liberec**

#### ***The Turów Mine Dispute as a Catalyst of Eurosceptic Moods in the Czech-Polish Borderland***

The dispute over the Turów coal mine between Poland and Czechia became a prominent international controversy, revealing currents of Euroscepticism in both countries. The controversy got to the level of the EU. In Poland, procedures in the EU institutions triggered strong Eurosceptic reactions, which framed the decision as an infringement on national sovereignty. Although the Czech government pursued legal recourse through the EU mechanisms, Czech Eurosceptic voices, especially from populist and far-right parties, criticized their inability to enforce its rulings effectively. These voices were mixed with dissatisfied environmental organizations. The dispute thus served as a prism through which concerns about the balance of power between EU institutions and member states were debated. It highlighted how environmental and cross-border issues can intersect with Eurosceptic narratives across multiple levels of governance. The text aims to document and categorize these narratives, especially in affected border regions. The higher ambition is to document the dynamics of Euroscepticism affected by cross-border conflict and supranational governance. The text is anchored in the theoretical background of international relations and political science. The study employs desk research to understand the Turów crisis and discourse analysis of media to explain the most symptomatic Eurosceptic narratives linked to the dispute.

### **Bacho Bitari Khuroshvili, University of Wroclaw**

#### ***The fall of Anti-discrimination Policy in Georgia: how the government uses the minorities to increase Euroscepticism and suppress Protests***

Anti-discrimination policies and issues concerning minorities continue to be focal points in both academic debates and public policy. (Geddes & Guiraudon, 2004; Guiraudon, 2006; Vanhala, 2009; Valfort, 2018; Bunt et al., 2020; Ringelheim & Ganty, 2023). In Georgia, the latter gained prominence after the 2014 signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union and the enactment of a law aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination. Although the legislation formally guaranteed protection regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, its practical enforcement diverged sharply from its intended objectives. Sexual minorities, in particular, face increasing vulnerability and social exclusion. This paper explores how the ruling Georgian Dream party strategically exploits LGBTQI+ issues to promote Euroscepticism, portraying European integration as a threat to traditional values and national identity. By linking minority rights to external interference, the government both undermines anti-discrimination commitments and suppresses domestic dissent, especially during protests. The analysis reveals the gap between policy design and implementation, showing how populist rhetoric, far-right mobilisation, and Eurosceptic narratives of the government converge to weaken

human rights protections. The findings highlight how minority issues are used politically as tools for governance and resistance to Europeanisation.

**Barbara Riman, Institute for Ethnic Studies (IES)**

*“Alive Croat, Dead Slovene”? The Slovenian Minority and the Emergence of the Slovenian-Croatian Border in 1991*

This article examines the experiences of the Slovenian national minority residing in the Croatian borderland during the establishment of the Slovenian-Croatian border in 1991. Previously an internal administrative line within the former Yugoslavia, the border became an international boundary, sharply dividing a region historically characterized by close social, cultural, and economic ties. Daily life and cross-border mobility were significantly affected, and members of the newly formed Slovenian minority, owing to their connections with the kin-state, experienced these changes with particular intensity.

The study draws primarily on Slovenian and Croatian media reports documenting border regulations and local responses at the time, supplemented by oral history interviews focused specifically on personal experiences related to the border's emergence. The findings highlight the complex challenges faced by the minority population, including restrictions on movement, shifts in economic practices, and the negotiation of cultural identity across the new international boundary.

The article's title reflects the enduring historical connections within the border region, emphasizing continuity despite political separation. As a reminder of the centuries-long coexistence in the present-day Slovenian-Croatian borderland, the title also underscores the fact that seven Croatian villages continue to maintain a cemetery located in Slovenia.

**Beate Ociepka, University of Wrocław, Poland**

*A Panel: De-bordering Europe while decolonizing discourses? The challenges of a lasting East-West divide in the EU*

Christian Noack, University of Amsterdam; Beata Ociepka, University of Wrocław; Julia Trzcińska, University of Wrocław; Pierre. F. Weber, University of Szczecin.

The panel presents the results of NARDIV Horizon Europe project's study on the relevance of colonial and post-colonial discourses within Europe. The project focused on how conflicting views of the past have been petrified in trans-European and internal EU relations. It explored the narratives and frames used by media in four countries (Beata Ociepka and Julia Trzcińska), how they were reflected in cultural diplomacy (Ociepka), and the roles of the conflicting pasts in Polish-German (Pierre-Frédéric Weber) and Polish-Ukrainian relations (Christian Noack). The participants of the project represent the constructivist approach in studies on international relations, including the study of perceptions, narratives and frames into their research. Their understanding of cultural diplomacy and its role in international relations is thus close to the cosmopolitan school. Jointly, the panellists will discuss the relevance of a decolonization of postcolonial currents for a better mutual understanding in Europe. While their main focus is on internal, trans-EU relations, the inclusion of the Ukrainian debate on decolonization extends the borders of the study in an attempt at de-bordering Europe.

**Bjarge Schwenke Fors, UiT The Arctic University of Norway**

*Cultural Revitalization and Regional Integration in the Torne Valley*

Recent geopolitical shifts have led to fragmentation and divisions across Europe, yet they have also sparked efforts toward reintegration. This dynamic is particularly evident in the Nordic countries, where cross-border cooperation has gained momentum.

One of the most promising areas for Nordic cross-border integration is the Torne Valley region, where Norway, Sweden, and Finland intersect. The region aspires to become "Europe's most integrated border region." Rich in natural resources, serving as a key hub for transport corridors, and spanning coast to coast, the Torne Valley holds significant strategic importance.

A distinctive feature of this integration effort is the role of the Kvens and the Tornedalians, two Finno-Ugric minorities whose homelands bridge the borders of the three nations. Their presence embodies continuity across boundaries, positioning them as a unifying force in the region-building process.

The paper explores the Torne Valley as a focal point for Nordic cross-border integration and examines how the revitalization of Kven and Tornedalian culture aligns with broader initiatives to strengthen regional identity and cohesion. The Torne Valley's approach illustrates how cultural revival and strategic development can converge to enhance both regional identity and cross-border collaboration in Europe.

### **Borut Klabjan, Science and Research Centre Koper: *Helsinki before Helsinki: Cross-Border Cooperation at the Edge of Europe from the Cold War to Post-Schengen Europe***

This paper analyzes multiple forms of cross-border cooperation in the Italo-Yugoslav (later Italo-Slovene) borderland after the Helsinki Accords in 1975. Despite being on opposite political and ideological sides during the Cold War, Italy and Yugoslavia developed fruitful cross-border cooperation. While this aspect has already been emphasized at the state level, a micro-historical analysis shows that it was not a top-down process; rather, it was supported and driven by a continuous demand for cross-border exchange among local populations — what the Slovene Minister of the Interior described as the "spirit of Helsinki before Helsinki."

This situation fostered hopes for deeper cooperation after 1989. The narratives of a "Return to Europe" promoted by East-Central European countries were initially promising, but soon led to disillusionment. Minorities, who had been the main agents of cooperation, were increasingly perceived as troublesome actors. Political blockades at the state level weakened cross-border dialogue during the 1990s, and only Slovenia's accession to the Schengen Area in 2007 brought tangible changes.

This paper therefore proposes an alternative, *border chronology* of Europe, emphasizing the role of minorities and the aspirations for cooperation during a crucial period of European transformation.

### **Carlos López Gómez, Universidad Antonio de Nebrija, Spain**

#### ***A border that is not a border: post-Brexit Gibraltar and the European Union***

For over three centuries the British rule over Gibraltar has deeply impacted everyday life in whole of the Algeciras' Bay beyond the different episodes of the litigation between Madrid and London. Gibraltar is today the only remaining colony in European territory and during the time both Spain and the United Kingdom were part of the European Union, it was a source of trouble regarding the application of the EU law and its performance as a tax haven, but, at the same time, it acts as an economic driver for the region, providing over 10.000 jobs for Spanish citizens.

Our paper explores the views and attitudes of the people from both sides of the fence (which is not officially considered a border by Spain), expressed by both political and social institutions, and the prospects opened by the latest agreement between the EU and the United Kingdom (not enforced yet), which is supposed to remove the fence and include the territory of Gibraltar both in the Schengen area and the EU customs union, all of this in the light of the historical claims and policies of Spain regarding Gibraltar.

## **Catalina Balan, NARDIV**

### *Cultural Borders of Europe: French Soft Power in Shaping Post-Communist Romania*

Having maintained essential diplomatic ties with Romania throughout the communist period, France remained a key actor in the country's democratization after 1989. French diplomacy in Romania acquired a distinctive character shaped by its geographical, social, and cultural context, while simultaneously contributing to the redefinition of post-communist Romanian society.

This paper examines French cultural diplomacy in Romania on the eve of the December 1989 Revolution and during the first six years that followed. It explores how France's cultural and diplomatic strategies helped shape Romania's political and symbolic reintegration into Europe at the dawn of a new world order after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Based on diplomatic archives from the Centre des Archives Diplomatiques in Nantes and La Courneuve, the study sheds light on the mutual expectations projected by the Romanian and French administrations, as well as on Romania's domestic challenges within the broader regional context of the early 1990s.

By analyzing these dynamics, the paper offers new perspectives on the role of French soft power in post-communist Eastern Europe and its contribution to reimagining Europe's cultural borders during a moment of profound transformation.

## **Catherine Teissier, Aix-Marseille University, France**

### *Collaborating across borders. Polizeiruf 110 (Świecko) and the visualisation of a shared space*

Popular culture offers a platform for expression and for projecting the problems of society. This is particularly true of television series, due to their specific temporal structure and societal roots. This format allows for the projection of cultural conflict and its resolution. Among the popular television series produced in Germany, the crime series Polizeiruf 110 is notable for its longevity and its large viewing audience of around 5 million. It is therefore particularly well suited to analysis of representations of the self and the other in media discourse. The distinctive feature of this series is its local roots. This paper will study the depiction of borders in episodes featuring a German-Polish police team working together at the Świecko crossing point near Ślubice, which have been broadcast twice yearly since 2015. The focus will be on the role played by the landscape and cross-border communications in constructing a transit area where a culture of collaboration between German and Polish police officers is developing. We will also examine representations of conflicts between national teams, their origins and strategies for resolving them, showing that this popular format develops a narrative of collaboration based on a historical dynamic of German-Polish reconciliation that does not ignore contemporary tensions.

## **Christian Noack, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands**

### *Proposal for panel: "Social Media Perception of Russian Disinformation Narrative across Europe"*

Focusing on Poland, Slovakia, Germany and France, our subproject of NARDIV explored how Facebook users engaged with selected Russian disinformation narratives during the first 18 months of Russia's war against Ukraine (2022-2023) and which kind of perception of the comments is produced by the comments. Using a comparative quantitative and qualitative approach, we identified the most commented posts across the four countries and analysed user reactions.

Our findings point to three key insights. First, user engagement patterns strongly correlate with national political environments and media ecologies. Second, across all the countries under scrutiny, user responses were more often than not emotionally driven, rather than content-focused. Over 80% of the comments displayed minimal engagement with the content of the disinformation narratives. Third, we suggest that these dynamics resonate with recent academic research on 'trolling' and 'derailing' (the latter term used in German language publications). We conclude that journalistic social media outlets should concretize coverage about disinformation narratives more in order to set limits to emotional reactions.

## **Dorte Jagetic Andersen, University of Southern Denmark**

### *Opaque Europe – moving towards alternative understandings of diversity, agency and participation*

In our paper we take up one of B-SHAPES' most significant findings; how Europe is not very explicitly present in our interlocutors' narratives. We come across what could be called pragmatic Europeanism where the privileges of European integration are taken for granted, whereas its normative foundation is openly rejected. Extensive interaction cross borders without reference to Europe also points towards banal Europeanism. However, instead of speaking into these conceptualisations, we problematize the absence of Europe by way of Glissant's notion of opacity. From the perspective of our interlocutors, opacity is understood as a strategy to retain their unique modes of being by recoiling from full transparency or translation into specific vocabularies. As a methodological tenet, opacity entails rejection of urges to erase difference through efforts to homogenize, translate and reduce, thereby honoring the right of our interlocutors to decide how to be seen and when to remain unseen. We thereby open towards an understanding of everyday navigation of bordering in the shadows of European integration. This adjustment of the researcher's instinct to bluntly 'shed light' is useful when assessing especially the more politically charged discourses, historical events, and personal experiences narrated by our interlocutors.

## **Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola, University of Oulu, Finland**

### *Intergenerational border as a method for analyzing border landscape as heritage*

Border landscapes are ecological, political and cultural spaces and palimpsests where people belonging to different generations dwell and share their experiences and perceptions of borders. Regardless of increasing interest in people's experiences and narratives of borders, the question of generations and borders have been left aside. This presentation will examine place-based border narratives and the experiences of young and senior citizens through an intergenerational lens. Specifically, it will examine what and in what ways border narratives can be regarded as intergenerational. The border narratives through which intergenerational dimensions are illustrated and scrutinized are based on the material collected during borderwalk group discussions in four different European Union borderlands. The presentation specifically focuses on place-based border narratives of places and sites that are important for young and senior citizens. The presentation offers a novel conceptualization of an intergenerational border and provides new understanding of European borderlands from the perspective of different generations.

Prokkola, Eeva-Kaisa, Andersen, Dorte, Jakola-Ylilauri, Fredriika, Nilson Tomas & sara Svensson

## **Ekaterina Mikhailova, UiT The Arctic University of Norway**

### *Remembering and Forgetting at the Skolt Sámi Museum: Between Lieux de Mémoire and Lieux d'Oubli*

The Skolt Sámi Museum in Neiden is the only museum in Norway that preserves the heritage of Skolt Sámi, indigenous minority spanning borders of Norway, Finland and Russia. This museum stands out as a heritage centre situated on the Skolt Sámi land and run by Skolt Sámi. The museum is highly border-aware: it is right next to the Norwegian-Finnish border and its main exhibition includes numerous maps of shifting borderlines. This is not surprising. In the course of the last 200 years, Skolt Sámi livelihoods have been repeatedly disrupted by imposed and shifting borders resulting in restricted or lost access to Skolt ancestral lands, fishing grounds, and pastures.

Drawing on the concept of lieu de mémoire, realms of memory, developed by Pierre Nora and its opposite, lieu d'oubli, sites of oblivion, developed by Guy Beiner, this study examines how collective memory, including memory of difficult past, social remembering and social forgetting manifest themselves in the Skolt Sámi Museum.

\*This abstract is for "Borders and Museums" panel.

**Elisabeth Donat, University of Continuing Education Krems, Austria**

*The Boundaries of Belonging: Openness, Closure, and Non-Belonging in 12 European regions*

Belonging to a political community influences people's opportunities and motivations for engaging in a political system. This contribution investigates preferences for different strategies of regional engagement in the EU from the perspective of three different types of belonging of citizens to a political community. While multiple belonging implies a European frame of reference, narrow belonging sets one's own region and nation-state at the forefront. A third type of "unaffiliated" dedicates low attention to all these communities. Using a population survey (n=8,700) in 12 European regions, I examine the consequences of belonging in terms of openness or closure at the regional level. The analysis demonstrates that all perceptions of belonging are more or less associated with strategies of transregional cooperation and strategies of delineation at the same time. Inhabitants of border regions slightly more often dispose of multiple belongings and preferences for a European frame of reference. In addition, a utilitarian or pragmatic approach towards regional engagement in the EU prevails. Nevertheless, the focus of the different types varies concerning openness or closure. This fragile relationship of openness and awareness for interconnectedness in Europe can easily wane if regional competitiveness is pushed as the one and only goal for regional development.

**Elżbieta Opiłowska, University of Wrocław**

*The Power of Narratives? De-/Reborderings Europe seen from borderlands*

This paper discusses how the narrative approach can be used to analyse borders and bordering processes in Europe, and how border narratives shape our perception of Europe and 'the other'. These narratives function as a powerful tool for creating meaning and can influence or even manipulate people's attitudes towards neighbours, migrants, political parties, and their sense of place. We argue that the history of the European idea revolves around the issue of its borders, namely where Europe begins and ends, who belongs to the European community and what constitutes European identity and heritage. Post-WWII European integration was driven by the belief that the idea of Europe is inherently transgressive, and advances in EU integration were celebrated as a way of overcoming European divisions. This viewpoint was echoed in many influential studies on the idea of Europe, in which Europe's borders existed only to be transgressed on the long march towards universality and borderless, equal inclusion. This paper revisits this thesis to discuss the impact of complex de/reborderings on the transgressive vision of Europe, including the securitisation of borders, the closure of borders during the pandemic, and the impediments to cross-border commuting caused by border controls. Adopting a borderlands perspective, it focuses on studying border narratives in which the various shapes of Europe(s) emerge, are negotiated and contested. (Joint paper with Łukasz Moll)

**Estelle Evrard, University of Luxembourg**

*From integration to inequality: place attachment in a functionally specialised cross-border region*

With the highest number of cross-border commuters in the EU and a long tradition of institutionalised cooperation, the Greater Region is often portrayed as a model of European cross-border integration. As Luxembourg's metropolitan economy increasingly extends beyond its borders, research starts considering the implications of the functional specialisation of space where economic activities concentrate in Luxembourg and neighbouring regions' economy is mostly residential. Using the concept of borderscape and findings from 60 walking interviews conducted in the France - Luxembourg cross-border area of Alzette-Belval, this paper explores how living in an integrated yet increasingly unequal region shapes residents' place attachment and their commitment to the wider region. The analysis shows that while the border serves as a resource for value creation, it simultaneously deepens territorial and social inequalities. EU-associated rights and opportunities strengthen residents' functional attachment to both place and region, yet emotional attachment varies depending on personal circumstances and individuals' ability to benefit from European rights and metropolitan opportunities. The paper concludes by identifying directions for future research on how everyday experiences of inequality and mobility influence place attachment in cross-border contexts. The presentation draws on data collected in 2021–2022 within the research–art project REMIX PLACE (EcoC Esch2022).

## **Evy Romeijn, Radboud University Nijmegen**

### *Border Controls, Cross border Mobility and Border Perceptions*

Border Controls, Cross border Mobility and Border Perceptions

Evy Romeijn and Martin van der Velde, Radboud University, Nijmegen

This presentation examines the implications of the reintroduction and intensification of physical border controls between the Netherlands and Germany in the Nijmegen–Kleve region. Since the implementation of the Schengen Agreement in 1995, residents of this border area have experienced largely unrestricted and passport-free mobility, rendering the border nearly invisible in everyday life. The recent partial reinstatement of border checks represents a significant policy shift, primarily intended to regulate the movement of undocumented migrants, yet also indicative of broader societal anxieties concerning a perceived erosion of control within an increasingly integrated European Union.

The contribution addresses two central questions: first, how these renewed border practices have shaped local perceptions of cross-border integration; and second, to what extent they have affected everyday mobility—one of the principal objectives of the Schengen framework.

Preliminary findings suggest that the consequences till now remain limited, both in terms of public perceptions and actual cross-border movements. However, the renewed visibility of the border has become symbolically significant, coinciding with a growing sense of unease regarding the cohesion and future trajectory of European integration.

## **Fredrika Jakola-Ylilauri, University of Oulu, Finland**

### *Understanding feelings of belonging in border landscapes through entanglements of place-based public and personal narratives*

Although it is widely recognized that feelings of belonging are inseparable from the social dynamics such as trust relations, togetherness and solidarity, the feeling of belonging in a landscape is often approached from an individual perspective. However, when studying people's belonging and attachment to border or other political landscapes, it is crucial to understand the interconnectedness of personal experiences and wider social and cultural understandings.

Drawing from the 'borderwalk' interview material collected in the Bulgarian-Greek, Danish-German, Swedish-Danish, and Swedish-Finnish borderlands, this paper offers a novel analysis of how feelings of belonging in border landscapes are expressed and made sense by entangling public and personal narratives in and about places. Particular attention is paid

to the emotional, spatial, and temporal dimensions of these stories and how they reflect belonging—or non-belonging. The study contributes to border and landscape studies by deepening understanding of how border landscapes are narrativized, and offers practical insights for planners and practitioners working with transnational landscapes as heritage and conservation sites.

Jakola-Ylilauri, F., Jagetic Andersen, D., Prokkola, E-K., Nilson, T., Svensson, S., Miraka, O., Nedelcheva, P. & D. Karaneshev

## **Henri Haase, University of Southern Denmark (SDU), Denmark**

### *The potential of corporate museums in processes of debordering. A qualitative analysis in the German-Danish borderland*

This project focuses on corporate museums as a form of corporate citizenship in border regions. The study explores how corporate representatives view the German-Danish border, and potential debordering processes, through a cultural heritage lens. Corporate museums can contribute to maintain collective citizen memory (Lueg 2024), enrich regional identity and bring cultural, ancestral and institutional value (Balmer, 2013) to a region. In the German-Danish rural and remote border region, corporate museums are rare, but recently there is a trend to establishing more museums. Within the scope of a HORIZON 2020 research and innovation project, we explore debordering narratives of corporate cultural heritage as brought forward by local CEOs and stakeholders. Based on ethnographic field research in “communities of practice”, we collect “small stories” (Bamberg) and narratives of what corporate heritage and corporate museums can contribute to debordering processes. This project expects to find, that corporate museums are constructed, by owners, corporate representatives and stakeholders, as a potential asset for the region, as a means of expressing and maintaining cross-border identities, and as a vehicle to drawing Danish and German regional heritage closer together. The study contributes to heritage communication research, to organization studies and to border studies by showcasing how the meaning of corporate museums is constructed in a border region.

## **Hynek Böhm, Technical University of Liberec, University of Opole**

### *Cross-border Cooperation and Euroscepticism in Peripheral Regions: Paradox of Integration at the Czech–Polish–German Border*

Despite significant financial and institutional support from European programs such as Interreg, many peripheral border regions in Central Europe remain marked by a strong sense of marginality and rising Euroscepticism. This paper explores whether and to what extent cross-border cooperation contributes to mitigating the structural and perceptual disadvantages of peripheral regions, or whether its effects are limited to administrative and infrastructural dimensions without transforming local narratives of belonging and trust in the European project. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative research conducted in the Czech–Polish–German borderlands under the B-Shapes and Impact of Post-war Population Transfers on the Czech-Polish Cross-Border Cooperation, the contribution analyses the apparent paradox between intensive Europeanization through cross-border projects and the simultaneous success of Eurosceptic political parties in recent elections. The study aims to reveal how local experiences of integration, identity, and perceived exclusion shape attitudes toward Europe and how these attitudes, in turn, reflect broader tensions within contemporary European integration.

## **Ingrid Kofler, Free University of Bozen-Bolzano**

### *Alpine Borderscapes at the Italy–Austria and South Tyrol–Trentino Borders*

This paper examines how Alpine border regions negotiate everyday coexistence across two sites: the Italy–Austria interface around Innichen/San Candido–Sillian, and the bi-provincial border within Italy between South Tyrol (Bolzano) and Trentino in the Nonsberg valley. Framed by borderscapes and bordering practices, we read borders as lived configurations produced through routines, infrastructures and institutions rather than fixed lines. Using field workshops, counter/experience mapping and participatory scenario work, we trace how mobility, schooling and core services are organised where administrative lines intersect with multilingual life.

In Innichen/Sillian, participants preferred a “European Alpine Region” pathway that treats the border landscape as a shared resource and translates it into practical arrangements—integrated ticketing, bilingual service touchpoints, and a common border place for civic and cultural programming. In Nonsberg, a contested school reorganisation was reframed through locally developed scenarios and guidelines, turning polarisation into implementable options for a small district spanning two provinces.

Crucially, South Tyrol is itself a recognised minority region; here the salient linguistic boundary does not align with the state border to Austria but becomes most visible at the provincial border with Trentino. Across both cases, identity and language emerge less as fixed markers than as everyday practices shaped by infrastructures and memories of control. The paper shows how cross-border governance can support lived multilingualism and service continuity under temporary border restrictions, and how border landscapes can be managed as spaces of shared belonging where people move, learn and receive care together.

### **Ioan Suhov, Dublin City University, Ireland**

#### *Mediatizing the Romanian Minority in Ukraine: Narratives, Propaganda, and Borderland Identities during the 2022 Russian War on Ukraine*

This presentation examines how Romanian media have represented the Romanian minority in Ukraine in the context of Russia’s full-scale invasion of 2022. Drawing on an original text-as-data analysis of over 50,000 articles published between November 2021 and December 2024 across 14 Romanian mainstream online media outlets, the study explores how narratives about this borderland community have evolved, circulated, or gradually faded during wartime.

The findings, part of ongoing doctoral research, highlight shifting framings of identity, victimhood, and belonging - revealing tensions between solidarity with Ukraine and the instrumentalisation of minority issues within domestic and foreign propaganda. Russian disinformation has recurrently exploited historical grievances and linguistic policies affecting Romanian speakers in Ukraine to undermine European unity and amplify scepticism toward Western institutions.

By situating these narratives within broader debates on borders, European identity, and (post)colonial discourses, the study contributes to understanding how media discourses shape perceptions of Europe’s so-called “eastern frontier”. It concludes with recommendations for strengthening media literacy and cross-border communication as tools to counter divisive narratives and reduce the impact of Russian propaganda in the region.

### **Isabella Traeger, Politecnico di Milano, Italy**

#### *Transboundary Maritime Spatial Planning as a borderscaping practice: cooperation, integration and power asymmetries in the Northern Adriatic context*

Taking as case study the Northern Adriatic Sea (Italy - Slovenia – Croatia), the article proposes to frame Transboundary Maritime Spatial Planning (TMSP) as a borderscaping practice. This enables to shed light on how – far from being marginal – maritime bordering and planning processes have played a non-indifferent role as terrain of both cross-border cooperation, integration and dispute within EUro-Balkan relations and broader EU (potential) integration trajectories.

This framing enables to propose a more politicized understanding and questioning of how TMSP participates in the (re)production of the sea-/border- scape across multiple scales. At the transnational level, this involves critically

unpacking how TMSP intersects with wider transnational geopolitical processes, revealing underpinning power asymmetries that reverberate across conflictual historical trajectories. In particular, it examines how TMSP projects have sought to develop 'commonly-agreed' approaches and methodologies for implementing concepts such as 'Blue Growth' and 'Ecosystem-Based Approach', and how these participate in the wider 'salvation/stabilization' narrative of the Mediterranean as a fragile and unifying common heritage requiring concerted stewardship. At the local level, the article frames TMSP as a tool of socio-spatial in/exclusion, interrogating its capacity to effectively represent and empower local institutions and communities, whether through participatory processes or through data collection and representation.

### **Iuliia Eremenko, University of Kassel, Germany**

#### *Borders, Heritage, and Urban Planning: Görlitz and Zgorzelec in Transformation*

This research examines the transformation of Görlitz, a German city situated on the Lusatian Neisse River, whose historic fabric was profoundly influenced by the shifting borders following the Second World War. When the new border divided the city, its eastern part became Zgorzelec, incorporated into Polish territory. The study shows how this geopolitical division altered the urban landscape, reshaping urban planning in two historically intertwined cities.

While bridges over the river still physically connect the two sides, the separation has produced visible differences in infrastructure, architectural development, and urban identity.

The research also considers various interventions and cross-border initiatives that act as cultural bridges between Görlitz and Zgorzelec. Joint cultural projects, EU-supported urban programs, and symbolic acts of cooperation underscore the cities' ongoing efforts to reestablish connections, while simultaneously fostering distinct identities. Ultimately, the case of Görlitz and Zgorzelec demonstrates how shifting borders not only redraw political maps but also transform the images, meanings, and functions of urban spaces.

### **Jakub Grochowski, University of Opole**

#### *Phantom borders as a landscape for current silesian minority*

Throughout history, Silesia has been a region under the rule of various states, with its borders frequently shifting—often without consideration for the indigenous population. Traces of these territorial changes are preserved in so-called phantom borders, which become visible in the results of national censuses. Despite differing methodologies employed across censuses, the eastern boundary of the Silesian region remains particularly discernible.

The aim of this presentation is to conduct a comparative analysis of the population census results from 2002 to 2021 in the context of the distribution of the Silesian minority, and to identify the differences arising from the methodologies applied in each census. The findings will be compared with the current administrative division of Poland in order to highlight the challenges faced by the Silesian minority that affect the articulation of its needs, as well as to expose institutional barriers to the development of Silesian identity.

### **Jerome Jakob, Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research, Luxembourg**

#### *The border as a semiotic resource for shaping spatial imaginaries. The case of Frankfurt (Oder) and Ślubice*

Co-authors: Jerome Jakob (Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research), Christophe Sohn (Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research)

The perception and experience of places and spaces is shaped by spatial imaginaries, understood here as performative discourses. In European integrated borderlands, spatial imaginaries shaped by cross-border regionalism are increasingly challenged by processes of rebordering and their related counter-narratives. In this context, this paper examines how border-related signs and practices are used to shape spatial imaginaries in the German-Polish twin cities of Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice. More specifically, we investigate the ways rebordering dynamics change the production, use, and interpretation of border-related semiotic resources for cross-border place-making. With over 35 years of cross-border cooperation (CBC), Frankfurt (Oder)-Słubice provides a valuable opportunity to trace the changing meaning of the border in CBC, the evolution of strategies and the interdependent relationship between local and supranational planning visions.

The analysis employs a multimodal critical discourse approach, incorporating documents, visuals, interviews and on-site observations. Hereby following a two-step approach: first, examining how semiotic resources are mobilized, and second, analyzing how stakeholders use these resources to achieve their goals, such as legitimizing spatial imaginaries of a coherent cross-border region. The study also contributes to debates on cross-border place-making, spatial planning, and the process of European integration.

### **Joachim and Nicole Umlauf, Umlauf-Colin, Goethe-Institut, Université Aix-Marseille**

*This two contributions interconnect case studies of migration and repression during the Cold War. By juxtaposing the commodification of the forced emigration of Romania's German minority with the deadly escape attempts across the Danube, both presentations address the question of how this largely unexamined European cultural heritage might be approached in a more inclusive way.*

#### **Nicole Colin**

##### ***Sold Homeland – The Suppressed History of Romanian-German Emigrants***

This contribution examines a silenced chapter of European history that: the systematic “sale” of Romanian-Germans between 1969 and 1989. During this period, more than 200,000 members of this minority were allowed to emigrate to the Federal Republic of Germany: without treaties, parliamentary oversight. This state-organized human trafficking constituted one of the largest such practices in the 20th century, leaving deep social, cultural, and psychological scars. The contribution interprets this forgotten chapter as a paradoxical border narrative between two states that do not even share a common frontier.

#### **Joachim Umlauf**

##### ***The Memory of Crossings – The Danube as a Border of Hope, Death, and Erasure (2)***

This presentation examines the memory of the Danube River as a contested border space – one that symbolized both hope and death for Romanians seeking to escape the communist regime before 1989. Thousands risked their lives in dangerous crossings into Yugoslavia, facing drowning, gunfire, or imprisonment. Yet despite the scale of these tragedies, this history remains strikingly absent from Romania's public memory. Neither monuments nor school curricula nor a literary canon exist to honor these acts of resistance or mourn the lives lost.

### **Joanna Kurowska-Pysz, WSB University, KREATUS Ltd.**

##### ***Inclusive borderland heritage management – bridging people, building future***

Inclusive management of borderland heritage is a vital tool for connecting communities and fostering a genuine sense of unity and togetherness. By transforming shared heritage into a foundation for common futures, cross-border cooperation can effectively reduce historical tensions and promote regional stability. The study explores this issue through selected, distinct European case studies, as well as insights from three European borderlands: i) the Danish-Swedish border in the Øresund region, where integrated cultural initiatives and a shared identity are actively encouraged; ii) the Finnish-Swedish border along the Tornio River, which evidences a deeply intertwined linguistic and cultural symbiosis, exemplified by joint heritage institutions; iii) the Polish-Lithuanian borderland, where collaborative projects aim to preserve a

complex, shared historical legacy to enhance mutual understanding. Drawing on the results of case studies and workshops conducted in these three locations, the study presents a set of general conclusions and recommendations for those managing borderland heritage. These address best practices for community engagement, challenges in harmonising different national conservation policies, and innovative strategies for using heritage as a catalyst for dialogue and shared identity, contributing to a more cohesive Europe.

## **Johanna Mitterhofer, Eurac Research, Italy**

### *Everyday borderlands: Investigating views of the border from a national minority perspective*

How do young people from national minorities living in borderlands perceive of the border, and what influence does this have on their identities, everyday lives, and practices? These are the key questions that underpin the research in this chapter, which focuses on five European borderland contexts: in Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, and Slovakia.

Our empirical data first draws on an analysis of newspaper articles from national minority media across the case study regions to investigate border narratives across the case study settings. This allows us to identify how borders are discursively constructed, and the main narratives that are perpetuated in national minority media (Scott 2012). In the second phase of the research, we conducted zine-making creative arts research activities, and in-depth interviews, with young people aged 18-31 in each study region.

Through the analysis we discuss contrasts in the border narratives collected, and differing opinions towards the wider European project, at both the macro and micro-levels of inference studied. Conceptually, we adopt a bottom-up approach to the study of borders and explore the potential of young people to act as agents of change to construct their own counter narratives, and interpretations for the future of Europe.

## **Julita Komosa, The Institute for the History of Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences**

### *The Idea of the Canonical Territory of the Russian Orthodox Church as an Example of a Postcolonial Dependency*

The concept of the “canonical territory” in the teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) refers to the area over which a given church community claims exclusive spiritual jurisdiction. In practice, this means that the ROC regards certain territories as belonging to it in a religious and organizational sense, regardless of political or national changes.

During her presentation, the speaker will discuss the origins of the concept of the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church and its theological significance. She will then, using the specific example of Ukraine, illustrate the geopolitical and postcolonial dimensions of this idea.

Although the idea of canonical territory originates in ecclesiastical law, today it functions primarily as a mechanism of political control and symbolic domination. In the context of Ukraine, it reveals postcolonial dynamics in which religion becomes an instrument in the struggle for identity, independence, and cultural sovereignty.

## **Justyna Arendarska, University of Wrocław, Poland**

## *Polish Political Discourses on the Three Seas Initiative: Competing Narratives of Europe in Times of Uncertainty*

This paper examines how Polish political actors employ the Three Seas Initiative (TSI) as a narrative framework for positioning Poland and Central and Eastern Europe within the European project. The TSI, launched in 2016 to enhance infrastructure, energy, and digital connectivity between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas, has been framed in Poland not only as a pragmatic regional project but also as a symbolic re-imagining of Europe's borders and hierarchies.

Drawing on discourse analysis of statements made by parliamentarians during the development of the TSI concept, this exploratory study investigates the diversity of narratives and political imaginaries surrounding the initiative. While the research is still in progress and it is too early to determine conclusive results, preliminary findings suggest that these discourses articulate distinct and sometimes competing visions of Poland's role in Europe and of the broader East-West divide. By situating these interpretations within the CFP's guiding questions, the paper contributes to debates on the symbolic construction of borders, competing models of European integration, and post-colonial narratives of Central and Eastern Europe's emancipation.

### **Kamil Bembnista, University of Wrocław, Poland**

#### *Debordering and rebordering in the cultural landscape of the Polish 'Recovered Territories' in the narratives of the third generation of residents.*

The subject of my presentation will be the narrative practices of reconstructing and deconstructing cultural borders present in the cultural landscape of the Polish "Recovered Territories" — territories annexed to Poland in 1945 as a result of the political decisions made at the Potsdam and Yalta conferences.

Nearly twenty years ago historian Robert Traba asked the question: "What is to be done with the sense of 'being at home' of the third generation of people born in the Western and Northern Lands, who are confronted with a non-Polish landscape in Gdańsk, Olsztyn, Wrocław? Reduce it all to the Mazovian-Warsaw image?" (Traba 2006: 17). This question remained unanswered for almost two decades — until representatives of that third generation of the inhabitants of the "Recovered Territories" spoke out publicly.

In my presentation, I will reflect on selected autobiographical threads found in publications by this generation, and explore how they engage in rereading, reformulating meanings, and redefining borderlines within the contemporary cultural landscape of these lands.

### **Karolina Radłowska, University of Białystok**

#### *The Category of Kresy (Polish Eastern Borderlands) and Its Museum Representations*

The concept of "Kresy" (Polish Eastern Borderlands) operates not as an objective geographical space but as a socio-cultural construct deeply rooted in Polish collective imagination and shaped by the state's politics of history. In museum representations, "Kresy" function both as a myth of a lost homeland and as a dynamic site for negotiating meanings—between local memory and national historical narratives.

This paper analyzes Kresy museums established in Poland between 2015 and 2023, during the Law and Justice party government. Focusing on narrative strategies and controversies shaped by this emotionally loaded category, it highlights postcolonial critiques and the tension between reproducing a vision of national homogeneity and acknowledging the region's multiethnic heritage. The study demonstrates how these museums both reinforce nostalgic national myths and open spaces for dialogue and reinterpretation, offering multivocal perspectives on Poland's borderland past.

By examining contemporary museum practices, the paper uncovers the ambivalent role of "Kresy" in today's historical imagination—showing how museum narratives can both cement exclusionary understandings of identity and foster new, pluralistic approaches to heritage. (Panel: Borderland and Museums )

### **Katalin Kovály-Kolozsvári, HUN-REN RCAES Geographical Institute, Hungary; Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian University, Ukraine**

#### *Transnational processes in the Ukrainian-Hungarian border region before and after the war*

Economic inequalities across border areas tend to foster dynamic cross-border interactions. Such dynamics can be observed in Transcarpathia, the westernmost region of Ukraine, where the ethnic Hungarian population residing in compact communities along the Hungarian border has, since the 1990s, engaged in various cross-border practices such as seasonal work, petty trade, smuggling, and long-term migration to Hungary. However, the geopolitical upheavals since 2014 have fundamentally transformed these strategies, as many families have purchased real estate in Hungary's northeastern periphery to establish a second home as a safeguard. Since 2022, tens of thousands of ethnic Hungarians have left Transcarpathia, most of whom resettled in Hungary as Hungarian citizens, taking advantage of Hungary's preferential renaturalization process.

This paper aims to analyze how the migration trends of ethnic Hungarians have changed in recent years and how war-induced cross-border practices have transformed the Ukrainian-Hungarian border region.

Based on mixed-methods field research we argue that second homes in Hungary, once used as stepping stones to the West until 2022, have become the main residences for many families, and cross-border living strategies, used to base in Transcarpathia, have now shifted to Hungary, causing significant changes on both sides of the border.

### **Katarzyna Jędrzejczyk-Kuliniak, University of Wrocław, Poland**

#### *Old and new fears: Migration Pact in Poland's post-2023 political landscape*

The paper examines the dynamics of anti-immigrant sentiment and public discourse in Poland two years after the pivotal parliamentary elections, and against the backdrop of the Migration and Asylum Pact. The shift in power introduced a new phase of political realignment, yet the issue of migration remains a potent, highly securitized element of public life. The paper investigates the persistence and evolution of migration-related "fears", delineating between 'old' cultural anxieties rooted in racial stereotypes, particularly those directed toward people of African descent, concerning identity, religion, and demography, and 'new' geopolitical anxieties stemming from the hybrid war on the Belarusian border and the potential implementation of EU relocation mechanisms. The paper analyses narratives disseminated by political parties, and nationalist movements to trace how these fears are strategically mobilized. The EU Migration Pact, despite Polish efforts to secure exemptions, serves as a crucial rhetorical tool for the nationalist opposition to generate anti-immigrant resentment. By framing the Pact as an existential threat to sovereignty, political actors successfully consolidate a deep-seated public desire to avoid "Western mistakes" effectively leveraging misperceptions and negative stereotypes of Africa and its inhabitants to designate non-European migrants as a political scapegoat and fuel political mobilization.

**Katarzyna Jendrzey, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany**

*Children's narratives: Knowledge and constructions of migration, European space, and their self-positioning in Poland, Europe, and the world*

Transnational families are a highly relevant social phenomenon. Nevertheless, the European region has been underrepresented in international research on transnational families and especially children living transnationally in Europe. The planned contribution focuses on two key frameworks: firstly, the region's uniqueness, for example regarding the EU's legal context and the geographical proximity between Poland and destination countries. Secondly, it highlights the younger generation as a minority group that has been under-represented in research on transnational migration to date.

The contribution will present initial findings from the German-Polish DFG project "TraNa", based on interviews conducted in Poland (the country of origin and return for many families) with children aged 11 to 14 whose parents work temporarily in other European countries, as well as with children who themselves lived abroad with their parents and now reside in Poland. The aim is, first, to reconstruct their narratives of their ideas, knowledge, and constructions of other (European) countries and places and to capture their interpretations of borders, uncertainties, and attitudes toward Europe and the world – including, second, their self-positioning in the national, European, and global space. The findings stem from mapping-based interviews and are evaluated according to the principles of grounded theory.

**Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, Brunel University of London**

*Euroscepticism in border regions: From elections to narratives and back*

This paper examines the extent and content of Euroscepticism in European border regions by combining quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Much existing research on Euroscepticism emphasises electoral performance and survey-based indicators, often at the national or regional level. However, European integration is intertwined with borders, which is why this paper focuses on Euroscepticism in border regions, where integration and disintegration are experienced most immediately. The analysis draws on voting results from the 2024 European elections to capture patterns of support for Eurosceptic parties at the regional level. However, electoral data alone cannot account for the meanings that citizens, local politicians and media actors attach to Europe. To address this shortcoming, this paper combines electoral data with local narratives drawn from coverage in regional newspapers, interviews with candidates and campaigners in the 2024 European elections, and focus groups with residents in the Franco-German, Swedish-Danish, Polish-German-Czech and Slovak-Hungarian border regions. The analysis shows that Euroscepticism is not only a matter of aggregate vote shares and generic Eurosceptic messaging, but also rooted in local narratives that present European integration through the perspective of local problems.

**Khrystyna Shelvakh, Opole University**

*Negotiating Local Identities in Crisis: Polish Minority Organizations in Ukraine*

The work analyzes group resilience in the context of the full-scale Russian invasion of 2022 through chosen active Polish minority organizations in Ukraine. Under extreme conditions, these communities faced not only the usual need for cultural

preservation but also a sense of solidarity, which led to groups' activation in humanitarian initiatives. Thus, by employing a case-study approach, the work aims to examine the ways in which these communities negotiate their sense of belonging between a distinct identity and support for Ukrainian nationhood.

Chosen Polish minority organizations are active social participants, having engaged in numerous local and transnational networks even before the crisis occurred. Later, these groups leveraged their networks in order to try to provide support to those in need. In this perspective, these groups' publicly available sources like media, NGO reports, and newsletters, can become a curious observation point into how such communities operate their minority identity, nationhood, and European transnationality. In discussing the general capacity of minorities to do so, the work contributes to broader academic discussions on identity negotiation practices and group resilience.

### **Laurie Trautman, Border Policy Research Institute, Western Washington University, USA**

#### *How 'crises' and emergency powers are re-shaping cross-border mobility and collaboration: The example of the Canada – United States borderlands*

In the first months of his presidency, Donald Trump declared nine national emergencies, enabling his administration to implement policies that bypass traditional reviews and approvals. Many of these emergency declarations are re-shaping cross-border relations and mobility. The impacts of these policies are particularly disruptive to the Canada – US relationship, with tariffs enacted in the name of border security. The trends currently playing out in the US build upon a similar policy approach during the Covid pandemic, in which European countries also sought to restrict their borders as an emergency response to an 'external' threat. The pandemic border restrictions – as well those imposed during Europe's immigration 'crises' - were a prescient warning that if left unchecked governments will continue to increase their capabilities to restrict borders in response to a growing diversity of 'threats.' While aimed at foreigners, the cross-border mobility of citizens and residents is severely disrupted, especially in borderland communities. This presentation builds upon the recent book, "When the World Closed its Doors: The COVID-19 Tragedy and the Future of Borders," to explore the progression and expansion of borders as a policy tool to address concerns that increasingly have little to do with borders themselves, yet impact borderlands disproportionately.

### **Liliana Tymchenko, European Humanities University, Vilnius, Lithuania**

#### *"Terminological Debordering: Rethinking Europe from the Epistemic Margins"*

Abstract (200 слов):

In the face of overlapping crises—war, populism, epistemic fragmentation—academic narratives about Europe reveal deep conceptual fatigue. Based on my work in critical legal studies and borderland epistemologies, this paper explores how dominant European discourses reproduce exclusions not only through content but through language itself. While decolonial frameworks offer tools for critique, their terminology—imported, rigid, and often untranslatable—frequently alienates scholars, especially in Eastern Europe. The term decolonization itself is often perceived as a Western export or moral accusation, deterring engagement and reinforcing epistemic asymmetries.

To address this, I propose a set of experimental terms rooted in borderland positionalities and post-Soviet scholarly experiences. Among them: epistemic disobedience fatigue—the exhaustion of constantly resisting dominant paradigms without viable alternatives; cognitive frontiering—the process by which scholars at the margins are tasked with translating

both imperial and counter-imperial discourses; and terminological capture—when liberatory concepts become institutional buzzwords, emptied of their transformative potential.

This paper argues for a terminological de-bordering: a conscious effort to create vocabularies that do not simply invert colonial binaries but open space for plural, situated knowledges. In doing so, we can reimagine Europe not as a bounded identity, but as a contested, evolving narrative responsive to its borderlanders.

**Loris Pagnani, Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research, Luxembourg**

*Common Ground? Founding Myths and the Imaginaries of Europeanization in Cross-Border Regions*

Co-authors: Kamil Bembnista, Loris Pagnani, Jerome Jakob

In this article, we explore the construction and maintenance of European spatial imaginaries and ask how the founding myths of cross-border cooperation (CBC) resonate with the communication strategies developed by its institutions. Which spatial imaginaries do cross-border actors draw on when constructing the process of Europeanization?

Hereby, we explore how founding myths are displayed and constructed in border regions to mobilize imaginaries of Europeanization. By linking border and memory studies, we broaden our understanding of European integration and its practical implementation.

Our analysis is based on a database, consisting of institutional documents from different founding periods, visuals, and interviews. This allows us to emphasize the significant impact of these periods on CBC in Europe. By comparing two case studies, we will demonstrate how moments of cooperation are employed in the reconstruction of spatial imaginaries: The Greater Region from the 1960s and Frankfurt (Oder)–Ślubiце from the 1990s.

Combining multimodal methodologies and social semiotics, we analyze how meaning, knowledge, and memory are constructed and transmitted through visuals and documents in cross-border cooperation.

Drawing on Pfoser's idea (2022) that narratives of Europeanization are constantly updated by short-term working memories, we conclude that CBC spatial imaginaries are both temporalized and rooted in long-term myths of cooperation.

**Małgorzata Bieńkowska, Faculty of Sociology, University of Białystok**

*Border/Migration Crisis on the Polish-Belarusian Frontier and Its Consequences for Local Minorities*

Since 2021, the Polish-Belarusian borderland has been the site of a migration crisis combining humanitarian, political, and security challenges. While public debate often focuses on the situation of migrants from the Middle East and Africa, the current crisis has deeply affected local minorities — Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Tatar — living in the region. Emergency measures such as restricted access to the border zone, militarization, and increased surveillance have heightened feelings of fear and exclusion while disrupting family and cultural ties across the border. These communities have faced growing stigmatization, greater scrutiny by security forces, and interruptions to cultural, educational, and civic activities, all of which have been exacerbated by the tense Poland–Belarus political context.

The crisis has altered traditional patterns of coexistence in the area, with fears of hybrid threats, xenophobia, and mistrust deepening social divisions. Humanitarian initiatives by minority organizations have often been obstructed or criminalized, limiting their ability to assist both migrants and the most vulnerable members of their own communities.

Since 2021, I have been conducting sociological research in this region on the resilience of local communities under crisis conditions. This work examines adaptive strategies, solidarity mechanisms, and efforts to preserve identity amid prolonged tension, stressing the need for balanced policies that ensure border security while protecting the rights and cohesion of all local minorities.

## **Marcin Dębicki, University of Wrocław, Poland**

### *Czech media narratives on Poland. A mid-2025 perspective based on selected examples*

Over a past few years, we have been observing a change as regards the scale of Czech media's interest in Poland and the way it is reported, described and advertised as a destination. The change is both quantitative (the number of articles devoted to this scale and time intervals in which they appear) and qualitative (the scale of topics, the atmosphere around the state and its inhabitants). Apart from showing possible sources of this change, we would like to point at particular narratives – including main thematic nodes (with e.g. certain figures from the past) as a significant point of reference for the Czech audience and general atmosphere of the coverage – that tend to be employed. The paper would be based on a couple of press articles that came out in Czechia in mid-2025.

Co-author of the paper: prof. Jiří Trávníček (Czech Academy of Sciences, Masaryk University)

## **Marco Simonetti, Independent Researcher/Memorial Italia, Italy**

### *Redefining Borders through Memory: The Institutionalization of the Great Patriotic War in the "Donetsk People's Republic" (2014-2022)*

Eastern Europe is marked by intense geopolitical tensions, fueled by the conflict in Ukraine that began in 2014. In this context, the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" — a pro-Russian separatist entity supported by Moscow — has promoted the systematic institutionalization of the memory of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), transforming it into the founding myth of its state project. This study examines how, between 2014 and 2022, occupation authorities instrumentalized the myth of the War to stretch Russia's cognitive boundaries, distance Ukraine from the "European family of nations," and thereby draw it closer to the so-called "Russian world." Drawing on primary sources — laws, decrees, and articles — the research reconstructs this institutionalization process and shows how War memory became a political instrument for both cognitive-identity reconfiguration and geopolitical consolidation.

## **Marike and Veronika Flömer and Warzycha, Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner, Germany**

### *Fractured Narratives and Persistent Memories: Border Memory in Everyday Life at Internal European Borders*

From our perspective, border memory (Sommer/Warzycha 2025) can be conceptualised as a socio-spatial dispositif that among others allows us to understand how biographic narratives relate to material traces in borderlands. Understanding remembering and forgetting as a non-linear composition of social reality challenges a temporally linear conceptualization of border landscapes as heritage. Drawing on this approach and based on two case studies of the border towns and villages at the Polish-German border, and the Danish-German border, we aim to answer how biographical memories refer to (counter-)narratives of border disruptions and examine how they appear across generations and borders, challenging dominant memory frames in the regions. In our contribution, we discuss two main aspects: (1) what role socio-spatial memory plays for the everyday lives of inhabitants, using property and heritage as exemplary points of conflicts in border memory, and (2) how, in our approach, contextualizing heritage through a critical perspective of border memory reveals the fractures within, and the challenges to, a shared European narrative about borders. Our data corpus consists of 35 biographical-narrative interviews with inhabitants, mixed with data of mental mapping and photo-elicitation. Our analysis is based on a triangulation of grounded theory and multimodal analysis.

## **Martin Klatt, University of Southern Denmark**

### *Citizen Science in B-SHAPES: bottom-up involvement of borderlanders*

by Thomas Kaarsted, Mette Fentz Haastrup, Anne Kathrine Overgaard, Martin Klatt, Tomas Nilson, and Marcus Nicolson, elaborates on the B-SHAPES project's endeavor to use Citizen Science as a core approach in the project, leveraging the active involvement of citizens to advance both scientific discovery and societal engagement. The chapter seeks to evaluate the implementation of citizen science elements in B-SHAPES' research within the project's work packages on national minorities and border landscapes as heritage to unpack the impact of using this approach on the findings of each work package. It thus explores how the B-SHAPES project draws on Golumbic et al.'s model of three fundamental elements of inclusion, contribution and reciprocity (Golumbic et al., 2017), complemented by theoretical frameworks on levels of participation. It reports on the implementation of CS in ZINE-making workshops and in border landscape walks, where the researchers planned and developed the stages of citizens' participation. This led to a modified model used to identify problems, research questions, study designs, collect & process data, analyze & interpretations, and finally dissemination & policy.

Golumbic, Y.N., D. Orr, A. Baram-Tsabari, and B. Fishbain. 2017. 'Between Vision and Reality: A Study of Scientists' Views on Citizen Science.' Sect. 6. Citizen Science: Theory and Practice 2 (1).

## **Natalia Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak, Institute of Sociology, University of Wrocław**

### *The border dividing towns in museum narratives – based on towns divided by the Polish-German and Polish-Czech borders*

Paper proposed by Julita Makaro and Natalia Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak (University of Wrocław)

When reflecting on cities divided by national borders, attention is usually paid to the policies and practices of their inhabitants and less often to the programmes of cultural institutions, which combine political and social elements. Therefore, we would like to address the subject of the content of museums located in Zgorzelec and Görlitz, as well as in Cieszyn and Český Těšín. We will pay particular attention to whether or not they consider the topic of the administrative border, its demarcation, and the consequences of this fact. We'll also consider the presence or absence of the neighbour from across the river in the museum narrative. The power of a museum lies in its ability to shape narratives and persuasive messages. In the context of divided towns, museums can play a key role in promoting an integrative model, advocating the idea of a single cross-border town, or emphasising the independence and distinctiveness of its two parts (emphasising the national rather than the local or transnational perspective). In both cases, the establishment of the Polish state border was an action in which Poland had limited agency, the border separated neighbours embroiled in conflict, and the consequences of these political decisions remain a dissonant heritage. (Panel: "Borders and Museums")

## **Noga Raved, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel**

*Comparative Insights from Israeli Museums Created by Displaced Communities and Immigrants - Panel title: "Borders and Museums"*

This paper explores the intersection of borders, memory, and identity through museums and collection houses established by displaced communities in Israel. It focuses on the Yamit Heritage Center, commemorating families evacuated from the Sinai Peninsula after the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, and the Gush Katif and Northern Samaria Heritage Center, preserving the narratives of communities uprooted during the 2005 Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip. Founded by former residents, these institutions illustrate how shifting borders generate forms of musealization that commemorate loss while negotiating belonging.

Far from neutral spaces, these museums actively construct narratives of contested borders, displacement, and resilience. They transform traumatic experiences into heritage, embedding local memory within national discourse. At the same time, they expose tensions between inclusion and exclusion: while amplifying marginalized voices, they reproduce particular political perspectives on disputed territories.

By situating these Israeli cases within broader debates on borderland museums, the paper shows how such institutions become sites of ongoing boundary-making, where histories of displacement are translated into cultural claims. Ultimately, it argues that community-driven museological practices preserve difficult heritage and shape dialogues on identity and borders.

**Oksana Pochapska, Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University, Ukraine**

*Borderland Memories and Hybrid Identities: Narratives of Europe in Ukrainian-Polish Media Discourse during Wartime"*

This paper examines how the idea of Europe is constructed in Ukrainian-Polish borderland media narratives during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It focuses on the communicative role of border regions as spaces where geopolitical meanings and emotional perceptions of "Europeanness" are constantly negotiated. Through discourse analysis of regional and transnational media (2022–2024) and 25 semi-structured interviews with journalists, editors, and media consumers from Rzeszów and Lviv, the study explores how notions of solidarity, resilience, and belonging are articulated in borderland storytelling.

The research reveals that Europe is framed simultaneously as a moral community of shared responsibility and as an aspirational project marked by hierarchies between the "core" and the "periphery." The narratives often combine pragmatic expectations — linked to mobility, aid, and institutional cooperation — with symbolic meanings of protection, hope, and democratic renewal. Borderland journalists act as mediators, translating European values into local experience, turning everyday encounters into a form of cultural diplomacy.

The findings argue that in uncertain times, the borderland becomes a living archive of European identity — a site where memory, geography, and media discourse intersect, redefining what it means to "be European" in a time of war and transformation.

Keywords: borderlands, Europe, media discourse, hybrid identity, Ukraine, Poland, war narratives.

**Olga Dorokhina, St. King Tamar University, Georgia**

*Spatial Patterns of Euroscepticism and the Transformation of Attitudes towards Europe across Georgia's Border Regions*

The pro-European discourse in Georgia is marked by a deep geographical divide. While pro-European narratives dominate in the capital, the border regions demonstrate growing Euroscepticism. The spatial divide in the perception and support of the European project — understood as a political and normative reference point for Georgia — deepened after

the freezing of the EU accession process in 2024, with legal transformations introduced in 2024–2025 further narrowing the corridor of opportunities for EU programmes and civil society engagement. Understanding this divide requires explaining the socio-economic factors that have hindered the consolidation of a pro-European consensus in Georgia's border regions.

Drawing on the concepts of “forgotten places” (Rodriguez-Pose, 2020), everyday borderland (Cassidy et al., 2021) and contested Europeanization (Diez, 2023), the paper analyzes how spatial inequalities shape alternative visions of the European project. Applying methods such as analysis of survey data, direct observation of development projects (2022–2024) and discourse analysis, the study reveals the mechanism of formation of peripheral Euroscepticism. Georgia's border communities shape their own perception of Europe through the prism of economic deprivation generating social vulnerability and dependence, domination of pro-Russian narratives, and traditionalist values of conservative societies perceived as incompatible with the liberal European project.

The study shows how the unbridgeable gap between center and periphery has weakened the sustainability of Georgia's European project.

### **Olga Jerjomina, Witten-Herdecke University**

#### *When Do Linguistic Identities Become Politically Salient? Institutional Language Status and Borderland Contexts in Europe*

As the modern political landscape grows increasingly fractionalised, language remains a visible line of division, especially in border regions with significant minority populations. Such linguistic boundaries often shape how minorities perceive their position within European democracies. In some contexts, linguistic divisions remain muted, while in others, group membership becomes a source of inequality, shaping political opinions.

This paper examines when and under which conditions differences in official language status influence individual political attitudes. Two expectations guide the analysis. First, when one language is officially recognised while others are not, unequal status may heighten the salience of linguistic identity. Second, during periods of political activity, such as elections or language reforms, linguistic differences are likely to gain visibility and political relevance.

The study uses forty harmonised Eurobarometer waves (2004–2024) to test whether official recognition conditions the relationship between linguistic identity and attitudes toward institutions, democracy, and left-right placement. Eastern borderland cases of Latvia and Estonia, where the second-largest language lacks official status, are compared with multilingual Western states (Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland), which grant equal recognition to several languages. The analysis also examines border regions separately, assessing whether embedded territorial divisions amplify the political salience of language.

### **Peter Balogh, Eotvos Lorand University, Hungary**

#### *Borders create identities and differences (Paasi 2005) and even until recently, transborder Hungarian speakers largely identified themselves as Hungarians from their respective resident state (Veres 2015).*

The results of B-SHAPES from southern Slovakia partly confirm that this is still the case there, yet partly also nuances that picture. Additionally to being Hungarians from Slovakia, several informants have reported the borderland (i.e., both sides of it) to be their most important level of spatial identification – indeed, as their home(land). Other categories – such as Hungarian (more generally), Slovakian, European, Central European, and global – were also indicated but only as secondary or, in a few cases, not at all. These findings are important in several ways. On the one hand, decades-long efforts by Hungarian governments to ‘reunite the nation without changing borders’ (Pogonyi 2017) appeared to resonate with local informants to a limited degree. At the same time, the impacts of similarly-old initiatives by the EU to create a

common European identity could also be traced in the borderland only to a limited extent. The irony is of course that without the mentioned institutions, the regional cross-border identity would have had more difficulties to emerge.

### **Ruairidh Tarvet, The University of Edinburgh, Scotland**

#### *A Sign of the Times: a comparative analysis of recent changes to national symbols and anthems in present day Denmark and Slovakia*

National symbols are an essential component of national narratives. Flags telling mythological stories, coats of arms denoting royal lineages, folklore, religious symbols and colonial exploits and anthems composed in the style of National Romanticism elude to a sense that the nation is an everlasting, grand tale. Whilst these symbolic representations draw upon elements of history and myth, that is not to say that they cannot be changed. In 2025, during a spat with US President Donald Trump over the possession of Greenland, the Danish King changed the coat of arms in order to stress unity between Greenland and Denmark. Similarly, following controversial efforts by the Slovak Culture Ministry, a new version of the Slovak national anthem was premiered on 1 January 2025. Although the melody and lyrics remained unchanged, the new version included a traditional Slovak fujara, a cinematic orchestration and a slower tempo. These subtle yet politically-motivated changes highlight that national symbols, regardless of how ancient or beloved, can be amended to reframe the nation. This article explores how these changes came about and assess the reception of these changes in Denmark and Slovakia. To do so, this study combines survey data with sentiment analysis from online forums.

### **SAIDA LATMANI, Faculté des Sciences juridiques économiques et sociales , Université Abdelmalek Essâadi, Maroc**

#### *Dynamiques identitaires et sociales des migrants subsahariens en situation irrégulière dans les régions frontalières du Maroc*

Les régions frontalières du Maroc accueillent un nombre significatif de migrants subsahariens en situation irrégulière, dont les parcours et pratiques sociales sont influencés par des frontières physiques, symboliques et administratives. Cette étude examine la manière dont ces populations minoritaires organisent leur mobilité, leurs interactions et leurs stratégies d'adaptation dans un contexte de restrictions légales et de marginalisation socio-économique. Elle analyse également l'impact des frontières sur les relations avec les communautés locales et les institutions publiques, en mettant en évidence des formes de coopération, de cohabitation et de négociation quotidienne. À partir d'observations de terrain, de témoignages migrants et de l'analyse de discours institutionnels, cette contribution explore la construction de représentations sociales et identitaires dans un contexte de mobilité irrégulière. L'approche adoptée permet de comprendre les dynamiques spécifiques aux minorités migrantes dans les régions frontalières marocaines et offre une perspective originale sur la relation entre frontières, migration et identité, sans porter de jugement de valeur. Cette contribution vise à enrichir les débats scientifiques sur les minorités, les politiques migratoires et la diversité culturelle, tout en fournissant un exemple empirique pertinent pour les études comparatives sur les régions frontalières et les minorités en Europe et ailleurs.

### **Sandra Hagelin, University of Tartu**

#### *States speaking borders: entangled borders in governmental communication*

Borders are spoken into existence, yet how states justify and legitimize changes in border politics remain understudied. This paper sets out to contribute to the literature on how border discourses are crafted by arguing for the need to analytically separate various types of borders to better grasp how different borders are invoked and constructed. This helps to untangle layered and often overlapping border narratives, thereby rendering visible how conceptualizations of different types of borders contribute to understandings of borders more broadly. Furthermore, the analytical separation of border

types makes it possible to reveal the complexity and strategic use of borders in governmental communication. Practically the paper draws on research on governmental communication within a Nordic and Baltic context, looking at the discursive representation of national borders versus the external Schengen border. This research finds that different border types are discursively invoked to emphasize the significance of borders. While this pattern is most evident where borders physically overlap, the findings suggest it also applies when national borders do not overlap the external Schengen border.

**Sara Svensson, Halmstad University, Sweden**

*Cross-border polities? Party campaigning and collaboration in border regions*

A lack of a European polity and/or a political space is often lamented at a European level, for instance manifested in the criticism of European elections being second-order elections. This focus on the Europe-at-large-scale neglects processes whereby this is, possibly, emerging within smaller European transnational spaces such as cross-border regions. We know little, however, about the processes by which parties join forces or campaign across borders in border regions, in order to advance common political agendas. The article identifies difficulties in identifying which parties to collaborate with and suggests a typology of different courses of actions for politicians in borderlands. The typology consists of cross-border campaigning, learning and joint advocacy work. The chapter illustrates this with case studies from four European border regions.

Paper co-written with Pierrick Bruyas and Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt.

**Stefanie Gerstenberger, Dresden University of Technology, Germany**

*When Places Lose People: The Democratic Consequences of Demographic Decline*

Demographic decline and regional disparities are key challenges for the quality and resilience of democracies in Europe. Focusing on left-behind places, peripheralization and democratic quality this paper explores how local institutions in shrinking and ageing regions experience and respond to social, economic and political marginalization.

Using the German–Czech borderlands, an area which is characterized by population loss, industrial restructuring and limited political visibility, as its case, the study examines how demographic and spatial inequalities influence democracy, e.g. perceptions of governance, participation and trust in governance.

The paper draws on qualitative interviews conducted with local actors on both sides of the border during a project seminar. The findings suggest a multidimensional process of local democratic erosion. Shrinking communities face declining civic participation and limited institutional capacity. At the same time, however, they develop adaptive practices of cooperation and local resilience.

**Thomas Wegener Friis, University of Southern Denmark**

*Suveillance in the German-Danish Borderlands*

Ethnic minorities often find themselves at the intersection of national security concerns and state surveillance. Their mere existence can be perceived as a challenge to the territorial integrity and cultural cohesion of the host state, making them vulnerable to suspicion, repression, and intelligence scrutiny. This paper examines how such dynamics played out in the

Danish-German border region during the 1950s, a period marked by efforts to reconcile longstanding ethnic and territorial tensions. Drawing on historical sources and intelligence studies, the analysis explores how minority groups were framed as potential separatists or extremists, thereby justifying their monitoring by state security services. However, the paper also investigates how these tensions were de-escalated through diplomatic engagement, and legal recognition. The Danish-German case offers a valuable lens for understanding how threat perception change and the implication for surveillance. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader debates on the role of intelligence in democratic societies and the potential for reconciliation in ethnically diverse borderlands.

## **Tobias de Fønss Wung-Sung, Museum Sønderjylland**

### *From Division to Diversity: Narrative Strategies in the Borderland Museum*

How can we narrate conflicting and divisive pasts in the borderland museum? What steps can museums take that contribute to the mending of a difficult and contested border-region history? And what are some concrete experiences of working with the implementation of narrative strategies in the context of divisive heritage? This paper tackles such questions and considerations as they have materialized in the research and collection strategies of Museum Sønderjylland, the leading museum cluster covering the nationally ambiguous Danish-German border region.

The paper is based on an analysis and discussion of recent exhibition and collection initiatives that seek to communicate new narratives about the border region's past. For example, a large-scale project marking the centenary of the current Danish German border; and an initiative shedding light on diverse cultural meanings of German communities on the Danish side of the border at different times in the twentieth century. The paper positions such concrete experiences of the borderland museum within the wider intersectional field of contested heritage, arguing that complexities and ambivalences do not necessarily have to equal political or national positioning.

For Borders and Museums panel

## **Tomasz Komornicki, Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Polish Academy of Sciences, POLAND**

### *Cross-border mobility under external shocks: the experience of Poland's eastern border*

Over the past three decades, the external border of the European Union between Poland and its eastern neighbours — Russia, Belarus and Ukraine — has undergone profound functional transformations. These shifts, closely linked to geo-political developments, have directly influenced the intensity and structure of cross-border mobility. In recent years, this border region has been strongly affected by two major external shocks. The first was the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed strict mobility restrictions and disrupted previously dynamic flows related to labour, education and tourism. The second was the humanitarian crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in the large-scale opening of EU borders to Ukrainian refugees while simultaneously tightening entry restrictions for citizens and businesses from Russia and Belarus.

The presentation will analyse the effects of these crises on border traffic and three key sectors in Poland's eastern border regions: the labour market, education and tourism. It will also examine how these changes have significantly impacted borderland communities, affecting employment structures, demographic dynamics, access to services and everyday cross-border interactions. The analysis covers 2019–2023, highlighting how crisis-driven migration and evolving border regimes have reshaped the scale, direction and structure of cross-border flows.

## **Valentina Rodani, Politecnico di Milano, Italy**

## ***Exploring Alternative European Futures by Co-Design: The legacy of the “Borderless” Narratives of Nova Gorica-Gorizia ECoC 2025***

The conurbation of Nova Gorica (Slovenia) and Gorizia (Italy) was designated European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2025 with the bold vision of creating a cross-border European city – as remarked by the slogan “GO! Borderless”. This case offers a distinctive vantage point to observe how the prolonged state of entangled European crises is locally perceived and experienced. At the same time, it unveils how place-based narratives can reframe and reshape alternative futures for Europe. The contribution critically examines the conception, development and enactment of GO!2025 “Borderless” vision, by combining the analysis of official documents, plans and projects, with fieldwork, including 22 semi-structured interviews with institutional actors, experts, and cultural associations developed during 2024, and a co-design workshop held in June 2025 to explore the legacy of GO!2025 through alternative future European scenarios for the cross-border conurbation. The research offers a critical reflection grounded in Nova Gorica-Gorizia ECoC 2025 to highlight the potential of integrating the multi-dimensional analysis of narratives with design tools to inform the understanding of the situated perceptions and imaginations of the alternative futures in uncertain times for Europe.

Paper co-authored by Valentina Rodani and Isabella Traeger (Politecnico di Milano).

The article is part of the PRIN project "Italian borderscapes after 2020. Mapping, Unfolding, and re-framing border territories in response to the Covid-19 pandemic" funded by the EU - Next Generation EU - PRIN 2022 Call for proposals - D.D. No. 104, February 2, 2022 - M4 C2 Inv.1.1 Prot. No. 20225TN2R9 - CUP: D53D23010950006.

## **Vello Pettai, European Centre for Minority Issues, Germany**

### ***Narva as a minority-majority border city caught in geopolitical crisis***

This paper will profile Narva as a border city with a minority-majority population. It will showcase the evolution of local politics over the last 30 years, but also update the situation in particular since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the de facto closure of the Russian-Estonian border. There are clear shifts in minority identities, political attitudes and socio-economic conditions underway. A review of these developments will supplement knowledge on border regions in extreme transition. Narva has become a focus of change in northeast Estonia and the border area at large.

## **Weronika Koston, University of Opole**

### ***Between border and bridge: The role of minorities in cross-border paradiplomacy***

The paper will examine whether and how national and linguistic minorities in European border regions act as active participants in cross-border paradiplomacy. It will explore the extent to which minority communities contribute to regional internationalisation and serve as “bridges” fostering cultural dialogue, educational and economic exchange, and mutual understanding across borders. The study will focus on indicators of minority presence in paradiplomatic practices, such as the participation of minority organisations in cross-border projects, partnerships between cities and regions sharing a common identity, and joint cultural, linguistic, and economic initiatives. It will also consider how regional and local authorities use minority heritage and multilingualism to promote their territories internationally. The aim is to determine the extent to which minority communities co-shape the foreign policy of their regions and influence their position and image within the broader European context.