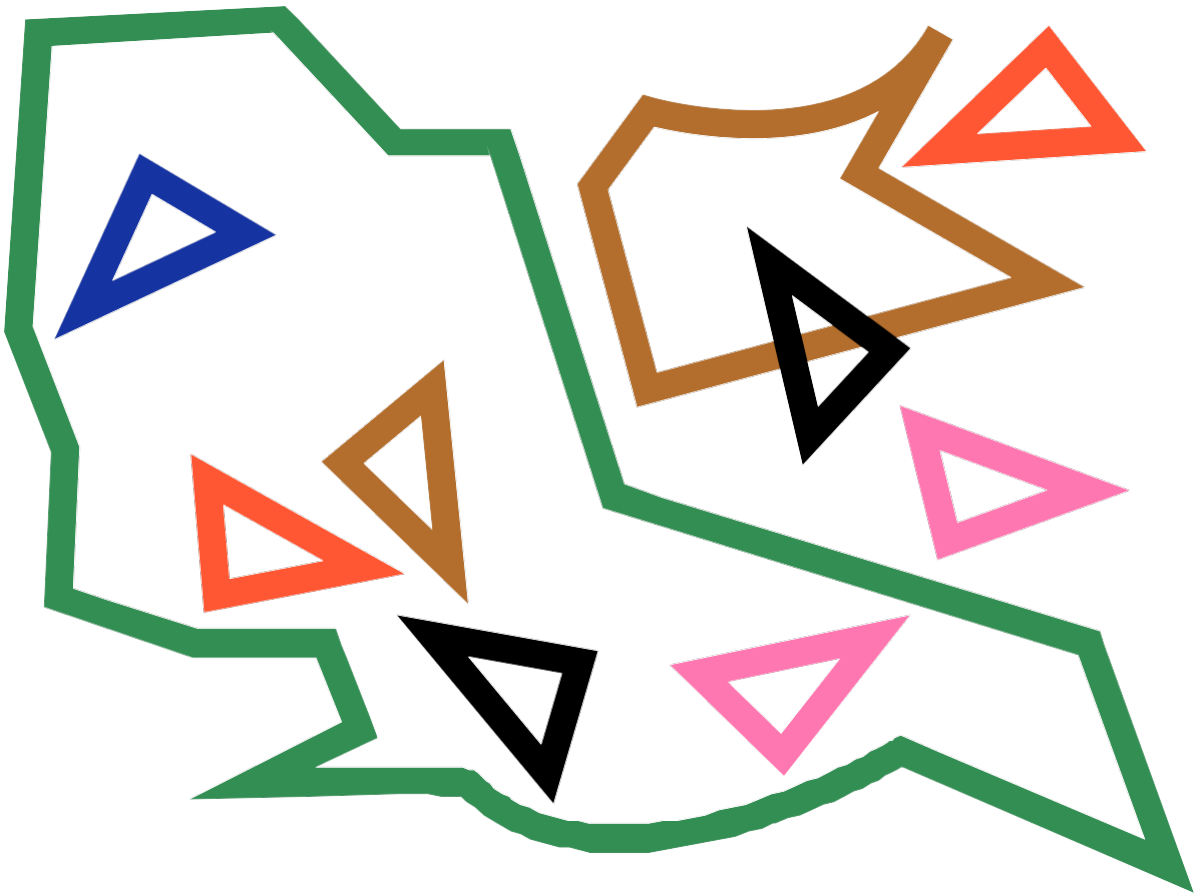
Policy Brief # 11

Border landscapes as people's heritage

B-SHAPES - Borders shaping perceptions of European Societies



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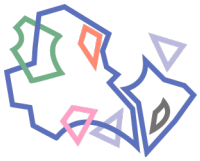
Context

European border regions are sites of shared and contested heritage. Heritage policies can offer responses to European identity building and self-awareness by including borders and border memories into these policies. Making shared and contradictory border heritage and border heritage narratives visible is crucial for better understanding European identity politics, and how borders shape people's perceptions of European societies.

European heritage making is often seen as an economic resource. Thus, funding schemes such as the European Interreg programme is offered to develop heritage as tourist attraction, but this means commodificating culture and heritage. Today's development and funding schemes often bypass local citizens and their perceptions even though the engagement of various stakeholder groups is crucial for promoting inclusiveness in heritage management as underlined in Faro Convention (Council of Europe 2005/199).

European border regions are sites that lean themselves well for the evaluation of implementation of heritage policy at the local and regional level. The evaluation of the heritage policy requires attention to practices, knowledge and values that local citizens connect with the landscape on different sites of a border. Within the context of the research carried out by the B-SHAPES (Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies) project, knowledge is offered of borders as people's heritage in different European border regions. It responds to the need to gain more knowledge about the incorporation of peoples perceptions and values of borders to regional, national and European heritage politics and policies.



Evidence, Analysis, and Results

The research is based on B-SHAPES research on border landscapes as heritage that investigated citizen perceptions and narratives of heritage in a local borderland context. The research offers knowledge of possible conflicting and bridging elements of borders from the perspective of people's heritage

The research on border landscape as heritage involved young and senior citizens in their everyday surroundings by conducting borderwalk focus groups together with local people. This allowed us to learn about places and sites that are important for borderland citizens and their perceptions of borders. The material was collected from four border regions: the Arctic Finnish-Swedish border region, the urbanized Swedish-Danish Öresund region, the rural Danish-German border region, and the southern Bulgarian borderland triangle with Greece and Türkiye. In total 42 focus groups were conducted with young and senior citizens in the four border regions, engaging 174 borderland citizens.

The border regions in question have their own specific contextual societal and geohistorical characteristics and also youth and senior borderlanders have shared particular collective border

memorisations. Although borders are not the same for all borderlanders, the findings point to analogies in the ways of perceiving and valuing borders as people's heritage.

Key findings:

Local perceptions of borders as heritage and the institutionalized border heritage are inextricably connected. Public narratives of the border and past border events are often an important part of the consciousness of people living in borderlands. This means that public heritage-making where specific events and figures are remembered in borderlands is of uttermost importance.

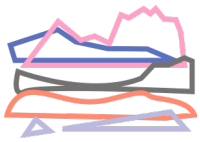
Young and senior citizens share an understanding of meaningful places and border heritage, but the place-based narratives of young and senior citizens also differ from each other. Youth narratives highlight a familiar relationship with the border and border crossing practices. The senior group narratives and memorisations were often tied to shared meeting places and past social gatherings.

The border heritage and narratives do not always acknowledge the diversity of voices that shape the border landscape today. Often official narratives in borderlands are tied up with national historiographies that do not emphasize or even recognize the lived cross-border dimensions that are part of people's lives in the borderlands. This also reduces the innovative potential of the narratives.

The role of Europe, Europeanness and the European Union is not strongly present in the memories and narratives of borderland citizens. Although maintaining free movement across the border was seen as of high importance in the northern European border regions, a European integration perspective was largely absent from the border heritage discussions.

The importance of the natural landscape for people in the borderlands is often under represented in official national narratives. Borderwalk focus groups with local border citizens pointed out that they value nature as an important part of the borderland heritage. This was narrated in stories emphasizing the importance of the natural landscape for everyday life in the regions, and thus in the nature-culture relation, as well as in complaints about how local environmental questions were absent from the official narratives of border landscapes as heritage.

Policy Recommendations.



Promote the acknowledgement of people's border heritage

- Ensure the principle of subsidiarity in the European Union heritage planning and conservation.
- Discuss borders as people's heritage from the different perspectives of everyday life, shared natural landscapes, culture and values.
- Promote cross-border communities as heritage communities.
- Promote low threshold, micro-funding schemes for cross-border heritage-making.
- Promote low thresholt cross-border culture and heritage cooperation and initiatives.
- Emphasize the local and people's heritage aspects more strongly in funding schemes (e.g. INTERREG).
- Promote cultural events and inclusion of various local actors across the border.
- Promote the use of youth competencies and inclusion of young people in heritage-making for border regions.

Promote accessibility of border heritage

- Promote the accessibility of border heritage. People with disabilities have equal right to cross-border heritage.
- Offer opportunities for groups with less resources, such as young people, to visit nature reservations, museums and historical sites on both sides of the border.
- Improve public transport connections across the border. Visiting heritage sites should not be a priviledge of private car owners only.
- Promote platforms for digitalized border heritage.

Nature heritage emphasis

- Focus on the nature-culture connection as heritage.
- Work against the division between nature and culture heritage. Culture-nature divide in heritage perspective is articifial in many ways.
- Highlight that natural heritage of borderlands brings people together.
- Ensure that maritime borderlands receive equal recognition to land-based borderlands.
- Promote care for borderlands nature as as a way of cross-border peacebuilding.
- More funding schemes for cross-border local nature conservation.

Promote inclusive perceptions of Europe

- Recognize that there is a difference between Euroepan Union intergration and sense of Europenasses .
- Diversify narratives of Europeanness and make explicit what are European values and how they are visible in local heritage interpretation.
- Border heritage narratives are always selective but they should not be exclusive.
- Highlight cross-border cooperation tradition as European heritage.
- European heritage-making is not for tourists but also for locals. Increase resources and funding schemes for local small-scale heritage-making projects.
- Promote intergenerational borderland heritage.

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Borders Shaping
Perceptions of European Societies

Project Information:

- **Project Beneficiaries:** University of Southern Denmark, Denmark; Brunel University London, UK; European Academy Bozen, Italy; Oulu University, Finland; Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary; Technical University of Liberec, Czechia; University of Wrocław, Poland; Université de Strasbourg, France; The National Museum of History, Bulgaria; The Association of European Border Regions, Germany; The Foundation Network of European Remembrance and Solidarity, Poland; Kreatus, Poland; Lungomare Art Collective, Italy, Hogskolan Halmstad, Sweden
- **Duration**: April 2023 – March 2026 (36 months).
- **Internet presence:**
  Website: https://www.sdu.dk/en/forskning/forskningsenheder/samf/b-shapes
  LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13019005/
  Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/people/B-Shapes/100092507586694/
  Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/bshapes2023/?igsh=dnhqd3g0eGV1YWhx

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