Seeing Europe from the Border:
Research and Policy Insights on European Borderlands

Sara Svensson, Joanna Kurowska-Pysz
and Martin Guillermo-Ramirez

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Abstract

There is the vision of "Europe without borders", and the reality of "Europe with *many* borders".

In this edited volume perspectives on Europe are presented as seen from the borderlands. Landscapes, people and organizations at national borders constitute borderlands that differ from the national heartlands in respects that are both predictable and unpredictable. The collection of short essays captures some of the many ways seeing from the borderlands shapes how to think about Europe and how to plan and make policies that make sense for all.

The texts are written by researchers and practitioners who have been involved in *Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies (B-SHAPES)*, a Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Action project that analysed and assessed how borders are still a key factor in how we understand societies. Eight European universities, one research institute, a national museum, a foundation, a political association, a consultancy, and an art collective came together between April 2023 and March 2026 to examine borders in cooperation with Europeans living in border regions.

The short essays comprise both professional insights and experiential reflections based on the project, with authors allowing themselves to be personal while remaining informed by their organisational roles. The volume contains texts that advocate for film and art informing research and policy, as well as texts that distil the key policy implications from different perspectives.

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Introduction

Sara Svensson, Joanna Kurowska-Pysz and Martin Guillermo-Ramirez

Borders shape perceptions of societies, and their story has been told mostly according to national interests. However, the story of borders can be narrated differently than from a purely national perspective. Moreover, borders are not only located at territorial edges, but they are also produced in discourses, narratives and practices. In turn, how borders are created influences how we as societies relate to them and the rules we impose on how, when, and whether they can be crossed, traversed, ignored, or used for different purposes.

When taken for granted and when viewed from the vantage point of the nation-state, however, people living in and with borderlands risk being ignored and, ultimately, harmed in different ways. And even when heard, not all voices and concerns are addressed. In this volume, authors look at different ways to bring borderlands and the diversity within them into the centres and rooms where decisions are made. Each chapter contains perspectives which can help policymakers make decisions and organizations across the public, civil and private sectors to implement them.

The content of the volume

In the first text of the volume, "Policy implications of the B-SHAPES project: Borders Shaping European Societies", the authors, who are also the editors of this volume, summarise the research findings related to policy needs.

In the second chapter, Joanna Kurowska-Pysz outlines the complexities of developing European Union borderland policies by evaluating the tension between scientific methodological rigour and the operational pragmatism of political negotiation and strategy, ultimately advocating for a balanced, evidence-informed approach supported by the knowledge brokers.

In the third chapter, Sara Svensson reflects on whether European borderlands hold an overlooked potential for the creation of political spaces capable of mitigating the lack of a European *demos*.

In the fourth chapter, Martin Klatt reflects on how autochthonous minorities could be used to improve policymaking when it comes to European borderlands and beyond. He argues that national minorities in European borderlands should be integrated as active assets in regional development strategies by aligning minority

self-governance with economic policy to leverage their unique cross-border linguistic and cultural competencies.

In the fifth chapter, Katia Anguelova, Angelika Burtscher and Marion Oberhofer explore how collaborative artistic research in European borderlands serves as a methodological tool to reveal marginalised narratives and provide policymakers with aesthetic insights that rethink borders as dynamic thresholds of solidarity rather than mere geopolitical barriers.

The sixth chapter, written by Fredriika Jakola-Ylilauri and Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola, evaluates StoryMaps as an interactive, multimedia tool that promotes inclusive border heritage by engaging young people in place-based spatial storytelling and specific actions, such as borderwalks, effectively bridging the gap between official state-centric management and local everyday perceptions.

The seventh chapter, written by Zsuzsanna Simits and Martin Klatt, is based entirely on evidence of the B-SHAPES project. It demonstrates the usefulness of audiovisual tools for supporting research activities in the borderland, authentically visualising unheard voices and transgenerational heritage through a bottom-up perspective while maintaining rigorous ethical and scientific standards.

In the eighth chapter, the volume presents various future scenarios for European borderlands, with a perspective extending to 2035, developed by contributors engaged in the B-SHAPES project as researchers and practitioners. These scenarios are designed as inspiration, tools, and materials for policy discussions, exploring how contemporary issues, ranging from integration and sustainability to security and crisis management, may lead to diverse outcomes impacting the borderlands.

This volume is addressed to a wide range of audiences whose decisions, interventions and behaviours shape the reality of European borderlands. They are, among others, but not exclusively, policymakers, officials and other actors at local, regional, national, and EU levels, seeking perspectives and exploring multidimensional narratives from borderlands in their operations. The work is also relevant for practitioners acting in various cross-border entities, such as Euroregions, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, and others operating in organisations that support territorial cooperation. Furthermore, the volume serves as a valuable resource for academic researchers in border studies, representatives of minorities and border civil societies.

Policy Implications of the Project B-SHAPES: Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies

Sara Svensson, Joanna Kurowska-Pysz. Martin Guillermo-Ramirez and Martin Klatt

Borders are at the centre and, at the same time, at the periphery of European societies and politics. To policymakers and millions of European Union citizens, the Schengen Agreement made borders invisible by discontinuing border controls and dismantling border infrastructure. Yet when mobility is questioned in a geopolitically unstable world or when a hitherto unknown virus threatens public health, borders suddenly reappear as sites of control and are perceived as barriers once more. And, as much scientific research has shown over the past decades, national borders — whether visible or not — continue to shape mental maps and influence behaviour in ways that would differ if they were absent.

A shared understanding of the central and peripheral roles of borders, as well as a conviction of the significance of narratives of borders and Europe – their entanglements, overlaps and contradictions – brought together the consortium behind the research project B-SHAPES in 2021. That year, we began preparing the application that would lead to a three-year Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Action (project no. 101095186). The project was designed to connect professionals from both the traditional research sector and other fields engaged in knowledge creation and dissemination, working within and beyond Europe's power centres such as Brussels.

The consortium includes the National Museum in Sofia, Bulgaria — located in a region shaped by repeated bordering and rebordering, with a heritage of Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Judaism, Islam and Orthodox Christianity — , a foundation focused on collective memory in Warsaw, Poland, an art collective in Italy, a consultancy engaging cross-border stakeholders in Central and Eastern Europe, the Association of European Border Regions, a research institute in Italy, and eight universities situated along key European borders: Sweden–Denmark, Finland–Sweden, Denmark–Germany, France–Germany, Poland–Czechia–Germany, Hungary–Slovakia, the United Kingdom, and Czechia–Poland.

This composition not only enriched the project's conceptual and empirical research by bringing together diverse professional, disciplinary, and geopolitical perspectives, and by applying inclusive methodologies such as citizen science, but

also supported a design that took dissemination, communication and resource utilisation through policy uptake seriously. Thus, the project included a policy-oriented winter school, an open online course, twelve policy briefs, six policy seminars (two in-person and four online), and the development of an Inclusive Borderland Cultural Heritage Management Plan. In addition, all sub-projects created meeting spaces for citizens, researchers and policymakers, in the form of workshops as well as around the creative art activities, including art installations, exhibitions and a documentary. Visual StoryMaps based on borderwalks with residents in borderlands enabled policymakers beyond the periphery to better grasp the realities of borderlanders and their perceptions of local histories at the intersection of local, regional, national and European heritages. Throughout these activities, attention to narratives underpinned a productive feedback loop between research and policy.

Intersecting policy arenas and policy fields

In public policy studies and discourse, the metaphors of policy arenas and policy fields are frequently used. Policy arenas are the metaphysical spaces where decisions are discussed and made, evoking images of antiquity's forums (squares) and conveying the idea of people representing different decision-making bodies, sectors, societal spheres, and not least, themselves, meeting up in a specific place. A policy field is a demarcated land of some sameness and homogeneity, representing decisions and discussions pertaining to a specific (same) topic or issue. In borderlands, both (policy) arenas and (policy) fields are complex and interwoven. It is therefore logical that the policy implications and recommendations resulting from the B-SHAPES project relate to different issues, topics, sectors and discourses. In what follows, we try to lay out and sort the key topical pillars of the project's policy implications, divided into: cultural and cultural heritage policy; national minority policy in borderlands; border landscape policy; border management; cross-border governance and funding structures; and the policy of politics.

Cultural and cultural heritage policy

It is hard to avoid the notion that culture is everywhere, partly because American public and policy debates spill over into global discourses. In Europe, though, cultural cleavages go beyond the focus on "cultural wars". For one, in many countries, the social democratic movements that formed many European societies in the 20th century contained deep-seated debates centring on what culture is and what culture counts, boiling down to issues around whether governments should encourage broader uptake of certain segments of culture, or rather recognise and support equally different expressions of culture: David Hasselhoff or Wagner, ABBA or progressive rock, Eurovision or radio drama. The varying weight

attached to nation-state-based and national characteristics across all of these creates a constant backdrop of tension largely absent in the US, as do the debates around the appropriate amount and target of state fund support for cultural institutions. The European Union (EU) and its preceding institutions initially claimed to adopt an offhand stance on culture. Still, they slowly carved out a field of culture policy, and today they have a marked interest in promoting and creating European culture, however difficult to define that may be, as evidenced, for instance, in the European Heritage Label (Niklasson 2019).

Borderland culture is often studied as everyday cultural connections, for instance, seeing "cultural integration as a crucial element in broader cross-border regionalism and the intensification of economic transactions" (Bakry & Growe 2020:1), but what policies and structures support border regions as spaces of culture? B-SHAPES studied the way policy is used to induce or shape documented/recorded culture in places impacted by multiple scales: local, regional, national, European, and global. Results indicated that cross-border cultural cooperation is weakly addressed at national level and unevenly supported at regional and local levels, often driven by minorities and economic (tourism) priorities rather than shared cultural identity, with wide variation in stakeholder engagement, limited alignment with EU frameworks, and only selective integration of cross-cutting themes such as sustainability and digitalisation.

National minority policy in borderlands

Recognised or unrecognised autochthonous or national minorities inhabit many European borderlands. While there is no specific definition of what a national minority is in the European Union or Council of Europe frameworks for its legal protection, there is a general consensus in research that national minorities are communities of people with common ethnic and/or linguistic features differing from the titular nation of a state that have historical and/or long ties to a specific geographical area, and an expressed will to be identified as national minority. Moreover, national legislations may define the term and specific groups covered. Autochthonous minorities with their deep-rooted cultural and linguistic heritage and socio-cultural and economic ties, across borders, play a crucial role in fostering cross-border cooperation. They have the potential to contribute to decision-making on cross-border policies, which is now slowly being recognised and used more effectively than in the past. Some minorities have strengthened their role in promoting regional stability and development, social cohesion, and the preservation of cultural diversity and heritage while others still face many barriers.

B-SHAPES research demonstrated different perspectives on Europe. While media outlets frame borders and Europe in politicized or securitized terms, young members of minorities are pragmatic and functional, focusing on the opportunities the EU offers for travel, study, work, and everyday convenience. A key conclusion in B-SHAPES research on minority communities is that they constitute an asset to European border regions, but that they are an underused resource in policymaking

(see chapter in this volume). The B-SHAPES research found this to be particularly true for minority youth, who – embedded in multilingual, cross-cultural environments – embody the everyday reality of European integration.

Border landscape policy

Landscape conservation and heritage policies in the European Union are closely connected. The Council of Europe Landscape Convention, established in 2000, highlights the heritage value of landscapes and promotes their sustainable management of landscapes. The policy underlines that landscapes extend beyond state borders and require shared responsibility. Globally, the subject of transboundary multilevel governance for environmental conservation, protection and management is gaining attention as a practical theme in policy discussions — for instance, through the UN-EU Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context. This should also be seen in the context of the green transition and the EU's Green Deal, which may increase the pressure on land use in border regions.

The recognition and protection of valuable natural and cultural transboundary areas is gaining more policy and scholarly attention. European border regions and their landscapes are specific sites where the regional and local scale adoption and implementation of landscape policy can be evaluated. Border landscapes are impacted by environmental, economic and political changes taking place in two or more countries and this applies to land, maritime and aquatic borders. The evaluation of the landscape policy requires attention to practices, knowledge and values connected with the landscape on both site of a border. Border landscapes are environments where the responsibility for a shared environment becomes visible and highlighted, and part of the perceptions of people, as well as having concrete implications for health and human security.

B-SHAPES research investigated the perceptions and narratives of border landscapes as heritage in documents pertaining to education, environmental and spatial planning in relation to heritage, and tourism. Findings included that the extent and means of how common regional and cross-border heritage is included in education varies between and within the border regions, and that common natural and cultural heritage forms an asset for local tourism development but there is still untapped potential. Notably, the European Union is limited within the narrative material, which is instead dominated by national and state-centric perspectives.

Border management

The research carried out within B-SHAPES was planned in response to research funding advertised at the end of the Covid-19 pandemic. The outbreak of this virus profoundly reshaped debates on European borders, exposing the fragility of the vision of a truly borderless Europe. Long celebrated as a laboratory for integration, the European Union saw its notions of cross-border cooperation, mobility, and

multilevel governance come under strain. The reintroduction of border controls, often labelled "Covidfencing" (Medeiros et al. 2021), challenged not only the symbolic but also the practical significance of Euroregions and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), which were once presented as key instruments of integration and multilevel governance. In this sense, the pandemic accelerated a re-bordering process that had already been set in motion by earlier crises.

The partners in the research consortium behind B-SHAPES were, in their different capacities, directly involved in research and/or mitigation activities related to these events in many ways, and observed the immediate social and cultural consequences of re-bordering. The disruption of everyday cross-border practices revealed the extent to which many Europeans had come to inhabit border regions as shared living spaces. The suspension of borderlanders' mobility highlighted the deep entanglement of borderland communities across Europe, an entanglement often taken for granted before the pandemic. At the same time, the crisis underscored a structural cleavage in Europe: that between the highly mobile, well-educated segments of society who benefit most from cross-border integration, and those "left behind" in peripheral regions. For the former, closed borders represented a disruption of established lifestyles; for the latter, they often confirmed a sense of exclusion from the benefits of European integration. The pandemic thus not only forced a reconsideration of Europe's external and internal borders but also laid bare the uneven geographies of mobility, opportunity, and belonging within the European project.

While border management (including border infrastructure, border crossing processing, etc.) is only one part of this, B-SHAPES has furthered our understanding of these processes, with necessary policy implications in the form of recommendations for how to better deal with a similar scenario in the future.

Cross-border governance and funding structures

Tens of thousands of Europe's local and regional policymakers work in areas that are located close to national borders. They deal with issues that have, or could have, cross-border implications, such as environmental protection, infrastructure and local economic development. Many of those policymakers are directly or indirectly involved in formalised cross-border cooperation organisations, which have grown in number ever since the foundation of the first Euregio at the German-Dutch border in 1958 (Perkmann, 2003). Despite documented difficulties in creating anything like coherent cross-border governance spaces, organisations that bring together local and regional governments, and sometimes representatives of the economic and civil sectors, have become more visible in the European public and policy spaces. They were boosted by political actions and policies at the European level such as the inclusion in the structural funds in the late 1980s (Interreg), the specific mentioning of cross-border regions in the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (Article 175) and the creation of the legal

institutional tool EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) in 2006 (Evrard & Engl, 2016). After seven decades of such cooperation, policymaking in borderlands is intrinsically linked to these bodies, even when they lack official competences or mandates or keep a low profile. It is therefore inevitable that, in the consultations and discussions held throughout this project, as well as in the document and media analysis, cross-border governance and funding have emerged as topics. Despite that not being the focus of the research project, important insights and implications have come up, and we have chosen to include them.

The policy of politics and policy

An important part of B-SHAPES revolved around attitudes to Europe, with a special focus on whether, how and why borderlands harbour different kinds of Eurosceptic attitudes. This ultimately concerns measures to promote the creation of a European demos based on a European identity, while at the same time allowing and fostering multiple and local identities to remain and flourish.

The project also collected perceptions of the "other" within these nested forms of European identities, touching upon policies that, in a broader sense, address relations with the culture and people across the border.

Policy recommendations from the B-SHAPES project

During the B-SHAPES project, a series of Policy Briefs has been produced to engage with policymakers. This section draws on these policy briefs and on broader consultations conducted across the different sub-projects.

Issue: Cultural and cultural heritage in border regions

The analysis highlights strong potential to better connect multi-stakeholder models for cross-border cooperation with national and European Union frameworks on heritage and culture. While some coordination can occur at the level of individual borderlands, progress depends on subsidiarity, the local and national value placed on heritage, and the presence of proactive policymakers. At the European Union level, dialogue between regional development and heritage actors could foster cross-sector alignment and unlock the potential of borderlands as collaborative spaces for cultural and heritage-based development.

Work across scales

Actors at national, regional, and municipal levels should collaborate more closely to strengthen heritage conservation for its intrinsic value and its contribution to tourism, culture, and sustainable development. Heritage policy relies not only on political decisions but also on technical expertise—from archaeologists, historians,

conservation architects, ecologists, and others. Investment in forums where professionals and policymakers co-create cross-border strategies would enhance coherence. Initiatives such as the EGTC German-Polish Geopark Muskau Arch, Ireland's cross-border heritage cooperation with Northern Ireland, or the Spain–Portugal EGTC Rio Minho project illustrate how shared governance can protect natural and cultural heritage.

Leverage diversity

Border regions' dynamic and diverse cultural landscapes offer opportunities for innovation and sustainable growth. National minorities and new residents alike are underused assets in cross-border cultural development. The EU and Member States should promote intercultural competence—essential for effective governance—alongside multilingualism.

Promote sustainability

Transboundary codesign and collaboration in natural and cultural heritage policy are vital for climate resilience and the protection of shared resources. Capacity building at all levels of administration should include cross-border governance skills and a shared understanding of natural heritage.

Engage young people

Intergenerational initiatives that involve youth in rediscovering and interpreting borderland heritage foster cohesion, creativity, and entrepreneurship. National heritage agencies should support youth-led cross-border exchanges to strengthen Europe's cultural sustainability.

Issue: Inclusion of national minorities

National minorities in borderlands are a special community. The border shapes their life differently, as disruption, control and closure cuts them from their ties to their kin-state, while an open border (as within the Schengen zone) eases their borderland life considerably. Linguistic and cultural differences are often more salient "borders" for borderland minorities than physical checkpoints. Furthermore, minority communities can be an asset in improving a cross-border region's quality of life, because of their linguistic and cultural capabilities, but also their social networks and educational institutions.

   Therefore, minorities' voices should be heard. Measures of re-bordering harm minority communities in borderlands: the narrative in the media, but also from our informants, has been that such decisions are made by politicians from a nation centred, nation capital's perspective not taking into account the side effects for borderland life.

It is important that the European Union, but also and especially national policymakers and officials, acknowledge both the integration and vulnerability of borderlands, ensuring that re-bordering policies do not disproportionately harm minority communities. At present, there is no specific minority protection policy at EU level, while at the same time a greater consistency in minority protection is needed and the EU is perceived as a norm-setter and guarantor of minority rights. Protection of national minorities has been conditional for accession since 1993, but the EU has not yet delivered a consistent approach to national minorities.

Finally, youth voices, particularly those of underrepresented groups such as minorities, should be actively integrated into policymaking processes through both formal and creative and participatory approaches. Youth should also be a key target of EU communication to enhance young people's identification with the EU.

Issue area: National minorities – minority media

Media outlets in Europe's border regions play a powerful role in shaping how societies understand national minorities and cross-border life. By diversifying perspectives and amplifying underrepresented voices, the media can help foster inclusion, challenge stereotypes, and deepen public understanding of what European integration means on the ground.

Diversify Voices in Reporting
Borderland journalism should reflect the diversity of the borderland communities it serves, with a borderland perspective (as mainstream media usually does not have this special perspective). A borderland perspective could be a niche approach to sustain regional media faced with severe structural changes.

Widening the perspective means including perspectives from borderland minorities, but also specifically from women, young people, migrants, civil society, and persons with disabilities—not only as interviewees but also within newsroom teams and editorial boards. Media organisations can build databases of diverse experts, collaborate with journalism schools on diversity and inclusion, and hold open discussions on issues such as male gender bias. Strengthening journalists' knowledge of EU integration and cohesion policies can also help connect local stories to broader European contexts.

Tell Human Stories
Beyond institutional or policy reporting, borderland media should focus more on the lived experiences of people whose lives are shaped by borders. Stories about migration, family connections, or cultural exchange can reveal the human dimensions of European cooperation. Highlighting these narratives helps audiences see how European values and policies shape everyday life even in the most peripheral places.

Connect Local and European Contexts

More coverage of EU activities—such as cross-border initiatives, cultural collaborations, and mobility programmes—can show how Europe supports opportunities and cohesion in border regions. Dedicated "Europe" sections could help make these links visible.

Issue: Landscape as heritage in border regions

Europe's border regions hold unique landscapes shaped by shared histories, diverse identities, and overlapping cultural influences. To unlock their potential, policymakers at both the EU and national levels should promote transnational landscape and heritage programs that encourage collaboration across borders and sectors.

   A more holistic and inclusive approach to policymaking is needed—one that values place-based narratives and recognises intersectional identities in borderlands as assets for cohesion and development. Border landscapes should be integrated into national education curricula, with schools in these regions supported to develop local excursions and cross-border learning initiatives that connect young people to their shared heritage.

   Funding schemes such as Interreg should place greater emphasis on landscape and heritage, linking cross-border sites to designations such as UNESCO World Heritage. Local and regional events can bring together diverse stakeholders, including minority communities, to co-design heritage narratives that reflect lived experiences and intercultural exchange.

   Finally, raising awareness of the European Union's role in landscape heritage planning—through media, cultural events, and education—can strengthen the sense of shared European values rooted in everyday life. Border regions with advanced intercultural narratives offer powerful models for inclusive heritage-making and regional branding that celebrate diversity rather than division.

Issue: Border management: closures and attitudes to Europe

To ensure effective and fair border management, the Schengen Borders Code should clearly define proportionality. This would prevent overreactions by enforcement agencies and reduce unnecessary burdens on cross-border students, families, and commuters. Bilateral coordination is essential: border closures involve at least two national policy regimes and should be coordinated with neighbouring states to consider the unique impacts on border regions. Governments should designate clear contact persons at all levels to facilitate communication.

Local consultation is critical. Cross-border stakeholders, including EGTCs and Euroregions, should be involved in designing and implementing rules to ensure clarity on responsibilities, particularly when private actors are involved. Preparatory measures should include publishing acceptable documents to prove cross-border connections and developing joint emergency plans for all border regions.

Efficient communication channels are needed to provide reliable information, counter misinformation, and guide citizens on mobility, education, and labour market implications. Hotlines and information points can support these efforts.

Finally, promoting the narrative of an inclusive Europe is key. Re-bordering during crises has challenged the perception of open borders. Borderlands—sites of intercultural exchange, diversity, and hybridisation—demonstrate Europe's strength. Member states, local authorities, and civil society should actively highlight the contributions of border regions, immigrants, and minority communities to counter nationalist and Eurosceptic discourses and to reinforce the benefits of European integration, cross-border cooperation, and the Schengen Agreement.

Issue: Cross-border governance and funding

The role of cross-border actors and relationship building
Ensuring the sustainable development of cross-border cultural cooperation requires the deep, ongoing engagement of Euroregions and EGTCs, as well as other borderland actors. They should be the drivers of institutional and personal relations built on mutual trust and shared interest. These entities, serving as crucial local hubs, can link key community actors (cultural centres, NGOs, artists) and ensure continuity even when funding structures change. Establishing these multi-level relationships is crucial for building resilience against political shifts, such as those following election cycles.

Integrating cross-border heritage into strategic institutional frameworks for long-term development
While cross-border historical and cultural heritage is vital to local and regional actors, it is often overlooked in national-level cultural development strategies. Development policies and strategies often fail to address cross-border cooperation adequately, or they do so only superficially. This disconnect hinders long-term development by failing to provide a supportive top-down framework. Insufficient strategic integration is compounded by poor on-the-ground coordination. Many cultural entities operate in isolation, leading to dispersed activities. Without a systematic sharing of cultural information, practical and long-term cooperation is challenging. Cross-border cultural planning must become an integral part of the

strategic planning for Euroregions, EGTCs, and other institutional actors operating in borderlands.

Funding diversification and the value of culture
A significant challenge for cross-border cultural cooperation is reliance on Interreg programme funding and the intense competition for these funds. To capitalise on past successes and ensure survival, entities must diversify their funding streams. This requires training staff to acquire funds from alternative sources, including commercial ones. Possible solutions can be microgrants from local budgets, crowdfunding for specific projects, or partnerships with local SMEs through their CSR initiatives. This financial shift must be accompanied by a deeper understanding of why culture matters: it is not merely a tourist offer, but a key asset for building a shared identity and sense of community. It protects heritage and strengthens integration. The borderland's intangible heritage is a massive social capital that requires minimal investment.

A shift in approach: from projects to processes
A fundamental change in approach is necessary: moving from a project mode to one focused on continuous "processes and relationships." This includes identity-building activities such as joint workshops (e.g., craft, culinary), social archive projects documenting oral history, and cross-border social events. It also requires shifting to process-oriented structures: regular, low-cost networking meetings for cultural leaders; reciprocal residency programs for artists; and open, bilingual databases of local talent to facilitate direct, ongoing collaboration.

Issue: The future of European borderlands in times of trouble

Historical context and threat perception shape EU-Russia border relations
Historical context profoundly shapes relations in EU regions bordering Russia, but attitudes are not coherent. Finnish Karelia, for instance, has a legacy of positive, people-to-people cooperation, whereas Estonia's relationship is defined by a long-standing perception of threat rooted in past occupation.

Russia's 2022 aggression in Ukraine froze cross-border activities but did not create a unified response. Instead, it reinforced these pre-existing dispositions: regions with a history of cooperation hope for relations to resume, while those with a history of mistrust have deepened their isolation.

Similarly, perceptions of military threat remain diverse and context dependent. The Baltic countries, for example, fear Russia far more than Poland or Finland. This is influenced by specific factors, such as historical memory (the Soviet period in Estonia), geography (the proximity of the Suwałki Gap), and the presence of allied forces.

Navigating the strategic dilemma between alertness and tension, together with the hope for normalisation, and permanent border securitisation.

European border regions neighbouring Russia now face a dilemma between two mutually exclusive trajectories: either hoping for a normalisation and a return to pre-invasion cooperation or approaching the securitisation of the border against a perceived permanent threat.

Many border actors observe that the conflict with Russia is already underway, primarily as hybrid warfare. The evidence is cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, GPS signal disruptions, and economic sabotage, such as the damage to the cable between Estonia and Finland. Regardless, some hope for a return to pre-invasion cooperation; however, the long-term outlook seems to be one of permanent alertness and tension, reminiscent of a new Cold War with closed borders.

Economic support and addressing peripherality

Border regions face the highest economic costs due to closed borders. Targeted investments are necessary to combat the sense of being peripheral. This includes "hard investments" aimed at creating high-quality economic opportunities, strong public services, and digital infrastructure to make these regions appealing places to live and work.

Specific support packages are especially important for regions bordering Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. These aids must be customised to promote economic diversification, offset losses caused by closed borders, and reduce their economies' dependence on Russia. This is essential to prevent regional decline and depopulation.

Addressing depopulation and internal social tensions

The conflict generates significant internal tensions, particularly in multi-ethnic regions with large Russian-speaking minorities, such as in Estonia or Finnish Karelia. Local authorities face the difficult task of balancing security issues with minority rights and maintaining social cohesion. Therefore, support for social cohesion is essential, as it promotes dialogue and protects minority rights, ensuring they are not exploited as tools of hostile disinformation.

Furthermore, depopulation must be addressed by creating incentives for the younger generation. This means creating tangible opportunities to encourage them to stay in or return to their border regions, allowing them to build a future in their home regions.

Building resilience and countering disinformation

Resilience to hybrid threats must be strengthened. This includes investments in cybersecurity, the protection of critical infrastructure (such as energy and communication), and technologies to counter GPS signal disruptions and drone activities.

In some border regions, populists also use the sense of threat as a political tool, creating a disconnect between ordinary residents' perceptions and politicians' narratives. To combat this, a reliable communication strategy is needed at the EU and national levels. This strategy must provide transparent, fact-based communication about real threats, thereby building societal resilience to disinformation and countering the politicians' use of fear for their own purposes.

Issue: The future of European borderlands in times of togetherness

The fragility of trust and the need for autonomy
A fully open and cooperative Europe, based on deep mutual trust, is also extremely fragile. As a multitude of crises have shown, the natural and rapid answer to a threat is to close borders. This shows that trust is both the greatest strength and its weakness. Central decisions taken without multilevel, stakeholder or citizen consultation, such as Germany and Poland's 2025 border controls, are a fundamental contradiction of European integration and undermine the trust that underpins the system.

Integration requires the real application of partnership, subsidiarity, and autonomy. Border regions must be granted greater autonomy in matters related to cross-border cooperation. This should include formal mechanisms to prevent central governments from making unilateral decisions that negatively affect border communities without consultations. Furthermore, the EU should develop a supranational European crisis response mechanism to counteract border closures (for health, economic, migration, and other reasons), enabling a coordinated response without undermining freedom of movement and trust.

Integration tools for EU enlargement
The vision of a prosperous and integrated Europe can attract new members who expect support, including access to proven and effective programs. Interreg and Erasmus are key tools for facilitating integration, and they should continue to serve as primary, proven mechanisms of integration for countries and territories aspiring to join the EU.

Overcoming practical and legal barriers in Integration
Advanced integration does not eliminate practical challenges. Cross-border spatial planning remains a significant challenge for regional authorities, alongside the imperfect functioning of a common market and insufficient social cohesion, due to numerous individual obstacles. Therefore, the Interreg programme remains necessary to develop standard tools for practical cross-border cooperation, including common legal and administrative frameworks to address specific problems, such as spatial planning and the sharing of public services.

A change in perspective should also be promoted at the national level, so cross-border cooperation is perceived not as a local issue, but as a strategic interest of the entire state. To prevent the unintentional creation of new barriers, a mandatory cross-border check for new legal regulations is effective, as shown by the positive German example. A compulsory framework for this check should be established at the EU level. Every significant regulation, at both the national and EU levels, should be subject to an impact assessment and mandatory consultation with Euroregions, EGTCs and local partners, thereby establishing the German model as a European standard.

Balancing open borders and security
Open borders are not only positive; they create security challenges and cannot be perceived idealistically. Schengen always had two sides: open borders, but also stronger cross-border cooperation police and judicial cooperation to meet citizens' expectations for security. Investment in integrated, European systems of police cooperation, shared databases, operational teams, and harmonised laws is essential for maintaining security in a Europe with open borders.

Building inclusive narratives through protecting identity and diversity in integrated borderlands

Integration does not eliminate the need to preserve the cultural identity of citizens who still want to maintain it, and borders (even symbolic ones) help protect it. This issue is particularly important in areas where national and ethnic minorities live and where identity is based on interpersonal relationships. This also applies to internal borders (e.g., Belgium). Consequently, a diversity policy must be actively supported as part of the EU integration process. Initiatives that protect cultural heritage, minority languages, and regional identities should be consciously financed to communicate that European integration strengthens, rather than weakens, local cultures. Overall, Europe and border regions require an inclusive narrative grounded in diversity and respect for human rights and identity, rather than in bordering processes. The inclusive narrative could be framed as a tool against raising Euroscepticism.

Issue of policy of politics

European borderlands offer an overlooked opportunity to create political spaces that would be able to mitigate the lack of a European *demos*. Throughout the B-SHAPES project, in our research activities (interviews, focus groups, media analysis) and in policy seminars and workshops with various actors, we have found examples of politicians reaching out to and cooperating with each other in borderlands. If done on a larger scale, this would enhance understanding of each

other's lived realities and could also affect attitudes towards the larger European community (EU). This is because these lived realities incorporate a European dimension through exposure to the same European legislative and normative insertions in policy realities.

We do not say that this is the case at the moment. The European elections in 2024, for instance, was still very much carried out against the backdrop of national debates. Local and national elections do not "spill over" into the other side. But, there are practices that those who practise them could take up or scale up. It is also notable that many European countries have lively and dynamic party landscapes, with multiple parties – often small and sometimes local. These may benefit or change through cooperation with the other side.

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Borderland Policy Development: a Scientific versus a Practical Approach

Joanna Kurowska-Pysz

Shaping policies for the development of borderlands is one of the most complex challenges in contemporary territorial management in the European Union. They often operate under a multi-level management system on each side of the border, as well as in cross-border cooperation within the Euroregional or Euro-city framework, and must also consider, in their development priorities and during the process of setting these priorities, the often quite divergent interests of actors on each side of the border. The intensity and quality of cross-border cooperation and relations also play a vital role in this process, influencing both the entire policy-making process and the manner of their implementation on each side of the border. Another vital aspect of shaping policies and strategies for border areas is the clash between the academic rigour of what is usually referred to as an evidence-based policy and the pragmatics of political negotiations inherent in such processes. Strategic planning for the development of border areas can, therefore, undoubtedly be linked not only to a scientific or expert approach but also to the reality of cross-border interests. In this field, there is often a dispute between academic arguments and a practical perspective, usually stemming from many years of active observation of life on the border (Jakubowski & Miszczuk 2021).

This chapter aims to analyse and evaluate the importance of scientific and practical approaches in shaping policies for border areas. The focus is on identifying and characterising the tensions between the methodological rigour postulated by the scientific paradigm and the operational pragmatism required by management practice.

The author gathered the conclusions presented in the paper by personally participating in the preparation of four strategic documents concerning the development of the Polish-Czech, Polish-Slovak, Polish-German, and Polish-Lithuanian border areas in 2018-2025. In formulating her conclusions, the author also drew on her experience gained from many years of practice in project management and cross-border relations on the borders mentioned above. Another significant opportunity to gain experience in this field was the participation in the B-SHAPES project. It investigated specific issues related to borderlands, treating these areas as living labs, with a strong emphasis on including groups often overlooked in EU policy debates, such as young people and national minorities. A key practical element of the project was translating research findings into language

understandable to decision-makers (local, national, and EU politicians) through the development of policy briefs. The unique perspective of an insider-researcher allowed the author to gain a deeper understanding of the formal and informal dimensions of the policy-making process for border areas, in particular, the specifics of transferring scientific knowledge used in the preparation of such documents into the language of practice and balancing the often very different interests (Lomas 2007) represented by various stakeholder groups on both sides of the border.

Active participation in the policymaking processes for border areas drew the author's attention to the specificity of the analytical approach to complex problems, phenomena, and conditions, which should be reflected in the diagnostic and postulated parts of the documents. Beyond the discourse on the advantages and disadvantages of scientific and practical approaches, attention should also be paid to other important issues that shape these documents and may influence their outcome. First and foremost, programming for the development of border areas requires a holistic, balanced approach that equally accounts for the perspectives of both sides of the border. This often involves operating in an environment of specific tensions, differences, and asymmetries and requires particular sensitivity. Key challenges that may be encountered in the process of shaping policies for border areas include:

- data asymmetry, i.e., incompatibility between the statistical systems from which data for a joint document are obtained on both sides of the border, as well as different conditions of access to information and data, i.e., in one country, data may be available without restrictions (Open Data), while in another country, access to the same data requires formal consent from the competent authorities,
- differing narratives regarding the perception of heritage, shared history, and identity, determined by past conflicts, border shifts, and resettlements, which translate into the quality of neighbourly relations, the level of mutual trust, and the motivation to cooperate,
- legal and administrative barriers hindering the development of coherent policies that can be implemented on both sides of the border,
- linguistic and communication differences that need to be taken into account in the document preparation process,
- the need to ensure the involvement of a representative group of stakeholders on both sides of the border, including national, ethnic, and linguistic minorities, for whom borders can be used as symbolic resources (Decoville et al 2021).

In this chapter, the author refers to the above-mentioned aspects of policymaking for border areas, taking into account the complexity of this process and analysing the evidence-based policy approach that identifies the most critical interdependence between science and practice and suggests possible solutions.

The Evidence-Based Policy paradigm in science and practice

Policymaking for border areas is a crucial issue in modern territorial management within the European Union, as it must account for both the specific location of border regions and their internal diversity, including cultural, linguistic, and geographical differences. It also involves the complexity of regional development management, which arises from the often very different administrative structures of individual countries. These complex conditions are further shaped by multi-level governance issues related to self-government frameworks in each country and the activities of Euroregions or EGTCs, which encompass areas at the junctions of two or more jurisdictions. These entities typically play an active role in all processes occurring in the border area.

Shaping policies for border areas, therefore, requires a skilful balance between the ideal planning model (the domain of science) and the reality of negotiation and compromise (the domain of practice). The scientific approach strives for model planning based on consistent, comparable, and reliable data, which, in practice, due to the conditions described above, is impossible to achieve and can lead to decision-making paralysis (Head 2008), especially in the face of data deficits in border areas. The administration's preferred approach is that politicians and many local stakeholders in border areas operate under strict time, budgetary, and political constraints. Practitioners are forced to use simplified methods, expert estimates, and heuristics to achieve the minimum goal of preparing a document and making progress in implementing development policies for border areas despite information gaps (Olivier et al 2014).

The evidence-based research approach bridges the worlds of science and political decision-making. However, in the context of European Territorial Cooperation, this process encounters systemic barriers: significant tensions between science and practice arise from a timing mismatch between their work cycles. The EU policies, including Interreg programs, operate within a rigid time frame comprising the programming, implementation, and closure phases. Scientific research, on the other hand, is governed by its own dynamics, which are often much slower (Parkhurst 2016). This is particularly evident in the territorial diagnosis phase, when, for example, statistical data, especially at the European level (Eurostat), arrive late, creating the risk of basing multi-annual strategies on outdated premises. It is also important to mention the phenomenon of so-called policy windows (Kingdon 2011), such as short periods for policymaking, e.g., ex-ante evaluation, mid-term or ex-post evaluation. At such times, decision-makers

are open to scientific evidence, while research conducted outside these windows, even when very useful, often remains unused.

Due to the differences in language codes, knowledge brokers (Lomas 2007) are necessary to connect scientists who operate with abstractions and methodological reservations and officials who focus on operational goals. In relation to European Territorial Cooperation, knowledge brokers are institutions such as ESPON, Interact, and the Joint Secretariats of Interreg programs, which act as translators, converting the scientific language of analysis into the practical language of indicators and investment priorities. ESPON is an evidence provider, conducting cross-sectional territorial analyses for the European Union, translating complex trends, e.g., demographic trends, into strategic recommendations, and providing the substantive input necessary for diagnosis in program documents (Evrard et al 2015). Interact acts as a process broker and facilitator of know-how exchange. It focuses on tacit and procedural knowledge. By harmonising management tools and capitalising on good practices, it standardises the implementation of Interreg programs. Both institutions work in complementary ways, transforming raw data and experience into practical management knowledge. Joint Secretariats can be considered operational knowledge brokers, operating at the intersection of strategic planning and project reality. They often constitute a critical bureaucratic interface between the abstract objectives of programs and the concrete actions of beneficiaries in the field. Through ongoing monitoring and contact with applicants, they gather situated knowledge about the real barriers to implementation and the specific nature of border areas, which often escapes macro-statistics. In the programming and capitalisation phase, they conduct bottom-up evidence-gathering on individual project results and transform them into recommendations for Managing Authorities. They therefore act as feasibility verifiers, assessing the extent to which theoretical strategic assumptions grounded in scientific evidence can be implemented in practice.

The ongoing digitisation of knowledge exchange processes has created a need for a digital knowledge broker for European Territorial Cooperation, a role fulfilled by the European Commission's Futurium platform. It serves as an evidence repository, but above all as a tool for participatory knowledge creation. Through thematic groups (e.g., the Border Focal Point Network), Futurium enables the direct injection of expert and grassroots evidence into the mainstream political debate in Brussels, bypassing traditional hierarchical administrative levels. This is an example of the democratisation of access to the evidence base in cohesion policy (Baun & Marek 2014).

The evolution of knowledge formatting is also becoming increasingly apparent: a shift away from extensive monographs and reports in favour of short policy briefs and targeted analyses, which are more accessible to decision-makers. This is related, among other things, to the so-called usability gap. Practitioners often argue that, although reliable, scientific evidence is sometimes inapplicable in a specific decision-making context, which means it cannot be translated into simple, concrete

recommendations. An additional challenge is the problem of scalability: it is difficult to generalise the conclusions drawn from detailed case studies to the level of policy for the entire border region, or, more broadly, to the scale of the European Union as a whole.

The specific nature of European Territorial Cooperation means that research encounters a barrier known as border data blindness (Szydarowski et al 2021). This results from the difficulty of aggregating data from incompatible national systems and the lack of standard definitions of variables on both sides of the border. In addition, there is a visible discrepancy between the functional areas where real socio-economic processes take place and the rigid NUTS administrative units for which statistics are collected. In response to these shortcomings, there are increasing calls to use Big Data to supplement traditional public statistics.

The response to the above-described challenges in the use of scientific evidence to shape policies for border areas, could be a change of the evidence-based paradigm, where research dictates the assumptions of the decision-making process, to an evidence-informed approach, where evidence is only one of many elements of the decision-making process, alongside the budget and the political will of the participants in the process.

In practice, however, the opposite phenomenon, known as policy-based evidence making, is often observed in strategic programming (Strassheim & Kettunen, 2014). It consists of the instrumental use of research to legitimise decisions made earlier through political negotiations. In this approach, the prioritisation of objectives often results from the need to balance national or regional interests, rather than from an objective analysis of indicators. This leads to cherry-picking data to justify the adopted investment priorities.

The complexity of the policy-making process for border regions

The process of shaping public intervention in border areas is characterised by specific dynamics resulting from the need to reconcile interests in relation to national administrative structures, often operating in a multi-level governance system, often with the participation of organisations dedicated to cross-border areas, such as Euroregions or EGTCs, which usually also represent their own political interests (Opioła & Böhm 2022). When developing public intervention, two crucial issues should be considered: a place-based approach and the participatory principle. A place-based approach should emphasise the unique context of a specific borderland by recognising its assets and values as deeply intertwined with the social, environmental, and economic conditions of its physical place. This approach ensures that interventions are tailored to the immediate setting and community. Implementing the participatory principle requires the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, especially border communities and minorities. This advocates co-creation and shared responsibility and is crucial for

legitimising policies and ensuring they are inclusive of diverse perspectives (e.g., from both sides of the border and across different cultural/ethnic/linguistic groups). Implementing this principle involves consultation, collaboration, and empowerment, making sure local knowledge and concerns shape the future.

Essentially, the process of shaping policies for border areas can be divided into two key phases: diagnosis of the socio-economic situation and strategic programming. In the case of territorial policymaking, a comprehensive diagnosis is a mandatory stage of analysis within cohesion policy, which aims to provide an objective picture of the situation and identify the key problems and potential of a given area, thereby forming the basis for subsequent policy implementation decisions.

In the diagnostic phase, the intersection of science and practice becomes most visible and conflictual. The scientific approach of experts preparing analyses aims to objectify facts using statistics and identify long-term trends. Statistical data often point to unfavourable phenomena such as rapid depopulation, an ageing population, or low levels of innovation. From a scientific point of view, a rational recommendation in such a situation would be to adopt a smart shrinkage strategy that would allow public services to adapt to a declining population. However, this diagnosis clashes sharply with the perspective of practitioners, including local government officials and civil servants, who assess these facts through the prism of their political usefulness and the electoral cycle. Decision-makers often reject pessimistic scenarios, pushing instead for unrealistic pro-development and investment goals that resonate better in election campaigns (Brunet-Jailly 2013).

This leads to the rejection or marginalisation of scientific evidence. This phenomenon is described as the politics of evidence, where decision-makers tend to cherry-pick indicators to justify decisions already made or narratives of success (Lomas 2007). The task of researchers at this stage is to convince decision-makers that the disclosure of uncomfortable data (e.g., on economic peripherality or weak innovation) need not be a political burden but can instead become an effective bargaining chip in the fight for external structural funds to address these very deficits. Competent decision-makers can turn such weaknesses of territory into opportunities by adopting a more creative approach, such as the MOA approach (Cappellano & Kurowska-Pysz 2020).

An essential technical challenge at this diagnostic stage is the aforementioned border data blindness. This is particularly acute in cross-border cooperation, as national statistical agencies traditionally collect data broken down by administrative units within countries. As a result, the specificity of cross-border flows is difficult to capture. The harmonisation of data between national systems also faces serious barriers resulting from differences in the definition of fundamental variables, such as the unemployment rate or the typology of economic sectors, which may differ on both sides of the border, making it impossible to compare indicators. However, researchers lack reliable flow data measuring daily commuting, migration, or the use of public services (e.g., hospitals) on the other

side of the border. As experts point out, the lack of consistent cross-border monitoring forces researchers to analyse fragmentary data, making it challenging to make a precise diagnosis, especially in border areas with high institutional asymmetry (Kingdon 2011).

A properly conducted diagnostic stage undoubtedly requires the researcher to engage with the environment, as the perspectives of stakeholders, including decision-makers, are essential in formulating conclusions and are explored primarily through qualitative research. Then, exploration of individual perspectives and experiences is possible through in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, observational methods, and fieldwork, which embed research in its natural context, such as participant observation, non-participant observation, walking interviews, and tours.

The transition from the diagnosis stage to the programming phase raises a fundamental question about the nature of the strategic document being created: should it be a reliable roadmap based on facts, or a collection of stakeholders' expectations? The process of translating the diagnostic conclusions into strategic objectives, which should be SMART, often leads to redefining the original research assumptions in the name of pragmatism. In practice, methodological rigour usually gives way to political logic at this stage. In cross-border policies, the prioritisation of objectives stems from the need to politically balance the interests of partners on both sides of the border, rather than from the results of the analysis carried out at the diagnostic stage. Even if the diagnosis indicates the need to concentrate resources on a single key problem (e.g., transport infrastructure), the logic of compromise forces the dispersion of funds so that each of the partners involved in implementing the policy on both sides of the border can realise at least some of their demands.

In extreme cases, this approach means that the use of scientific evidence from the diagnostic stage is superficial or facade-like and legitimises the actions that policymakers care about. This phenomenon, known as policy-based evidence making, involves a reversal of the vector of dependence: it is policy that defines what evidence is needed and acceptable, and the role of experts is reduced to justifying predetermined priorities (Strassheim & Kettunen 2014).

Despite these limitations, the role of scientists and experts in the programming stage remains essential. They help practitioners translate abstract scientific concepts into the language of operational documents. An example of this is the adaptation of the idea of functional areas that do not coincide with administrative boundaries. Thanks to the work of knowledge brokers involved in the policy-making process, abstract ideas become an acceptable element shaping intervention, which is crucial to ensuring that modern approaches to development management, promoted by organisations such as the OECD, are reflected in the structure of implemented policies, even if this requires constant compromise with local politics and administrative specifics (Parkhurst 2016).

Interdependencies between science and practice in effective policymaking for border regions

The above considerations lead to the conclusion that the effectiveness of European Territorial Cooperation shouldn't depend on the dominance of a scientific or practical approach, but on finding a compromise between these approaches. Scientific knowledge should not be treated as external, inviolable dogma. Still, it should be consciously incorporated into the decision-making process and adapted to the realities of implementation and political constraints.

Based on the author's experience and insights, the insider researcher's unique position plays a key role in understanding the dynamics between theory and practice. The participation of researchers in the management structures of cross-border programs, such as task forces, triggers a two-way learning process. On one hand, direct contact with the decision-making process fundamentally changes the scientific perspective by introducing an element of practical rationality. The researcher learns that even the best recommendations will remain dead letters if they are not feasible. This leads to the development of an attitude of methodological pragmatism – a conscious abandonment of abstract models and academic purism in favour of solutions that can be operationalised within rigid budgetary and legal frameworks. On the other hand, the constant presence of scientists in decision-making bodies (e.g., monitoring committees) influences decision-making culture, raising the quality of public debate. Officials, confronted with scientific rigour and statistical data, are forced to justify their decisions on a more substantive basis, thereby limiting their discretion and compelling them to base their arguments on cause-and-effect logic. The scientist then acts as an internal knowledge broker, translating academic concepts such as territorial cohesion, cross-border functional areas, or polycentricity into concrete objectives or indicators.

The reality of programming processes in many European border regions proves that extreme approaches are ineffective. The scientific approach, although methodologically correct, often proves too slow in relation to the dynamics of the political cycle. Researchers' pursuit of full data comparability in the absence of data leads to a lack of progress in the policy-making process. Science that operates at too high a level of abstraction becomes useless to practitioners who must make decisions "here and now," even with incomplete knowledge. However, relying solely on a practical approach is equally risky. The dominance of the bureaucratic perspective threatens far-reaching short-sightedness, especially when the overriding goal is the quick and easy allocation of funds rather than solving real problems. Budget decisions are then made based on the logic of fair distribution among partners, which often leads to a waste of public resources by financing one-off investments that do not bring lasting, cross-border added value.

The influence of science and practice is not constant but varies depending on the phase of the political cycle. There are moments when scientific input is critical and

moments when political and administrative mechanisms dominate. In activities related to policy windows, diagnosis, or evaluation, researchers play a leading role (van der Valk 2020). Science defines the problem, selects indicators, and shapes perceptions of challenges. The way the problem is described at this stage determines the subsequent direction of intervention, in accordance with the policy windows paradigm – when the window is open, science has a chance to influence the agenda. In turn, at the stage of policy negotiation and operationalisation, when practice dominates, e.g., in the phase of budget allocation and the creation of detailed implementation rules, the scientific approach loses its significance. Substantive arguments often give way to complex negotiation logic and the need to balance national or regional interests. At this point, compromise becomes crucial, even at the expense of the program's substantive coherence.

Despite growing awareness of the need for an evidence-based policy approach, many systemic barriers persist at the interface between science and politics. The aforementioned phenomenon of policy-based evidence poses a serious ethical threat. Instead of making decisions based on research, policymakers instrumentally use the authority of science to legitimise political choices that have already been made. It is common practice to selectively choose indicators to justify predetermined investment priorities while ignoring inconvenient data.

Communication and institutional barriers are additional difficulties. The academic language of scientific analysis often does not suit the needs of decision-makers who expect simple, unambiguous, and readily available recommendations. The structural silo mentality of public administration exacerbates this problem. Borderland issues are inherently horizontal and interdisciplinary (e.g., combining transport with ecology), while government offices are divided into vertical departments. The implementation of integrated scientific recommendations is hampered by these rigid divisions of competence, which hinder a holistic approach to territorial development.

Summary

The process of shaping policies for border areas within the framework of European Territorial Cooperation is a constant source of conflict between evidence-based rationality and the realities of political negotiations and the logic of resource allocation. The above considerations lead to the conclusion that effective borderland policy cannot be based on the science-practice dichotomy. Still, they must combine both spheres, exploiting the synergies and complementarities that may exist between them. The scientific approach proves too slow in the context of borderland development programming, while relying solely on practice risks a lack of strategic vision.

The critical moment seems to be the diagnosis phase, when methodological rigour clashes with the phenomenon of border data blindness and political

resistance to uncomfortable diagnoses. In turn, the programming phase poses the most significant risk of policy-based evidence-making, in which decision-makers selectively choose data to legitimise previously adopted priorities.

In this complex system, the researcher-practitioner plays a key role as an internal broker, capable of negotiating facts and translating the hermetic language of analysis into operational goals that are understandable to the administration. This allows for the nuances of the decision-making process to be seen, which remain invisible to external evaluators. Undoubtedly, the research partners in these processes should be practitioners, decision-makers, cross-border project partners, and other interested stakeholders, whose involvement ensures that the unique cross-border perspective is considered throughout the process, in line with the place-based approach and the participatory principle.

The future of cohesion policy after 2027 requires a long-term systemic transition from an evidence-based paradigm to a more realistic evidence-informed one.

Currently, evidence-based policymaking is being improved, among other things, thanks to Cross-Border Impact Assessment. This special variation of the Territorial Impact Assessment may provide an opportunity to study potential (cross-border) effects emanating from legislation systematically at the European level (Unfried et al 2022).

The development of an evidence-informed approach requires the institutionalisation of the role of knowledge brokers in management structures. Experts should not be appointed only on an ad hoc basis to write a report. Still, they should be a permanent part of decision-making bodies, enabling ongoing verification of courses of action and quick responses to changes. The formatting of knowledge should also be changed – moving away from voluminous volumes of analysis in favour of concise Policy Briefs and interactive tools.

A key technical challenge is establishing cross-border territorial observatories capable of collecting and harmonising data on both sides of the border. It is becoming necessary to make greater use of Big Data for real-time process monitoring to avoid basing decisions on statistics that are two-three years old. This is in line with the recommendations of research institutions such as ESPON (Szydarowski et al 2021). Only the integration of modern analytical tools with bureaucratic pragmatism will allow for a transition from declarative policy to evidence-informed policy.

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Can Transnational European Political Spaces be Created in Borderlands?

Sara Svensson

Europeans might be united in their dislike of Mr. Donald Trump, who as US President is often the subject of ridicule, contempt and incomprehension by European citizens across nations. But aside from that, European Union citizens largely live in 27 separate political communities. The name-recognition of politicians from other countries is low, usually limited to leaders of big countries (e.g. Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron) or troublesome countries (e.g. Viktor Orbán). The European Parliament is a key forum for European-level democracy, but citizens can only vote for parties in their own countries and have a hard time following or understanding the political process.

Those in favour of a more integrated Europe, or simply a more democratic one, see many reasons for the promotion of a *demos*, that would support the European project. As a long-time researcher of European borderlands, I have often wondered whether they could be potential sites for the creation of European transboundary political spaces, and what it would take to make that happen.

While not centre to the B-SHAPES project, the time spent on planning and carrying out the research yielded ample opportunity to collect material and reflect on these questions. The aim of this chapter is to present these thoughts, using examples from B-SHAPES and beyond.

Politicians: "can't live with them, can't live without them"

Who are the politicians in borderlands? In my role as a researcher of borderlanders, I have encountered many professionals and citizens who in different ways dealing with cross-border issues without seeing those as political or being able to identify themselves or others as borderlands politicians. Let me share three examples.

I started researching how borderlands are governed and functioned in 2009, at the border between Hungary and Slovakia. Since the end of World War I, when the river Danube became the border between Hungary and Czechoslovakia, this has been a borderland characterized by small villages, peripherality, agriculture, and the presence of ethnic minorities. The latter comprises especially the relatively

large community of Hungarian-speakers on the Slovak side. Around the larger towns of Esztergom, Stúrovo, Komárno and Komárom, three cross-border organizations had been formed that had picked my academic interest: Ister-Granum EGTC, the PonsDanubii EGTC and the Hídverő Association. Driving around in this historically rich place and interviewing dozens of mayors of settlement, ranging in size from 500 to a couple of thousand, it struck me how often they would talk about "politicians" as someone else. One mayor, who was on his fourth or fifth term as directly elected leader of his small town, told me straight that if only "politicians" would leave them alone and let them do their daily work in the region they would be able to solve their policy problems, Hungarians and Slovaks together. It was obvious that he did not want to include himself in the "political" class despite being democratically elected within the multi-level political system. Instead, "politicians" were those at the national level.

Throughout my various border-related projects I have read through thousands of text pages produced by the various European Union institutions and their counterparts in member states. On websites, reports, brochures, pamphlets and other material, the word "policymaker" seem to be among the most popular ones for referring to actors in the cross-border space. But who are those who make policy? Both public administration employees and elected officials clearly fit the label of "policymaker", but also leaders from NGOs, special interest representations, private sector, in so far that they take organized part in committees, consultations or other interactions with legislative and implementing European bodies. Overuse of the word policymaker tends to overshadow the importance of those who are *actually* chosen by the people to make decisions that concern all of us in democratic societies.

Even more than grey literature stemming from institutions, I have read scholarly texts by the research community, to which I myself belong. This community tends to have a broad conception of who matters when it comes to governance in borderlands. That is not incorrect. However, talking to, interviewing, and surveying, a broad palette of professional roles might also lead to confusion around who decides. This has been pointed out by scholars who are interested in the twinning processes of technocratisation and de-politicizing. The latter term can have different meanings, but in the way it is thought of here, it means when certain policy issues or geopolitical areas are portrayed as if there were no interest differences or conflicts of interests, and as if the democratic process of electing representatives did not really matter as long as we focus on "de facto" problems.

Truth is, there *are* politicians in the border regions, and it is important to know who they are and what they can do. You might think you "can't live with them", but, at least in a democracy, "you can't live without them" either.

Politicians are elected officials

An easy way to decide whether someone is a politician in the borderland is to establish whether he or she has been elected, either directly by citizens (as mayors are in some systems) or through representative elections. This is not to deny that globally there are people holding elected positions that may not be usually associated with the label politician, such as sheriffs in the United States. However, these marginal phenomena are even more so in Europe and hence does not destroy the value of the above rule-of-thumb definition.

In European borderlands there are many politicians with this definition, but who counts also depends on how you define the borderland itself.

Usually there are some municipalities and regions that virtually everybody considers part of the border region. These are usually located directly at the border or very close (as perceived by citizens) to the border and elected officials in those municipalities and regions could all be seen as borderland politicians.

Another definition are those territories which have established cross-border organizations (EGTCs, Euregios, Euroregions etc). These may cover contiguous land territories or be unevenly shapes with "white spaces" depending on the membership profile. People who serve on town councils and regional boards of these municipalities and regions are all politicians with a direct stake in the development of the borderland. Some countries, such as Germany and Austria, divide the lower levels into more than one step. (The European system for territorial division, NUTS and LAU, recognizes five levels of hierarchical government.) For instance, in the Oresund region, which was studied in B-SHAPES, there is an organization called Greater Copenhagen, which comprises two Swedish regions (Scania and Halland) and all of Sjaelland. In total 89 municipalities are part. Politicians from 19 of those municipalities and regions sit on the Executive Board. Those politicians have more knowledge and direct say in the borderland development, but even those who are not on the Executive Board are politicians in the borderland.

These cross-border organizations usually have executive committees and councils with representation from comprising members. Applying a narrower definition, only those politicians sitting in those bodies or in other way directly taking part in cross-border cooperation activities would count.

The national level also comprises politicians, members of parliament, from the regions at the border. To some extent they are also stakeholder politicians, especially since national decisions often are of crucial importance for borderlands, such as for border crossing management or for large infrastructure decisions.

Another election of increasing importance is the election to the European parliament. In B-SHAPES we followed the election campaigns in May and early June 2024. Most commonly, voters vote in a single national election district in the European elections. (Belgium, Ireland, Germany, Italy and Poland are exceptions). But even with those single constituency models, some candidates in the list usually

come from borderlands, especially since parties tend to strive for geographic diversity on their candidate lists.

Parties and party representatives in borderlands

One can say that parties are active in all borderlands. But one can also say that parties are active in no borderlands. Political party systems gravitate towards the centres of national politics. There are no political parties that claim entire borderlands, spanning a national border, as their home turf.

We know remarkably little of political parties in borderlands. For reasons not entirely clear to me, it has not been a topic that has caught the attention of researchers or research funding. In trying to understand parties and party representatives in borderlands, one therefore must start nearly from scratch and analytically decide how to approach the topic.

One way to do this is to approach it from a demand/supply perspective. On the demand side, researchers can study how voters behave in borderlands. One point that has received some interest is whether borderlands tend to embrace openness and de-bordering policies, or if they may indeed be hotbeds for radical right attitudes to border as protection or as something that should be open mainly for those of similar ethnic affinity.

For instance, the borderlands of Hungary may be an interesting case. The erosion of democracy in Hungary, under the leadership of prime minister Viktor Orbán, is well documented to the extent that it has become a poster child for the term 'democratic backsliding'. The term refers to increasing deficits in the institutional structure of democracy, and several measurements of democracy indicate a world-wide trend of weakened democratic structures and autocracy. Scholars have also noted the peculiar development of the party Fidesz, the left-to- right transfer of which intensified after coming into power in 2010 and on many policy positions overtook the place of the party Jobbik as the far-most right-wing party. The two parties have competed when it comes to issues like resisting immigration and playing on national sentiments. Despite the international focus on Hungary's decreased quality of democracy, there has been much less scholarly attention to effects of backsliding on the sub-national level, or vice versa, i.e., the extent to which sub-national dynamics may impact national processes. Hungary has been an active promoter of cross-border cooperation, partly due to the existence of Hungarian-speaking minorities in neighbouring countries. At the same time, borders have in the government's nationalist discourse increasingly been used as symbolic and de facto manifestations of security-based policies. Hungarian borderlands are therefore sites suitable for investigating voter behaviour embedded in nationalist-oriented right-wing discourses.

One way to do this is to look at voting data from the two most recent elections. Hungary has a mixed voting system for a one-chamber parliament, where about half of the seats are awarded through a first-past-the-post majority system and about half through proportional party list systems. The share allocated through first-past-the post system was increased before the 2014 election, which is to the advantage of the largest party. In the local government elections that were held in 2019, the biggest surprise was the left part of the opposition regaining hold of Budapest and most of its district, while a major part of the rest of the country stayed in Fidesz's hands. In the 2022 elections Fidesz won 135 out of the 199 seats in parliament, thereby winning a fourth consecutive term with a two-third parliamentary majority. The united alliance of five opposition parties gained 57 seats and the new far-right party "Our homeland" 5.

The results in borderlands are not straight-forward to measure, since the way voting districts are drawn, they sometimes include territory quite far from the border. To see what happens directly at the border I have therefore looked at voting results for single mandates at small settlements located at the border at a place where there is *a border crossing*. This follows the logic that although a lot of settlements are located at borders, many of them are located next to a river or field without crossing opportunity. This is manageable since several of the borders have relatively few crossing points. There are for instance only 4 crossings at the Hungarian - Ukrainian border, and 3 each to Serbia and Croatia, respectively. The number of crossings to the other countries are higher, but still limited, for instance 12 to Romania, and 18 to Slovakia. In 2018, there was very strong performances of either Fidesz or Jobbik in these areas, having performances that go beyond their national results. In the 2022 elections, Jobbik was part of the opposition alliance, complicating the possibility to compare results. However, it was clear again that the right side of the spectrum had an overall strong result. In the case of Hungarian borderlands, studies of voter behaviour therefore seem to support the idea that voters tend to vote for parties with protectionist instances.

Starting from the supply side of politics, one would look at how parties and party representatives behave in borderlands. In the B-SHAPES project, we did talk to party representatives using the European Union Parliament Elections of 2024 as our focal point. For instance, in Denmark and Sweden, we looked at the candidate lists and contacted those politicians who lived in the borderland. This entailed a different dynamic on the two sides. In Sweden, we judged those living in the counties of Scania and the region of Halland to be borderlanders, since those two counties are part of the most important cross-border cooperation across the Oresund strait. However, politicians in Halland turned out not to have thought of themselves as borderlanders at all before. In Denmark, the island of Sjaelland is the home of the national centre of politics (Copenhagen), meaning that many of the candidates currently resided there. We therefore had to go deeper into the biographies of candidates to try to focus on those with longer ties to the capital region. We also included the island of Bornholm as a borderland.

Cross-border cooperation between political parties

When we talk about cross-border cooperation we usually think about municipal and regional cooperation that has resulted in some sort of institutional formation. For instance, a committee is formed with representatives of the municipalities on each side of the border. These representatives usually have party affiliations, although they may also be independent, especially if they serve as mayors in some contexts. They can also be unelected public administration officials.

However, these cross-border cooperation bodies, which have received quite significant scrutiny from scholars, are usually not forums that serve well for the formation of party bonds across borders. Issues tend to be technical, the space depoliticized in the sense that issues of power, conflicts of interests based on ideology, is disregarded in favor of trying to reach technical consensus around shared common grounds. They also only involve a small part of all politicians elected for various levels in the borderlands.

Instead, what would be of interest is to patterns of political parties reaching out to each other in borderlands. Since the research in this area, the primary probing questions would be to see *who talks with whom*, *for what purpose* and *to what extent.*

Regarding the first question, who talks with whom, this should not cause difficulties in theory. It should be easy to identify sister parties as members of the European parliament elected through national parties sit together in eight political groups in the European Parliament. But in practice, it is not always obvious with which parties there would be good rapport. This is because political groups in the EP are even more heterogeneous than national parties, and sometimes there is no party from the neighbouring country in the same political group.

In B-SHAPES we have received examples of party representatives feeling closer to other parties than those of their own grouping in the EP. For instance, a French candidate from the right-wing Les Républicains said 'I knew my position on the list, I accompanied the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) candidate from Baden-Württemberg, and we spent a day together. It's part of the job.' One candidate from the French liberal Renew Party admitted that she was more inclined towards working and collaborating with candidates from the centre-right CDU party, despite being officially a member of the Renew alliance. She indicated that she did not really understand the liberal Members of the European Parliament and that she felt much closer to the CDU as the German conservative party. This is particularly relevant in the French context where traditional parties more or less disappeared after the election of Emanuel Macron, though as mentioned, a German Green candidate still felt very close to the French Green part.

Overall, it was pointed out multiple times during the B-SHAPES project time that it is difficult to identify a matching party on the other side of ta border, especially in continental Europe. The reasons range from Social Democracy being

quite weak in Poland and Czechia, generally greater religiosity in Poland than in Czechia and Germany and lack of specific contacts.

On the other hand, there are also contexts and instances of cooperation. In the Nordic region, there are long-standing traditions and established channels between some parties, e.g. social democrat and leftist parties, and some centre-right parties. These established channels make it easier for politicians in borderlands to find and reach out to each other.

Rallying around perceived needs to counter "the other side", also drives parties both on the right and the left to find partners. In one of our study regions, the Hungarian borderlands, cross-border linkages are particularly important because of the presence of significant Hungarian minorities across the borders with neighbouring states. A Hungarian candidate listed several European parties with which his party, Our Homeland Movement, had been building ties in recent years. According to this candidate, national-right-wing parties may have more difficulties finding similar parties, since some national antagonisms or national-identity issues may appear as obstacles, but that this to some extent had been overcome.

At the same time, for ideological reasons the candidate found it important not to split Hungarian diaspora communities, and since the Hungarian ruling Fidesz party has "monopolized" ethnic Hungarian parties in neighbouring countries, it could be harmful to interfere in that. Several other interviewees at the Hungarian-Slovak borderland mentioned coordination between Slovak and Hungarian parties, and the desire among locals to counter the danger of the assimilation of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia. A concrete example is a committee under the Federal Union of European Nationalities that includes ethnic Hungarian parties. The leaders of the latter – including that of the Hungarian Alliance – had signed a joint agreement ahead of the elections, ensuring mutual support.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the left side, the perception of growing and dangerous right-wing extremism is a reason to cooperate. On the German and Polish sides of the Polish-German-Czech border region, right-wing extremism was mentioned by all interviewees of centre-left and left parties. This was mentioned as a reason to cooperate across party lines within Germany. One interviewee said her region had a key role in resisting right wing extremism, as there are political forces that can bring people together against the right, while another also noted that the mainstream parties had to work together to resist the right. However, this put his left-wing party (Die Linke) in a difficult position because in these demonstrations, they were associating themselves with other parties in government that had failed people and caused some of the current problems. Conversely, interviewees from the AfD that is shunned by the other parties criticised that other parties would not work with them even on topics where consensus should be possible, e.g. on school meals or cross-border infrastructure development. There is an added complication insofar as the AfD is perceived in Poland not only as a right-wing party but as an anti-Polish party.

On the second question, for what purpose politicians talk with each other, we have compiled a list of different practices based on the B-SHAPES results.

Learning: This means that party representatives meet each other to learn from each other. That can in relation to policy and/or the art of campaigning/conducting politics. A party may believe that their sister-party is better at doing something, like outreach activities. Such meetings may be initiated bottom-up or happen within the structures that the parties generally have for region-specific (e.g. Nordic) and European) cooperation or be arranged spontaneously.

Joint material/campaigns: Representatives of parties write joint op-eds that are published in outlets read at both sides of a border (less usual) or published simultaneously in two different newspapers, on each side of the border. This has for instance happened at the Danish-Swedish Oresund border region.

Joint events: Parties can arrange joint events or public events. During the running-up to the European elections in 2024, a debate was arranged on the ferry going back and forth between Helsingborg and Helsingør (a 20-minute ferry ride between Sweden and Denmark). A Hungarian politician interviewed for the B-SHAPES project had partaken in three cross-border roundtables, two in Romania and one in Slovakia. The latter should be understood in the context of Hungary having Hungarian-speaking diasporas in these countries, which takes us to the next category.

Campaigning among diaspora/minorities: Borderlands frequently are the home to people who have ties to the other side. This can be in the form of language, when people for historical reasons live in one country but speak the language of the other. But it can also be a result of economic pull-push factors, when citizens have moved to or temporarily reside in another country. At the times of national elections, some politicians are motivated to reach out to these communities and gain their support, especially if they have voting rights combined with inclinations to vote.

This type of campaigning can be a solo endeavour but can also be a result of cooperation between parties. In the B-SHAPES research this sometimes came up in passing in fieldwork interviews or the policy workshops and seminars we conducted with stakeholders. For instance, at the Swedish-Finnish northern border, Swedish parties on the left helped Finnish parties on the left to arrange tours in Swedish towns at the times of elections in Swedish.

Another example is a Hungarian border town representative who first said that he and his party were not coordinating any campaigns in a cross-border manner. He later mentioned that some candidates on both sides had approached his party to come and participate in their local campaigns, but they did not want to intervene in the affairs of other settlements and regions. On the Slovak side, there is limited cooperation with Austrian parties and when it happens it is primarily after elections, but one candidate's campaign actively engaged with regional stakeholders in border areas, tailoring messages to address local challenges and opportunities.

	Disjointed / potentially divisive	Potentially uniting
One-sided	*Campaigning among diaspora and minorities*	*Learning*
In collaboration		*Joint events* *Joint materials (e.g. op-eds, campaign leaflets)* *Campaigning among diaspora and minorities*

Figure 1: Typology of cross-border party collaboration (author's elaboration).

To sum up and to answer the third question, to what extent talking takes place; there is evidence of sometimes lively exchanges between political parties of different countries, but these are not necessarily focused on the borderlands and do not go beyond fairly limited activities.

Can European political spaces be created in borderlands?

European borderlands hold an overlooked potential for the creation of political spaces capable of mitigating the lack of a European *demos*.

Throughout the B-SHAPES project research and outreach activities, we have found examples of politicians reaching out and cooperating with each other in borderlands. If scaled up, this would enhance understandings of each other's lived realities, and it could also potentially affect attitudes to the larger European community, i.e. the European Union. These lived realities already incorporate a European dimension, shaped by shared exposure to the same European legislative and normative influences across borders.

We do not say that this is the case at the moment, or that it is easy. The creation of a European demos, in any form, is always going to be difficult, since it must compete with much more salient communities such as the nation or a particular region. For instance, the European parliamentary election in 2024 was still very much carried out against the relief of national debates. Local and national elections do not "spill over" into the other side. But there are practices that could be taken up by others or scaled up by those who practice them. It is also notable that many European countries have lively and dynamic party landscapes, with multiple parties – often small and sometimes local. These may benefit or change through cooperation with the other side.

Finally, I acknowledge that readers may or may not agree with the idea that creation of a European demos, or cross-border political spaces, should happen. Here, I simply wanted to lay out, from the vantage point of someone having had many encounters with people in borderland who want what they believe is the best

for their region regardless of national borders, whether it would be possible and what it would take.

Minorities an Underused Resource? Personal Reflections on Policies for Borderlands

Martin Klatt

This chapter aims to present the results of our work with national minorities in borderlands, through the lens of how this specific community of borderlanders can be perceived as an asset when designing policies to improve regional development strategies.

It introduces the topic and its scope, then presents the institutional settings and challenges of governance of national minorities and regional development and finally suggests different models of institutional alignment that would ensure better inclusion of national minorities in borderlands in the development and implementation of regional development strategies.

B-SHAPES focused on how borders shape borderlanders' perceptions of societies when belonging to a national minority community. Data were collected in five European border regions: four Schengen borderlands (Denmark–Germany, Czechia–Poland, Hungary–Slovakia, Austria–Italy) and one external borderland (Greece–Bulgaria–Türkiye).

Our informers were young people (16–30) belonging to a borderland minority, ranging from high school and university students to activists in minority NGOs and other engaged borderland youth. Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, policy workshops, as well as creative zine-making workshops. In total, about 100 informers contributed to these activities.

A media analysis of minority-language media reporting on "borders" during crisis periods (the migration crisis of 2015–16 and the Covid-19 pandemic) underpinned these narratives. Results were published in two reports to the European Commission (Engl et al. 2024, 2025) and in a scientific article (Nicolson et al. 2025).

For this chapter, the collected data are framed to reflect how national minorities in borderlands could be included as an asset to regional development, both through their specific linguistic and cultural competencies and through their lived understanding of being borderlanders. This perspective is situated within existing research on borderland regional development and the institutional frameworks of minority governance and regional development governance.

Regional development: why and how?

Economic development is considered a human aim and integral part of modern society. Access to human capital, physical capital and technology are considered the key determinants to growth and development (Acemoglu and Robinson 2010, 2). Economic geography lays focus on natural amenities, such as profitable natural resource exploitation, the availability of water and navigable waterways as well as irrigable and fertile farmlands, as key factors to secure economic development in geographically defined regions, influencing population growth, employment and per capita income (Kim, Marcouiller, and Deller 2005, 275).

These factors alone do not explain different development success, though. They are influenced by human action – which can be summarized as economic policies. Bordering processes in modernizing states went hand in hand with trade controls, duties, and tariffs as well as non-tariff trade barriers in regulation and standards, impacting development especially in borderlands. Investment in infrastructure, especially railways and ports, was a means to strengthen development in certain areas. Such policies, while not specifically targeted at national minorities, have had an impact on societies, their composition, internal migration and linguistic harmonization.

While infrastructure investments such as canals, ports, railways, roads have dominated regional development policies until the 1980s, increasingly soft infrastructure as schools, higher education institutions, telecommunication and public services have entered the scene, with the aim to level up and guarantee equal living conditions and opportunities. At present, Regional Innovation Systems and Smart Specialization are in trend (Gonzales-Lopez and Asheim 2020). Regional Innovation Systems are organized networks between private enterprises, policy makers, and higher education and research institutions. Smart Specialization is a strategy to define strengths and opportunities of a region and then strategically support their development and expansion. Increased regional competitiveness is the aim, together with increasing a region's quality of life. These strategies aim to increase regional competitiveness in a globalized world – how does that impact regional diversity and the preservation or promotion of minority culture beyond heritage tourism? This challenge can be answered by including minority self-governance in regional development institutions.

National minorities and regional development in borderlands

But why national minorities? National minorities are an inherent part of European heritage. According to the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), an interest organization, Europe is the home of more than 400 autochthonous minority communities, numbering more than 100 million

people. Within the European Union, there are more than 50 million EU citizens belonging to a national minority (Autochthonous minorities in Europe, accessed 17 Oct 2025).

Autochthonous national minorities often live in peripheral regions of a state. Historic processes of nationalization and colonization originated in central regions of the dominant national group and expanded into the periphery in the cause of state expansion, state modernization and state policies of linguistic, cultural and ethnic homogenization. Ethnic as well as indigenous groups may have escaped such homogenization processes because of their peripheral, geographically isolated position. Examples are the Basque, Ladins in Tyrol, Frisians in the Netherlands and Germany, Sorbs in Germany, Gaelic speakers in Scotland and Ireland, but also the Sami in Northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and Northeastern Russia, the only indigenous people residing in the Europea Union. Here, peripherality might have been a factor that prevented linguistic and cultural assimilation into a dominant culture, which frequently happened in more developed regions of a historically multi-ethnic or multilingual state.

Furthermore, many national minorities in Europe are the product of historical processes of de- and re-bordering, where new borders have divided historic settlement areas of ethno-cultural groups. This applies to all the border regions assessed in B-SHAPES (Denmark-Germany, Poland-Czechia, Hungary-Slovakia, Austria-Italy, Bulgaria-Greece-Turkey), with the contemporary border being a result of the post WW I peace order. The newly erected borders have had a great impact on the people residing in these borderlands. Regions changed state, cutting socioeconomic ties to the old state, while these ties to the new state still had to be developed. New borders were not universally recognized but challenged by states or/and parts of the concerned regional population, especially hitherto dominant groups having become national minorities. This did not result in open border approaches by the concerned states, inhibiting the continuation of cross-border economic ties.

European integration's intention has been to change these processes by de-bordering. The Common Market and the Schengen regime of open borders have opened for new opportunities of cross-border interaction. This has also opened for a renewed focus on national minorities in borderlands and their bilingual and bicultural competencies. Inclusion of national minorities into regional development strategies and their implementation is not just advisable because of these competencies, though. Article 15 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities declares that "The Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them." The explanatory report specifically mentions that states should promote measures "involving these persons in the preparation, implementation and assessment of national and regional development plans and programmes likely to affect them directly" as well as "undertaking studies, in

conjunction with these persons, to assess the possible impact on them of projected development activities" (Council of Europe 1995, 23). Article 15 summarizes what is considered social and economic inclusion. The explanatory report, though, moves away from general inclusion of national minorities, restricting national minorities' involvement in regional development plans to those likely to affect national minorities directly, in fact a national minority impact assessment. Hereby, national minorities can easily be reduced to objects suffering from certain development plans and projects. They are not perceived as fully equal, empowered citizens and capacity builders of regional development.

Autochthonous national minorities are recognized in most European countries. Council of Europe legal frameworks such as the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1998) and the *European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages* (1992) have supported national minorities in preserving and developing their cultural and linguistic identity. The European Union, though, has not yet accepted a specific responsibility in protecting and developing the national minorities residing in its member states. The FUEN-sponsored Minority Safepack Initiative has so far failed to be adopted. Nevertheless, national minorities are agents in European politics and policies: The European Free Alliance (EFA) representing regional and minority parties is represented in the European Parliament, and minority regions with territorial autonomy as the Catalans and Basks in Spain and the Germans in South Tyrol (Italy) and Belgium have played important roles in the Committee of Regions. Furthermore, research has acknowledged the capacity of national minorities as political agents in border regions (Klatt 2017) and as potential contributors to regional development (Malloy 2010). Furthermore, a specific case study based on the experiences of Interreg in the Romanian-Hungarian and Danish-German border region demonstrates that this adds a new dimension to cross-border cooperation but also risks to reduce such cooperation to minority-kin state relations (Neagu and Klatt 2025).

Unfortunately, the reduction of national minorities into objects of policy instead of active policy agents, is still the case in borderlands with weak institutional settings (lack of Institutional Thickness), especially regarding minority institutions. While territorial autonomy (as in Catalunya, the Basque Country, South Tyrol) ensures minority inclusion in relevant institutions of development, this is not necessarily the case in border regions with national minorities enjoying a form of non-territorial autonomy, which basically means self-governing of their own cultural affairs. This is standard in most European minority regions, including those object to fieldwork in B-SHAPES: our information is based on data from South Tyrol (territorial autonomy), Schleswig (DK-DE), Cieszyn/Cesky Tesin (PL-CZ), Danube river valley (HU-SK) and Western Thrace (GR-TR), which all have some form of minority cultural self-governance; even though under very strenuous conditions for the Turkish minority in Greece.

To sum up, present institutions of minority self-government and the governance of regional development are not aligned. This leads to national minorities been

overseen as assets and agents of cross-border regional development, risking losing an important dimension which should be included in development strategies and their implementation.

Non-territorial autonomy as the most common framework for minority self-governance in Europe

Non-territorial autonomy (NTA) is widely seen as an instrument to govern cultural and linguistic diversity to secure autochthonous national minorities' cultural, linguistic, and educational rights. Securing these rights ensures social inclusion of national minorities within the framework of a nation- or multination-state. NTA institutions can range from elected minority councils, fully functioning minority parliaments, minority governments based on parliamentary election, to functional institutions or associations governing minority life. It can also be less formalized, with civil society organizations as private associations governing i.e. a minority kindergarten or a minority language theatre. The key point is that they govern aspects of the daily life as a minority and thereby serve the specific needs of the minority to live and preserve their special minority identity. Identity is here understood as ethno-cultural: language, minority culture and traditions, education. Economic policies and regional development, on the other hand, are not necessarily considered a task for non-territorial minority self-government.

Therefore, it is necessary to scrutinize the challenge of aligning vertical and horizontal governance of regional development with national minority self-governance in border regions, where such national minorities live. But let's take a closer look at the institutional setup of regional development planning strategies.

It is consensus here that economic institutions are a key variable for successful development (Acemoglu and Robinson 2010). A key factor is *institutional thickness*. Hereby is meant a local institutional presence of economic and political institutions, and the level of interaction between the relevant organizations and stakeholders as well as their mutual awareness of involvement in a joint effort to develop a region (Zukauskaite, Trippl, and Plechero 2017). Usually, economic institutions involved in the governance of regional development are situated in national and regional administrations (primarily ministries and agencies) and stakeholder interest organizations as chambers of industry or similar. Therefore, contrary to a territorial autonomy case as South Tyrol, where regional self-government by the minority implies their inclusion in these institutions, there is no direct link between non-territorial autonomy-based minority self-government and regional development policymaking.

The key point is that NTA-institutions are non-territorial within a state: they are not governing a territory, but a minority living dispersed within this territory. Usually, NTA institutions are thus detached from the territorially defined

administration of a state, which is also responsible for making and implementing economic policies aimed to support regional development. This parallel setting poses a challenge: National minorities' as well as the state of residence's focus of minority politics are the separate, autonomous NTA institutions. Therefore, there is a high risk to exclude national minorities in economic institutions.

Concept in summary	Non-Territorial Autonomy Institutions	Regional development Institutions
	Minority school association	City council committee
	Cultural association	Regional council committee
	Health and social services (in minority language)	Business Chamber
	Minority Council	Development agency
	Minority liaison office	University Institute/Centre
	Minority Parliament	
	Possible contact points: ● Minority Business Association ● Elected minority politicians (either in minority parties or mainstream parties)	

Figure 1: NTA institutions and regional development institutions (author's elaboration)

This makes regional development and minority self-governance a complex issue. The perception of a region from being peripheral to being central decreases out-migration of especially younger, educated minority members and thus should incite national minorities' empowerment, as well as social and economic inclusion. At the same time, there is a tendency to cultural and linguistic assimilation in developed regions, incited by participation in higher education (usually in the dominant language of the state, if only for reasons of scale) and participation in the qualified labour market – which, often, functions in the dominant language of the state. More opportunities will also attract in-migration of non-minority population, furthermore, adding to incremental assimilation tendencies. Already in 2001, Adam Biscoe demonstrated this dilemma, when he argued that European policies to support regional cultural diversity amounted to symbolism in a project, which's primary aim is economic integration into a common market, which would entail harmonization also in the field of culture (Biscoe 2001). On the other hand, Urban development research maintains the importance of tolerance and cultural diversity

to create economically successful urban regions (Florida 2012; Nathan 2015; Suedekum, Wolf, and Blien 2014). To sum up, there is a consensus that diversity supports innovation and development, but the empiric evidence for this consensus is based on urban areas.

Key findings of B-SHAPES

How can national minorities become more involved to play a more active role in regional development, instigating a consensus that national minorities are an asset for a region opening for new opportunities? A key finding of B-SHAPES' field work in all five examined border regions is that borderlanders belonging to a borderland minority have a different perception of belonging than other citizens. By their linguistic, cultural, but also their personal (friends and family) ties they live cross-border lives, close to Oscar Martinez' perception of what he identified as transnational borderlanders (Martinez 1994). Our informants expressed an interest to use this special borderland identity in their private and professional lives, to engage with bridging cultural gaps between home- and kinstate. They perceive themselves as integrated into home state society, and flexibly adapting to ensure integration into kinstate society, if they have chosen to live there either temporarily or permanently. National minorities are characterized by a borderland identity. The direct impact of this identity on development opportunities is unknown, though, and has not yet been researched. Applying the knowledge of migration studies and the role of diversity in creating innovative spaces, we must assume that the special borderland minority identity is an asset with high potentials.

How, then, can borderland national minorities' competencies and their social networks contribute to enhance development and thereby retain minority members in or attract them to return to their home regions? There needs to be more awareness that the daily life of national minorities is connected to regional development. The traditional setting of minority cultural self-administration governs national minorities linguistic and cultural life, providing for minority education and community life. This is necessary for the social inclusion and sustainability of national minorities. Still, a minority's sustainability is also highly dependent on the economic conditions of the region of residence. Therefore, minority self-government entails a risk: the minority has secured institutional stability, while the majority praise their generous concessions to the minority. This does not automatically lead to inclusion of the minority in state or regional agency within regional development policies, though. Therefore, the organization of administrative structures in regions populated by national minorities should include channels for minority participation in the design, application and implementation of regional development strategies and policies, additional to existing cultural self-administration structures.

One way to achieve this are special regional growth forums including minority representatives. The European Cohesion Policy as a key element of promoting regional development should include minority institutions in the process of designing and implementing cohesion policies, especially in Interreg, the European Union funding scheme for cross-border cooperation. This would automatically create a new narrative of national minorities as an asset in regional development, easing minority-majority relations in areas of tension and encouraging diversity, a key factor to ensure innovation and development also in peripheral regions.

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Borderlands as Learning Spaces: The case of *Through the Prism of Borders*

Katia Anguelova, Angelika Burtscher and Marion Oberhofer

European borders are not merely geopolitical demarcations; they are complex socio-cultural processes that shape identities, memories, and political imaginaries. In contemporary Border Studies, the notion of the border has shifted from a static line to a dynamic threshold—a space of encounter, negotiation, and transformation. This conceptual shift opens up new possibilities for understanding borders not only through political science, geography or anthropology but also through artistic research.

Artistic practices, particularly those embedded in collaborative and site-specific contexts, offer a unique epistemological lens for engaging with borderlands. They do not simply represent border realities; they enact them. In this sense, art becomes a method—a way of knowing, sensing, and intervening in the social fabric of border regions. Hannah Arendt's concept of the "public realm" as the space where individuals appear before one another through speech and action is particularly relevant here. Artistic interventions in borderlands create such spaces of appearance, where suppressed narratives and marginalised voices can be made visible and audible. Arendt argues that political agency arises from the capacity to act in concert and to disclose oneself in public; art, in this context, becomes a form of political action that resists invisibility and fosters recognition.

Chiara Brambilla's borderscaping approach further illuminates the role of art in border contexts. She argues: "Artistic practices provide a chance for an effective re-reading of the conflict-based determinacy of borders, grasping their potential for highlighting the character of borders as places of identification (belonging) and transformation (becoming), and creating a way to reverse the state-centric perspective and give centrality to borders and novel forms of political agency." This perspective challenges the dominant border spectacle and foregrounds the political-aesthetic nexus as a site of resistance and reimagination.

The artistic projects developed and produced in the context of *Through the Prism of Borders,* the theme developed by the Cooperative for Culture and Design Production Lungomare for the B-SHAPES project, are not only artistic interventions but also methodological experiments. They show how art can generate new forms of public discourse, activate historical memory, relate places to each other and provoke institutional reflection—functions that are directly relevant to policy innovation.

Art as a tool for disrupting barriers

The artists involved in the project and invited by us as curators spent time in two borderlands: the Czech-Polish border, specifically the divided city of Cieszyn / Český Těšín, and Europe's southeasternmost border region encompassing Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. This immersive engagement entailed listening to the experiences of borderlanders, understanding their perceptions of the border and its influence on their daily lives and exploring what has changed over the years and how residents imagine their future in these specific places. They encountered people in their everyday daily environment—at bars, workplaces, and homes—gradually building relationships founded on listening and trust. The artists also collaborated with researchers on site, delving into the history of the borderlands through researching in state and regional archives, visiting local museums, and participating in events and rituals shaped by local traditions. Some artists additionally engaged with activists who critically examine border demarcations and their consequences for the legal movement of people across territories, as well as the rights that exist on one side of the border but are absent on the other. Also walking as a research practice was used by the artists, walking becomes an embodied method that mobilizes perception, attention and encounter.

Working on-site and exchanging perspectives, knowledge, and lived experiences requires continuously questioning both the present and historical consequences of border demarcations, and considering how borders can move toward the centre of discourse—ensuring they do not become forgotten territories but rather serve as opportunities to rethink relations across Europe, incorporating the histories, needs, and desires of borderlanders themselves. As Piero Zanini articulates in his essay in the volume, which accompanies our artistic and curatorial research Through the Prism of Borders - Beyond the Threshold: Art and Spaces In Between: "On the border, something takes measure of something else, therein ending together. The fact that things end together suggests that in this ending, something is at work concerning – at the same time and virtually in a multiplicity of ways – the articulation between one thing and another. Even though it sets out from circumstances specific to their ending – or non-ending – in the proximity that is thus created, it happens in such a way that they "measure together," they interpret together, along with our hopes, our doubts, our fears and our desires. That they are interdependent."

In this sense, art possesses the capacity to build temporary relations, probing one or more specific aspects that characterize the many intertwined lives, stories, and perceptions shaped by borders. Art can create a narrative framework that engages a wider public through an aesthetic approach—one that not only awakens different emotions in each viewer but also has the power to connect biographies, experiences, and hidden traumas beyond the confines of rigid categorization. Art offers the possibility of inviting audiences to distance themselves from rigid structures, dogmas, and unidimensional historical perspectives, ensuring that we

do not exclude people and experiences that constitute integral parts of our shared history and daily life. In this way, art can be understood as a tool for disrupting barriers and inviting new ways of seeing and feeling—free from preconceptions.

Artistic projects

Sound Match (2025), developed by Zorka Wollny and Martin Dytko in the divided city of Cieszyn / Český Těšín, does not reenact history but listens to its reverberations. Through a co-creative soundscape composed with young adults from both sides of the Czech–Polish border, the project reveals how borders resonate in everyday life—not as fixed divisions but as fluid spaces of coexistence, memory, and political demand. The inclusion of more-than-human voices—bird calls, river sounds, radio static—further expands the borderland as a multispecies zone of negotiation and shared futures.

The Travelling Monument (2025) by Boris Missirkov and Georgi Bogdanov interrogates the politics of commemoration. By proposing a counter-monument to those who died attempting to flee the Eastern Bloc, the artists challenge the selective memory of state institutions. Their work, which includes archival footage and panoramic photographs of escape routes, transforms the landscape into a sensitive archive—a site where history is not monumentalised but contested and reimagined. The monument, fragmented and suspended, resists closure and invites reflection on absence, loss, and the politics of visibility. Through this project, the artists open a space for confronting the legacies of violence embedded in this landscape and the forms of trauma that, despite their significance, remain rarely addressed. In doing so, the artists not only challenge institutional amnesia but also interrogate the power structures underpinning the selection of who is deemed worthy of commemoration. Their work thus operates as a form of counter-memory that reconfigures the relationship between power, remembrance, and territory.

Ivan Moudov's Border Flowers (2025), controversially removed from the National History Museum in Sofia, exemplifies the disruptive potential of art in public space. Composed of rubbish collected along the Bulgarian–Turkish border, the installation provoked discomfort and debate, exposing the tension between institutional representation and lived reality. The museum's decision to remove the work, and the artist's subsequent withdrawal of his other pieces, underscores the fragility of cultural institutions when confronted with dissenting narratives. Yet it is precisely this friction that reveals the value of artistic research for policy: it acts as a societal barometer, indicating where tensions lie and where dialogue is needed and emergent priorities in border regions.

In Anna de Manincor's film The Answer is Out There (2025), shot in the sparsely inhabited region of Strandja, the border dissolves through the dense forest that characterises this territory. If humans had not built the 300 km long fence that divides Bulgaria and Europe from Turkey, the landscape would connect not only

an intertwined history but also a space that has grown together over many years. The work invites to reconsider borderlands not as barriers but as spaces of exchange, shared memory, and coexistence between humans and non-humans. Anna de Manincor provides a human and emotional depth to the understanding of borders, revealing how fragile or undocumented individuals are often excluded from official narratives. The process of filming—based on encounters, listening, and collaboration—becomes itself a form of field research that blurs the line between art and social inquiry. Moreover, the practice of "borderwalks"—walking and observing the border through direct experience—emerges as a powerful tool for territorial studies, fostering a deeper awareness of Europe's peripheral yet symbolically central spaces.

Traces of the Past, Ghost of the Future (2025) by Esra Ersen explores the close connections between personal and collective identities through the lens of borders—understood both in their geographical-territorial dimension and as elements that generate narratives of belonging and exclusion. Beginning with an examination of the Ottoman Empire's influence on Bulgaria, Ersen's research and artistic practice focus on the investigation and reproduction of covers of a series of sicil books—Ottoman administrative registers archived in the Sts. Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia—alongside six drawings with narratives drawn from both historical and contemporary sources. These drawings explore themes of human migration, whether voluntary or forced, and the cultural resilience of Turkish and Muslim minorities in the Balkans, foregrounding marginal stories often excluded from official historiography. Through this layered investigation of historical memory and diasporic identity, the work underscores a fundamental premise: that historical narratives depend fundamentally on perspective, and that power shapes the construction of collective memory.

Aesthetic-informed policymaking

These five artistic interventions and works, curated within the Horizon Europe project B-SHAPES, do not offer solutions, instead, they propose methods—ways of engaging with borderlands that are participatory, situated, and imaginative. They invite policymakers to move beyond technocratic approaches and to embrace the complexity of border realities. In doing so, they foster collaborative frameworks, where policy can be informed not only by data but by lived experience, affect, and aesthetic insight.

In conclusion, artistic research in European borderlands offers a powerful resource for rethinking policy. It enables the articulation of alternative imaginaries, fosters public engagement, and challenges the invisibility of marginalised communities. Through artistic practices, we can recognize that there is always more to learn from those living in border areas. By integrating such practices into

policymaking processes, Europe can begin to imagine its borders not as barriers but as thresholds—spaces of possibility, solidarity, and shared futures.

StoryMaps – a Resource for Inclusive Border Heritage

Fredriika Jakola-Ylilauri and Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola

The chapter focuses on inclusive border heritage as a policy objective and proposes StoryMaps as a tool for engaging with young people's perceptions of heritage. The study of borderland youth and their perceptions of border heritage is interesting and important for both academic and political reasons.

Many border regions are peripheralized, and their heritage management is defined from the state-adult-centric views. It is important to increase awareness about local and youth perceptions of borders as heritage. How borders constitute heritage, is there a common understanding of border heritage on different sites of the border and what a cross-border heritage means for young people? Understanding local and young people's perception of borders as heritage is important for creating more inclusive landscape and heritage policies underlined in European heritage and landscape conventions.

Inclusiveness and participation of different communities in heritage management are timely questions (Loromer 2024). The definition and management of cultural heritage is no longer merely at the hands of heritage professionals, but the engagement of various stakeholders is seen crucial for promoting inclusiveness in heritage management practices (Zhang et al. 2024: 56). The Council of Europe's Faro Convention (Council of Europe Treaty Series 2005/199)1, underlines the importance of "sharing responsibility" for cultural heritage management between citizens and authorities and facilitating participation of different groups of people (Colomer 2024). According to Faro Convention (Council of Europe Treaty Series 2005/199: 1), states should "recognize that every person has a right to engage with the cultural heritage of their choice, while

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[1] Most European Union and Schengen countries have signed the Faro Convention. Sweden makes an exception. Swedish National Heritage Board is taking a critical stance towards the broad definition of "Heritage Community" that would extend the definition of civil society in Sweden: "From the perspective of the Convention, civil society is not only comprised of groups within national borders but can also include groups or interests, both at a European and global level" (see Swedish National Heritage Board 2014: 98). The board also notes that participation is good objective, but it can be exclusive in practice. Participation of civil society actors may not always lead to inclusive perceptions of heritage.

respecting the rights and freedoms of others" and that everyone in society should be involved in the processes of defining and managing cultural heritage.

The chapter is based on B-SHAPES research on border landscapes as heritage that investigated citizen perceptions and narratives of heritage in a local borderland context and digitalized the collected narratives into publicly available cross-border StoryMaps (Prokkola et al. 2025: 5). The research was conducted with both young and senior citizens, and in this chapter the specific focus will be on elaborating the potential of StoryMaps for engaging with young people's perception of borders as heritage. Firstly, young citizens are a specific target group of European Union heritage policies (CE 2005). It is a cause of concern that young citizens have turned away from traditional forms of politics to alternative forms of civic engagement (Sloam 2013; Kitanova 2020). Youth, as future decision-makers, are vital to be engaged in heritage management, yet research shows that their participation remains at a relatively low level (Zhang et al. 2024: 56). Secondly, we found that engaging youngsters in research activities and place-based storytelling is often more challenging than with elderly citizens groups. Yet understanding youths' perceptions of borders, what and how young people perceive and value borderland heritage, is of uttermost importance for understanding the European cultural project, how past border conflicts are understood and how they can be reconsolidated to bridge societies. The perspective of youth also offers a window to emerging political border cultures.

The chapter is organized as follows. It first discusses StoryMaps and their potential for planning and engaging young people in the definition of local border heritage. Second, the chapter introduces B-SHAPES study of border landscapes as heritage with a specific focus on young border citizens and their participation in the production of StoryMaps. Our 'people's heritage' approach directs attention to meaningful places and elements of everyday landscape, including places that may not be officially recognized as sites that should be managed and preserved for future generations but are important for young people. Third, the chapter discusses and evaluates the potential and pitfalls of using StoryMaps in policy-making and inclusive management of border heritage.

StoryMaps as a participatory method

Story Maps are Web applications that are developed within different software's, the most well-known being the Environmental Service Research Institute's (Esri) Web-based GIS platform (ArcGIS Online). They combine interactive maps with multimedia content of text, photos, video, and audio to tell spatial and contextual narratives and digital stories. The StoryMaps therefore use geography to organize

and present information in an interactive manner (Esohe & Foster 2019) (Figure 1).
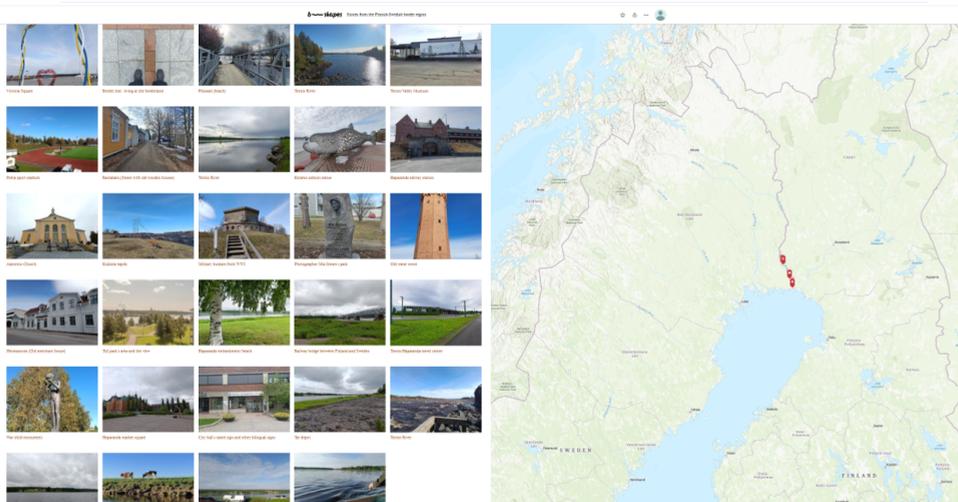

Figure 1. Screenshot of the B-SHAPES StoryMap from the Finnish-Swedish border region.

The power of maps and cartographic tools are often explained to lie in their ability to abstract and rationalize spaces (Culcasi 2025, Movik et al 2021), to help solve problems, make decisions and predict outcomes (Dangemond & Goodchild 2019: 3). Geographical mapping, a process of representing spatial information through maps, is commonly linked to quantitative GIS. Numerical results and data visualization of natural and built environment are usually perceived as accurate and relevant data sources for planning and development (see Goodchild 2018: 2). Since 1990's, however, qualitative and participatory GIS (PGIS) methods have been developed to offer more bottom-up and inclusive geospatial information for policymakers, planners and public more widely.[2] The methods were originally developed to engage marginalized groups into decision-making and provide community consultation in governmental processes especially in the context of urban land use planning (Marondedze et al. 2024, Brown 2012). The core idea in PGIS is to collect people's place-based ideas, opinions, and values and visualize these on the map (e.g. Brown & Weber 2013), highlighting that citizens are *experts* about their communities and environments in ways that go beyond official management and development plans (Jeannotte 2016).

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[2] In this text, participatory GIS methods are understood widely and separation between terms PGIS and PPGIS (Public Participatory GIS) is not made (cf. Brown & Weber 2013, Radil & Anderson 2018).

The StoryMaps and other participatory GIS methods offer a potential tool for inclusive heritage management, planning and conservation in regions. Firstly, the StoryMaps offer a method for representing the voices of groups under study and facilitating social impact. StoryMaps foster citizen participation and engagement of different groups by offering more open and bottom-up approach to local knowledge and perceptions through spatial storytelling. Furthermore, engaging local people in production of StoryMaps increases the locals' awareness of both research processes dealing with their everyday environments, and also how the research results are shared and communicated (Esohe et al. 2019; Dangermond & Goodchild 2019: 5).

Secondly, StoryMaps can complement and offer an alternative to more conventional dissemination methods such as reports and articles. The maps are often visually very appealing with vivid illustrations of collected results as they combine interactive elements and multimedia content (text, photos, video, and audio) with geodata (Dangermond & Goodchild 2019). A significant advantage for scientific communication is that the StoryMaps are Internet-based and easy to use with different devices such as computers, tablets and smartphones (Vojteková et al. 2021). What makes Internet-based StoryMaps particularly useful is their ability to recount multiple realities and to give voice to multiple groups simultaneously in one cartographic visual representation (Harris 2015: 41).

Thirdly, StoryMaps can be considered a particularly suitable method for engaging young people in research on border heritage. Young people are familiar with different technological devices and digital applications which make StoryMaps accessible for them. Thus, StoryMaps can work as a medium between youth and potentially abstract and distant topics of border heritage. As van Blerk (2023: 101) emphasize, alternative approaches are required to enable equity for young people as co-producers of knowledge exchange, and for creating impact beyond their immediate local contexts and surroundings. Co-created knowledge and understanding further enables more informed and inclusive decision-making and policy formation.

How we mapped border heritage with young people

To gain knowledge on youth's values and perceptions on border landscape as heritage, in our B-SHAPES research project we collected and analyzed place-based narratives and digitized the context into cross-border StoryMaps. Through StoryMaps, it was possible to identify and portray complex and layered meanings of border landscape and places which are particularly focal in the multidimensional and often contested contexts of border regions.

The collection of the place-based narratives of border as heritage was conducted by employing a mobile interview technique we termed borderwalks. Borderwalks

were conducted in small groups in four case border regions: Finnish-Swedish border, Swedish-Danish border, Danish-German border, and Bulgarian-Greece border (Prokkola et al. 2025). The youth were recruited by contacting local high schools, and it was emphasized that participation in research is voluntary and refusing to participate does not have any negative consequences. Youth were asked to select 3-5 natural or cultural sites from their immediate everyday surroundings which are meaningful for them and which they would like to sustain for future generations.
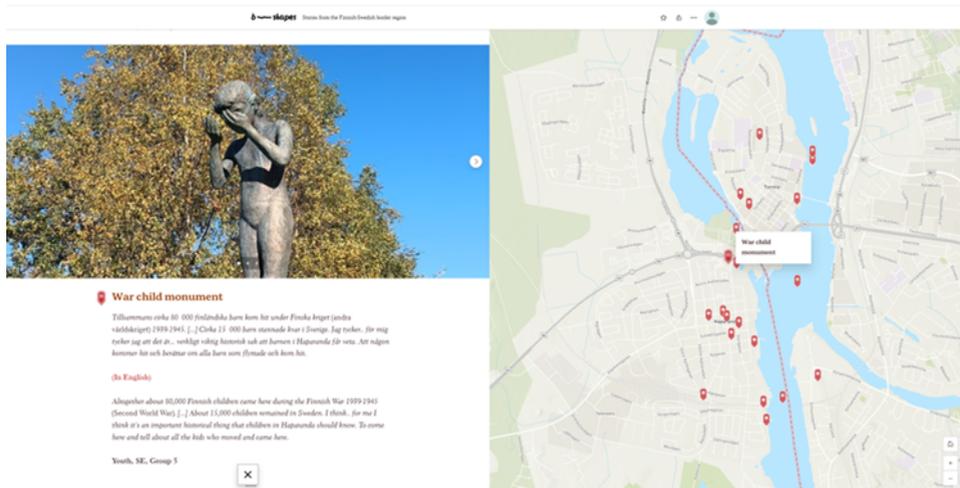

Figure 2. Borderwalk sites of the B-SHAPES cross-border StoryMap from the Finnish-Swedish border region. The map image is the intellectual property of Esri and is used herein under license. Copyright © 2025 Esri and its licensors. All rights reserved. Layout by Fredriika Jakola-Ylilauri.

While visiting the places and sites that young people had chosen, we were able to talk about the border landscapes and what is meaningful in it for them. The method was well suited for mapping meaningful places of the borderland, local knowledge of these places and the border, and to gain understanding of the meaning of borders and border heritage for youngsters. Youth were also involved in creating visual material for the StoryMaps by advising researchers about the pictures taken at the sites.

At the Finnish-Swedish border context, the borderwalks were followed by so-called StoryMap workshops in which the outlines for final StoryMaps were co-created with the participants (Prokkola et al. 2025). In these 2-hour workshops youth were asked to work with materials collected during the borderwalks and decide which sites and related stories and pictures would be included in the cross-border StoryMaps. Based on these selections, youth designed their own StoryMap posters which served as outlines for digital StoryMaps. Thus, the workshops

strengthened the validation of the results as participants were able to further reflect the borderwalks and collectively negotiate what is meaningful for them in their everyday environment. The implementation and digitalization of StoryMaps was done by researchers but it would be possible to engage citizens in this part as well.

The cross-border StoryMaps created in the B-SHAPES research can be read as specific border landscape narratives co-created by researchers and the border citizens. The StoryMaps' stories relate to the border and border landscape where research activity took place, but some are linked to discussion of European borders and borderlands more broadly. The cross-border StoryMaps thereby illustrate how the borders are part of the environment and landscape of local people and what they value and consider meaningful in their everyday surroundings.

An important finding regarding the Finnish-Swedish border region was that youth and senior groups selected many similar sites and places. Both groups selected sites that are most commonly known and meaningful for a wider audience, not only for them personally. Popular places for both groups included Victoria's square, Haparanda Stadshotell, Haparanda beach/embankment, Museum of Tornio Valley, War Child memorial, Mia Green's memorial and Hermansons. These places can be considered as part of the institutional border landscape narrative, and they are also important for local people's sense of place. Youth had also selected sites which were not directly related to border or border history such as Pikisaari beach, water towers, and sport stadium. Youth groups were not as fluent storytellers as the senior groups, yet they took active role in the selection of the sites for the borderwalk and were equally engaged in the StoryMap poster creation.

The digitalized cross-border StoryMaps show that local experiences and perceptions of borders heritage cannot be separated from the institutionalized tangible and intangible heritage, usually recognized and made visible in museums, monuments and touristic sites, but the two are inextricably connected. Public narratives, monuments and memorials of historical border events and border culture are an important part of the regional consciousness of local people. The connection between institutionalized and people's heritage perceptions highlights the importance of recognizing young people's perceptions of borders as heritage and how it impacts their sense of belonging in the local environment. The examination of the StoryMaps points out that the culture and tradition of an open border a form an important border heritage for young people.

StoryMaps and heritage management: pitfalls and potentials

StoryMaps like all maps are inseparable from the political and cultural contexts in which they are produced and used. The creation, availability and quality of maps is especially critical in the context of border regions where "the other side" has been typically presented as empty white space of which information and

knowledge is not available. Although today the earth's surface is virtually and visually accessible by Google Earth and other satellite imagery services, much information is still organized in a state-centric manner, which is a persistent challenge from the viewpoint of cross-border and inclusive heritage management.

Borderlands are typically associated with national heritage and iconography. European integration process and the opening of borders meant that new layers of meaning were attached to border landscape discourse (Prokkola 2010). In recent years, however, the transition towards shared border landscapes and heritage-making has been challenged by the rise of national protectionism and continuous temporary border closures.

In terms of heritage management, cross-border StoryMaps offer a way to move beyond nationally focused border heritage and producing knowledge and understanding of heritage in an inclusive manner. Cross-border StoryMaps can be employed in various ways in heritage management, education and heritage industry, including for example the valorization and dissemination community-based knowledge about heritage or cultural sites (e.g. Hart & Homsy 2020), educational virtual museums (Brumana et al. 2015) and virtual tours of heritage sites (Bosman et al. 2017; Krassakis et al. 2025).

The strength of StoryMaps not only lies in its potential for accessible and effective dissemination of knowledge but also in the possibilities for inclusion and co-creation of knowledge about heritage sites and perception of heritage. As visually appealing and engaging interactive tools, StoryMaps can help engage youth in defining border heritage. It therefore offers a tool for co-creation of knowledge of heritage; not only consulting but deciding together what should be emphasized and commemorated. In the B-SHAPES-project, youth first guided us through places and sites that they considered meaningful and need of conservation, and afterwards produced paper posters based on the collected material. It would be also possible to involve young people more intensively in the digital processing of StoryMaps. This could strengthen their perceived "ownership" on border heritage as something that concerns their environments and sense of belonging and as something they are able to have an influence. This, for its part, could further strengthen their interest and motivation to participate in the public discussion about border landscapes and heritage more broadly.

StoryMaps offer potential and appealing tools for engaging different groups in defining border heritage. There are also some pitfalls that need to be critically considered and evaluated when conducting focus groups and StoryMap workshops. Firstly, when people are asked to share their views, values and perceptions on borders and border heritage, it is important to carefully describe and evaluate the research setting (who is asking, where, how and from whom) and acknowledge different power dynamics (dynamics between participants as well as

participants and researchers). Moreover, when engaging youth in the co-creation of StoryMaps, it is important to reassure that young people with different backgrounds and genders are involved.

Secondly, the power of maps lies in their ability to abstract and visualize space. This creates also some pitfalls. The way people make sense of their everyday environment and how their views and values are linked to specific sites is a complex process and visualizing them with the help of StoryMaps entails a risk of oversimplification. It is therefore important to pay attention to careful interpretation of these maps and how the visualization of spaces and stories also asserts certain values, ideas, and worldviews (Roth 2021).

Thirdly, software such as ArcGIS Online normally requires licenses. Commercial programs are not feasible and accessible to all actors. One possibility for smaller heritage actors and organizations with limited resources would be to collaborate with research and education institutions with wider resources and technical skills. One option is to prefer free open-source software such as GeoStory and StoryMap JS.

Despite such pitfalls, StoryMaps offer a suitable method for collecting and disseminating young people's perception and knowledge of local border heritage. We encourage local and regional heritage actors and policymakers operating at border regions to engage youths to share their views and values on border landscape and define what is important for them. StoryMaps can operate as an important intermediate tool for this and help valorizing the benefits of cross-border heritage management.

Cross-border StoryMaps can foster more comprehensive understanding and conceptualization of border environments (cf. Padilla et al 2018) and offer a resource for heritage management and policies. StoryMaps and similar PGIS methods with multimedia content can be expected to become more popular in heritage management in the future. One significant promoter of this is the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which offers new possibilities such as virtual reconstruction of historical and archeological sites. The prospects it offers for combining real and virtual worlds can be more appealing for young people and offer a potential tool of inclusive heritage management and decision-making.

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Seeing from the border: Documenting research using the film medium

Zsuzsanna Simits & Martin Klatt

When we planned how to communicate our research to a broad audience in a simple, but at the same time ambitious way, the idea to produce a documentary film on our research arose.

The use of films for scientific purposes goes back to the early days of film: The Lumière brothers' cinematograph was used to document patients' conditions in hospitals as early as at the end of the 19th century, among others to develop a method for the visualization and diagnosis of mental illnesses, and there was an attempt to use the medium to create a scientific Encyclopedia Cinematografica in the 1950s (Universität Bremen, 2025). Films about borders, both fictional and documentary, are not new, either. Many fictional films and documentaries take global migration as a focus point of plot or documentation. Crime at the border has been a theme of the iconic Danish-Swedish *Broen/The Bridge* series and its United States-Mexican and English-French variants, plus a Finnish production set on the Finnish-Russian border (*Bordertown/Sorjonen*). The German Sunday night TV crime shows *Tatort* and *Polizeiruf 110* have also had border teams, one using the real life Polish-German police station at the former Świecko border control facilities as set (Klatt, 2019).[3]

These examples illustrate the opportunity to catch a wide public's attention with the border topic. The B-SHAPES application and Grant Agreement name "a documentary film on the fieldwork research involving citizens, documenting, and portraying specific research sites",[4] opening for interpretation and giving the filmmaker room for creativity in her methods to get the B-SHAPES' messages across. Since none of our B-SHAPES' partners have had experience with documentary filming, it was decided to subcontract the documentary film by requesting offers from different filmmakers with some experience on making films on the border. During this process, we realized the widely differing ambitions of documentary filmmakers and the wide-ranging opportunities but were bound by a rather tight budget resulting in a low budget production – not being less ambitious, though. The contract to produce the documentary film was awarded to Zsuzsanna

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[3] The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) keeps a record of artistic manifestations classified by type of art and can be consulted for more examples.

[4] Description of the Action, Part B, p. 23.

Simits, a freelance filmmaker originally from Croatia now residing in Budapest. Zsuzsanna Simits spent her early childhood in the so-called Baranja Triangle (Croatian countryside between the Serbian and Hungarian borders, where mostly the Hungarian minority lives) but had to escape the country when the war escalated in the 1990s. She has worked for various art projects as filmmaker, collaborator, creative writer and translator, relying on her experiences in working with theatres, film productions, museums, book publishing companies, etc.

Filming B-SHAPES

According to the contract, Zsuzsanna Simits and her team accompanied six of B-SHAPES' research activities in different work packages in different border regions, including the art installations implemented by Lungomare (see the chapter Borderlands as Learning Spaces in this volume). They filmed interviews with the involved researchers, meetings, borderwalks and zine-making workshops at the Danish-German border, in Sweden (Knäred at the historic Swedish-Danish border, Øresund), Slovakia (Komárno, Slovakian-Hungarian border), France (Strasbourg, French-German border) and the interviews with researchers and artists taking part in Lungomare's artistic activities (Sofia, Bulgaria) and a vocal performance in Poland (Cieszyn, Polish-Czech border).

The film activities took place between July and November 2024, with the pre-production research starting in March 2024.

The filmmaker and her team approached the task as non-researchers, but with the intention that the audiovisual elements could add significant value to the research itself, representing information and data that can't be seen, felt or sensed any other ways. For her, the human-individual relevance of B-SHAPES' research was especially fascinating. B-SHAPES' central method was collecting borderland and border narratives, from "unheard voices" in more mainstream discourses on borders, re-bordering and securitization. This bottom-up perspective could be visualized in the film, giving viewers an authentic border-living perspective. The filming visualized the impact of borders on the collective, it explored the layers of cultural sensitivity and therefore resulted in a unique experience to see the borders both in their physical (borderland) and abstract (transitions) forms. Sometimes, the script was unfolding parallel to the research in retrospect: it seemed as if the initial challenge of uncertainty (on what would happen at the activity filmed) turned out to be the exact reason why the filming process could become adventurous as well as authentic and natural. Furthermore, when even more improvisation was needed, the careful and supportive overall coordination of the project made our work easy and continuous.

The validity of film/video is centred around two aspects: The extent of the effective process of video recording on a naturally occurring event and how video remediates what it is that we see of that event: the reality status, partiality of the

video record that is generated of an event (Jewitt, 2012). According to Jewitt (2012, p.8-9), debates on the validity of video can be characterised as occupying three positions each underpinned by a different understanding of what makes research valid, robust and reliable: does it produce a replica of events, does it distort reality, or is it a reflective research tool?

The filmmaker chose to travel with only one cinematographer to each location. This ensured fast and flexible shooting and, after the first impression, increased the level of discretion. A side effect was that it also reduced the amount of equipment to carry, opening for sustainable modes of traveling (rail). Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff also suggest that the use of multiple cameras is not advisable in filming research, as they multiply the data collected, can overcomplicate the interaction with informers by adding multiple perspectives, can fracture sequences of interaction (in a similar way to a mobile camera) and present challenges for analysis (Heath et al., 2010, p. 53). Parallel with the on-site filming, and mainly during the post-production process, the filmmaker was working with the intention to continuously keep focus on the main topic of research, as the spine of the film. Nevertheless, she also had the luck to reveal some hidden symbols, and there were possibilities for creative solutions. These circumstances as well as the more than 27 hours of raw material filmed, as well as the filmmaker's intention to reflect an objective observers position to the most possible level, resulted in a film length of 80 minutes, about a third more than the originally planned 60 minutes.

Seeing From the Border reflects the different activities in different locations and thus illustrates what B-SHAPES did. It gives a word to work package leaders to summarize what we have learned and also presents the artists we involved in B-SHAPES and how they applied actional art to present borders and how they shape our perceptions of society. Hereby, our film demonstrates how to communicate transparency of research, without letting go of scientific quality.

Filmmaker's takeaways

To sum up: from the filmmaker's perspective, the main values of "Seeing from the Border" are:

1. The personal narratives shared by research participants of creative workshops and borderwalks, reflecting transgenerational heritage, turning history into tangible experiences by visiting traces of the past in nature and their original environments.
2. As a result of artists' flowing, free experimentation, constantly discovering new common points in the research of borders, art placed these

experiences into an even more abstract and also almost tangible perspective.

3. The encounters of generations, past and present, individual and collective perspectives, words and silence.

4. The significance of sense of belonging, sometimes appearing as a common root, reflecting the importance of introspection on an individual basis. It might be strange to use the word 'beauty' in this context, but several times, when emotions and love for the homeland were expressed, filtering to the pain of trauma(s), it was even easier to sense that common root, and therefore, an original yearning for peace. Individually, collectively and beyond all.

Ethical considerations

B-SHAPES field work activities involved some informants considered to be part of vulnerable groups (minorities). Therefore, some special ethical considerations were necessary to absolutely minimize the risk of harm to individuals. The B-SHAPES ethics advisor guided us here. Specific ethical risk assessments were conducted before each research activity, which resulted in the filmmaker not being present at the workshop B-SHAPES conducted with young borderlanders from the Turkish minority in Greece, a community which has faced non-recognition as well as tacit and open discrimination. Here, we deemed the risk of possible harm to informers too high to justify filming. All participants, of course, were informed about the purpose of the activity and signed consent forms to participate in filming activities. Furthermore, filming activities for "Seeing from the Border" were conducted to be as unobtrusive as possible to research participants, only filming researchers in direct portrait mode. Some participants were filmed from the back, other participants' faces were only half visible, when their narratives were recorded.

Seeing from the Border is freely available for screening on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGBX5nOkcdg

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Will European Borderlands be Inclusive 2035? Scenarios for policy discussions

Sara Svensson, Martin Guillermo-Ramirez and Caitriona Mullan

The future is not unpredictable. Many things that happen are, in fact, exactly in line with predictions. Some events, though, do come as surprises or unfold in ways not foreseen. And others happen because we did not even try to imagine the future. Working out what might happen helps us make choices. Those choices in turn can increase the likelihood of desired future scenarios to happen and decrease the likelihood of undesired ones.

In the B-SHAPES project, we asked the involved partners to craft future scenarios of borderlands, considering how those would be different depending on choices made by policymakers today. Those scenarios were then used as discussion materials in a series of physical and online policy seminars with policymakers across European geographies and governance scales. Those seminars took place in 2025, and we asked them to think ten years ahead of time, to 2035. This is a time period that may seem close but which can comprise significant social and geopolitical developments, as demonstrated by how the preceding 2015-2025 time period encompassed the long summer of migration, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, events that have significantly changed how borders are handled in Europe, with consequences for the borderlands.

We believe these policy scenarios may be of use for others wanting to explore possible futures for borderlands as well.

Nature and landscape conservation

Dorte Jagetic Andersen, Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola and Fredriika Jakola-Ylilauri

Landscape conservation and heritage policies in the European Union are closely connected. The Council of Europe Landscape Convention, established in 2000, highlights the heritage value of landscapes and promotes their sustainable management of landscapes. The policy underlines that landscapes extend beyond state borders and require shared responsibility. Globally, the subject of transboundary multilevel governance for environmental conservation, protection

and management is gaining attention as a practical theme in policy discussions — for instance through the UN-EU Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context. This should also be seen in the context of the green transition and the European Union's Green Deal, which may increase the pressure on land use in border regions.

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Scenario 1 (rebordering): In 2035, Europe is struggling to ensure the free mobility of goods, services and people. Countries frequently shut down their borders due to unforeseen events and maintain regular checks and controls at national borders even in "normal times". The Schengen agreement has more or less collapsed, since several states have withdrawn. In this context, where borders have regained a concrete and restrictive meaning, you are involved in the cultural heritage and planning sector in a region close to a border with another EU member state and tasked with assessing how the region complies with two general conventions that your country is still a signatory of: the Council of Europe Landscape Convention and the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context.

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Scenario 2 (debordering): In 2035, borderless Europe has once again become a guiding vision inspiring leaders within the European Union. The free movement of goods, services and people is ensured with free border crossings ensured along all internal borders. In this context of debordering, you are involved in the cultural heritage and planning environment in a region near the border with another EU country. You are tasked with evaluating how the region upholds two international conventions to which your country is still a signatory: the Council of Europe Landscape Convention and the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context.

Rebordering effects on borderlanders

Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt

Bad news: the next pandemic has begun. BSHPS-25 is a highly contagious new virus that resembles Covid-19 in terms of how it is transmitted and in terms of its mortality rate. However, unlike Covid-19, there are no accurate rapid tests or vaccines available yet. So far, cases of BSHPS-25 have been confirmed in a third of EU member states, all part of the Schengen Area, but without reliable testing, we cannot be sure that there are no cases in the other member states.

Predictably, neighbouring states have closed their land borders, and some have brought in the armies to monitor the border crossings. People living close to the border regions are in uproar! Commuters and students remember the difficulties they experienced during the previous pandemic. Some families were separated by Covid-related border closures. Others simply appreciate their freedom to shop, to visit friends, or enjoy leisure activities across the border. These border region residents are demanding solutions to ease the impact of border closures until the pandemic is under control.

What can policymakers at local, national and European levels in this scenario do?

The Future of Schengen and Beyond

Łukasz Moll and Elżbieta Opiłowska

The functioning of the Schengen area is suspended regularly with exceptional measures. Although the Schengen agreement has never been totally suspended, member states frequently implement temporary reintroductions of border controls. Migration and terrorism related fears are the primary reasons why countries in the Schengen zone decide to reintroduce such controls.

The main justifications for these temporary suspensions include the need to control illegal external immigration, fight smuggling, crime, and terrorism, and reassert a sense of territorial control in an era of globalisation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, suspensions and closing borders were seen as justified national responses to the spread of the virus.

Politically, the reintroduction of border controls is presented as a tactical move by mainstream political parties to the rise of populist and sovereigntist parties. These parties frequently use rhetoric about fighting the 'migration flood', restoring law and order, and protecting the nation's identity against foreign invasion.

The problem has been acknowledged by the Council of the European Union that has updated the Schengen Borders Code5 with Regulation (EU) 2024/1717 to "ensure the proper functioning of the Schengen area in order to put the ecosystem of rules back into balance and restore and reinforce mutual trust between Member States." Thus, reintroducing internal border controls should be "a measure of last resort". However, as of March 2025, 10 out of 29 countries have internal checks

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[5] Regulation (EU) 2024/1717 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders
https://www.europeansources.info/record/proposal-for-a-regulation-amending-regulation-eu-2016-399-on-a-union-code-on-the-rules-governing-the-movement-of-persons-across-borders/ (accessed 12 March 2025).

at their borders in effect (nine of them up to June 2025 and Germany until September 2025).

While suspensions and border securitisation are often seen as effective measures to protect the Schengen Area by stopping 'illegal immigrants' from entering the European Union, the price of such policies is high for the European Union citizens whose mobility rights are supposed to be protected in this way. Frequent suspensions make the permanent and stable functioning of the Schengen Area increasingly difficult to achieve. In this de facto post-Schengen reality, fragmented and inconsistent border controls and movement restrictions affect both external migrants and European Union citizens.

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Scenario 1: The end of Schengen. Member states continue to adopt temporary Schengen suspensions in response to migration, terrorist concerns, and the rising support of xenophobic parties. In practice, temporary suspensions have become increasingly widespread across Europe and often perceived as permanent.

The Schengen zone exists mostly de jure, but the new reality emerges de facto. As sovereigntist and xenophobic parties in EU member states are dissatisfied with Schengen and with EU pressure to maintain freedom of movement, a series of national referenda are held to leave Schengen. In some cases, critics of Schengen win, and certain member states withdraw from the agreement altogether.

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Scenario 2: The initiative to save Schengen. Temporary suspensions and securitisation of borders have proved ineffective in controlling immigration. Their ineffectiveness only reinforced the public's sense of insecurity. The humanitarian crises have further shaken public opinion, and the principle of free movement within the European Union is increasingly under threat. Citizens are worried that Schengen is in crisis and faces disintegration, so they mobilise to defend it.

The pan-European movement gathers to counter anti-Schengen sentiments. In response to these troubling developments, EU institutions—in cooperation with pro-EU national governments and civil society—reform the Schengen agreement to address both external and internal challenges better and to strengthen its long-term resilience.

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Scenario 3: The success of increased border securitisation and the survival of gated Schengen. In the long run, the securitisation of borders—including temporary Schengen suspension—is successful in addressing migration concerns. Through walls and fences at the European Union external borders, militarised

technologies like drones, cooperation with neighbours to stop immigration, refusal of asylum applications, and increased deportations, migration concerns are addressed, and the Schengen Area is saved.

However, these increasingly restrictive immigration policies to provoke significant resistance from migrants and their allies in the EU. Human rights violations, political tensions, and acts of disobedience are rising in number. Migrants claim the same mobility rights as European Union citizens.

National Minorities in Policy-Making Processes in European Border Regions 2035

Alice Engl, Johanna Mitterhofer and Marcus Nicolson

Scenario 1: In 2035, autochthonous minorities, with their deep-rooted cultural and linguistic heritage and socio-cultural and economic ties, across borders, plays a crucial role in fostering cross-border cooperation. Their potential to contribute to decision-making on cross-border policies is now being recognized and used more effectively than in the past. They have strengthened their role in promoting regional stability and development, social cohesion, and the preservation of cultural diversity and heritage. The voice of minorities in decision-making, including the voice of young people and women, has generally become stronger in the decision-making process

Regions did, however, choose different main paths to reach this scenario:

Some regions focused on *promoting stronger political representation and participation in decision-making*.

- They strengthened cross-border governance mechanisms (e.g., regional councils) and empowered minorities to participate in decision-making and policy dialogues, and they ensured that autochthonous minorities were given a more formal role in cross-border governance structures and in advisory roles within legislative and policy-making processes related to borders.
- The promoted youth participation through cross-border youth forums to encourage young community leaders to contribute to decision-making and encourage civic education programs for youth focusing on minority rights, cross-border cooperation, cross-border heritage etc.

Some regions emphasized t*he creation of special spaces and moments for collaboration*, i.e.

- a Cross-Border Leadership / Policy Innovation Hub Approach, including capacity building, and joint policy innovation across borders manifested through:

- Bilateral Exchange Programs: Minority representatives spend time in institutions across the border to learn best practices and co-develop policies.
- Joint Policy Working Groups: Create task forces composed of minority community leaders, academics, and policymakers to draft and advocate for inclusive border policies.
- Community-Led Pilot Projects: Fund cross-border initiatives led by minority communities to test and showcase inclusive policy solutions (e.g., joint economic programs, cultural preservation efforts), supported through Interreg/EGTC funding.
- Border Minority Policy Fellowship: Offer fellowships to young minority leaders to research and propose reforms to cross-border governance.
- Annual Border Inclusion Summit: Organize an annual summit where minority stakeholders from across Europe can present findings and share experiences related to policymaking.

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the different routes.

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Scenario 2: In 2035, autochthonous minorities, despite their deep-rooted cultural and linguistic heritage and socio-cultural, and economic ties across borders, have lost much of their role in many European cross-border regions. They rarely contribute to decision-making on crossborder policies is now being recognised and used more effectively than in the past. This has had negative effects on overall cross-border cooperation and European integration. The voice of minorities, including young people and women, while always weak, is now almost non-existent.

Long-term borderland policies: what kind of partnerships?

Johanna Kurowska-Pysz

The leading driver of cross-border cooperation revitalized cross-border cooperation is still the INTERREG Programme, which supports socio-economic cohesion through projects developed by individual partnerships and more extended cross-border networks created by Euroregions or European Groups of Territorial Cooperation.

However, ongoing evaluations of the INTERREG Programmes show that some cross-border partnerships and networks are still mainly driven by funding opportunities. The tend to focus on short-term project implementation and settlement, rather than on sustained cooperation. This means they fail to build on the outcomes of their projects by integrating them into long-term, cross-cutting

border policies, which is strongly needed in the INTERREG perspective post-2027.

Considering the performance-based approach currently being discussed as a new delivery model mechanism for the post-2027 programming period, INTERREG partners and stakeholders should start shifting their mindset from an input-based to an output-based approach. This shift is essential to develop multi-level synergies and build the capacity needed to implement cooperation results into long-term policies looking ahead to 2035 and beyond.

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Scenario 1: Individual partnerships.

From a post-2027 perspective, funding available through the INTERREG Programmes has been significantly reduced along many European borders, with a significant share redirected to other strategic programs, e.g., for defence.

This has weakened interest in cross-border cooperation, especially among those partners who combined their engagement with subsidies. Many Euroregions and EGTCs demonstrated limited capacity to sustain their activities have collapsed. Meanwhile progressive rebordering process have discouraged regional and national authorities to develop long-term borderland policies.

However, significant cross-border projects, e.g. projects concerning historical heritage and culture, are still being implemented. Partners investing in these projects are interested in maximising their results by building synergies and complementarities with other cross-border projects. They are largely responsible for this effort themselves, actively extending cross-border network cooperation and shaping cross-border policies, as Euroregions and EGTCs no longer operate in many European borderlands.

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Scenario 2: Euroregions and EGTCs as leading actors.

In a post-2027 perspective, the limited funds the INTERREG Programme are distributed among cross-border partnerships, mainly by Euroregions or EGTCs. Due to the ongoing rebordering process, borderland development policies have become less of a priority for regional and national authorities, who now tend to delegate them to Euroregions and EGTCs.

As a result, there are fewer cross-border projects than in 2021-2027, and many funding-driven cross-border partnerships have disappeared.

Still, several strong partnerships implement cross-border projects expected to generate long-term impact. These partnerships demonstrate sufficient capacity to deliver and manage projects, but struggle to expand cross-border networking and build o projects ' outcomes in a long-term perspective.

Existing cross-border partnerships follow the Euroregions and EGTCs, and they seek support in building synergies and complementarities among themselves. They also strive to integrate the outcomes of their cross-border projects into long-term borderland policies. Euroregions and EGTCs have become key ambassadors for border stakeholders, representing their interests in front of regional and national authorities and shaping long-term borderland policies.

The Fortress: a Future to Avoid?

Martin Guillermo-Ramirez

It is the year 2035. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 by Putin's Russia escalated into a broader regional conflict extending to other parts of Eastern Europe by 2027. The conflict in Israel-Palestine intensified and expanded to much of the Near East and parts of the Eastern Mediterranean. By the end of 2027, all of Europe had mobilised, and public expenditure was largely directed toward sustaining a war economy.

Donald Trump's brief second presidency was enough to dismantle most international conventions and lead to the disintegration of NATO. George Timothy Clooney, the new President and a declared pacifist, has decided to focus his efforts on deterrence and electronic defence. He has committed to keeping the US armed forces within national territory and avoiding conflicts in another continents.

On the other side, after Vladimir Putin's attempt to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine, Romania and Poland in the winter of 2028, massive protests across Russia led to his overthrow and imprisonment in a high-security facility in Northern Siberia by the end of 2029. A military directorate (the young commanders) took control of Nova Rossiya, the new entity emerged after Putin's fall, promising free and democratic elections. However, after seven years later, those promises have not come to fruition, and the Federation now faces disintegration due to internal disputes, particularly in the Asian republics, but most notably in Karelia, where 75% of the population wants to join Hyggeland, the Nordic Federation established by Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland and Greenland in 2026. Similar movements, but on a smaller scale, can be found across most territories of the Federation, driven in large part by ethnic minorities — nearly one in four Russians belong to one of more than 190 non- Russian ethnic groups. Relations with neighbouring countries have also deteriorated. Russia's debt with the Transcaucasian Republics, China, India and Nepal, the new technology tiger, is five times its GDP. A complete collapse of the economy and public services appears likely. The risk of Balkanisation is high and control over strategic weapons has once again become a major concern.

The war is not over, but there have been no active conflicts in Europe, Asia or the Mediterranean since 2030. Troops and weapons movements are now confined

to the territories uncontrolled by the warring parties. The current situation resembles the Cold War of the second half of the 20th century, governed by rational deterrence and the doctrine of "Mutual Assured Destruction", resulting in nuclear peace.

As a result, the European Union has suspended the Schengen Agreement and reinstated border controls at all internal EU borders. External EU borders have been, and the borders with the Republic of Nova Rossiya is now less permeable than the Iron Curtain once was.

Following NATO's decommissioning in 2025, the European Union had to make an enormous effort to establish a modern European army without any operational, logistical, or technological dependence on the US or any other non-European power. Investments were heavily concentrated on defence, security and resilience, including the development of related industries. And this had serious consequences for other EU policy areas. The European Union, once a comprehensive economic, social, and political project, has become reduced to a Defence Union: a joint military operation where cohesion and subsidiarity has disappeared.

There is an European Union consolidated command for the general defence strategy and the external action of the Union. However, the CDP (Common Defence Policy) i remains partially implemented, as each member state retains the right to deploy as many forces, controls, and defence mechanisms as they consider necessary, particularly if an EU external border is involved. Despite this, coordination seems to be driven more by necessity than by political will. Everything has been re-nationalised and only a few policies are integrated and properly "European," but we can find very different scenarios according to the history, location and other circumstances of every Member State. We will present here just two of them:

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Scenario A Camelot. EU external borders with Nova Rossiya are fully closed for territories that previously had a very dynamic cooperation, despite the hard border. The regional development of these territories was linked to their strong cooperation with Russia, particularly with the communities just across the border who are ethnically related and share many cultural elements. Now, a dramatic change in their development approach and perspectives has taken place, though not necessarily for the worse.

The stronger integration of the Nordic countries has led to the inclusion of all territories in regional strategies, including targeted support for i remote, sparsely populated and border territories, through positive discrimination policies. This process has fostered deeper cohesion and contributed to achieving technology independence (full development of software and production of hardware components), a transformation which has also brough enormous benefits to the European Union.

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Scenario B: Avalon. EU external borders with Nova Rossiya are fully closed for territories that previously were part of the Soviet Union. Since their independence in 1990, cooperation with Russia has not been the norm. Instead, their relationship has been marked by mistrust and fear, with defence and security remaining top priorities from the moment of they declared independence. The new situation after 2022 has not been a surprise for these territories and they face a high degree of isolation. It is a "fortress within a fortress".

Arcadia: The Preferred Future?

Martin Guillermo-Ramirez

The war in Ukraine, instability in the Middle East, and the unconventional presidency of Donald Trump in the middle of the 2020's prompted the European Union to rapidly integrate its public services, external policy, and defence. The European Union budget is currently 15% of its members' GDP[6], and it continues to grow.

This successful integration has attracted other countries like Canada to join the European Union. Actually, a joint Canada-UK agreement made possible the latter's return to the European Union and the former's integration, as well as the establishment of broad agreements with other members of the Commonwealth.

All Balkan states have united under a "Balkan Confederation" and have joined the European Union. Ukraine, Turkey, Moldova and Georgia have also joined, while Armenia and Azerbaijan are in the process of joining. It is too early to know exactly what will happen, but the dismantling of the Russian Federation after the victory of Ukraine and the allied forces in the War of Donbas might facilitate some of the resulting states to join in the near future.

Scientific cooperation within the European Union has made it possible for European researchers to discover new sources of clean energy: cold fusion is a reality opening new horizons for space research, but also to revert climate change. Renewable sources such as, wave energy, geothermal heat, and clean hydrogen are now standard for powering land, air, and water vehicles. Artificial Intelligence has been perfectly integrated in our industries, education, healthcare, entertainment, etc., through a smart process of regulation which has been replicated in most countries all over the world. Europe exports democracy, sustainability, progress, wealth, and welfare.

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[6] In 2025, the limit of the European Union budget is 1,27 % of the European Union GDP.

Borders are fully open for more than a billion citizens, and similar integration models are emerging across the Americas, Africa, and Asia. These efforts are built on the principles of open borders, subsidiarity, and partnership. Mobility is fully supported, especially for students and young professionals. Erasmus Mundus is now eligible for all member states of the United Nations. Other similar programmes of research, development, innovation, etc., have been extended to many territories outside the European Union and economic, social and territorial cohesion is a priority for most governments in the world. Remarkably, there has been no armed conflict anywhere on earth for the last five years, and both the world production of weapons and the volume of arsenals have reduced dramatically.

Fruitful cross-border cooperation policies and instruments have attracted both talent and investment, unlocking the full potential of border regions. These areas have developed into p operational cross-border functional zones, driving European Union leadership in clean energy, smart food production, sustainable "blue economy", practices, innovation, new technologies, and "smart defence". The European Union has become the world leader in the "orange economy", surpassing the United States in the production of quality products for entertainment. And also, the "silver economy" has revealed its full potential with the activation of senior volunteers in rural, mountainous, remote, and border areas, by supporting the training of young professionals, advising the development of new businesses and more. Border territories have become so attractive for young people from other regions due to the incentives and other opportunities put in place by the European Union, that the average age in European Union border areas is 12 years younger than the average European Union, an extraordinary demographic transformation in rural areas.

The momentum created after decades of successful cross-border cooperation has made the European Union the most integrated, prosperous, and healthy territory in the world. This model of cooperation has profoundly shaped global policymaking, demonstrating that the re-distribution of wealth in terms of access to public services and equality of opportunities for all, regardless their gender, origin, or capacities is now a lived reality.

Today, Interreg does not exist as it is not necessary. All mainstream EU (and national) policies now undergo a cross-border-checking before being adopted to prevent undesired consequences across national boundaries. Most policies also include a cross-border chapter, requiring formal agreement with neighbouring state(s) before any draft regulation can be discussed.

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Can the risks to peace and stability caused by recent re-bordering trends in Europe be mitigated by a focus on the role of borders in people's perceptions of societies and the European project? Do European borderlands offer underused opportunities to reach the full potential of cultural and natural heritage, arts and the cultural, and creative sectors as drivers of a European sense of belonging? In this edited volume, researchers, practitioners and affiliates with the Europe Horizon-funded project B-SHAPES: Borders shaping perceptions of European societies come together to offer research-based as well as personal reflections on these issues, often in a format that can be directly translated to the various policy contexts of European borderlands.

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