

REPORT ON THE 1ST BERLIN BORDER SEMINAR 2014

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At the 9th of November 2014 Berlin celebrated the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The celebration contained a 15 kilometer long art installation with 8000 lightened balloons, redrawing the former wall in the cityscape. The so called border of lights marked the most spectacular event celebrating the anniversary. The Berlin based think-tank Comparative Research Network (CRN) organized together with the VERA Centre for Russian and Border studies at the University of Eastern Finland (UEF) and the Dag Hammarskjöld University College for Diplomacy and international relations in Zagreb an academic highlight dedicated to memorize the fall of the wall.

Fig. 1 The art installation during the 25th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall



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The aim of the Berlin Border Seminar is to provide young scholars a forum to discuss their border related research papers with experienced practitioners in the field. The academic discussion was adjoined by excursions which had been concentrated on the history of the Berlin Wall as state and system border, it's visible and invisible marks on the cityscape and current discourses on the border regimes of the European Union.

The keynotes concentrated on different aspects of the 25th Anniversary. Dr. Paul Fryer, from the Department for Geographical Studies at the UEF revisited the field of Soviet studies and emphasized on the reoccurring relevance of the field in the context of the Ukrainian Crisis. Prof. James Scott, director of the Comparative Research Network, spoke about border making as an urban daily practices. He included samples of place making and bordering from Berlin in his presentation. Prof. Ilkka Liikanen, director of VERA, talked about the changing relevance of borders in post-socialistic context. Martin Barthel, Head of Programme at CRN presented a paper on the remaining significance of the Berlin Wall on the identity of the city. Dr. Beatrix Haselsberger of the Vienna University of Technology presented her research on decoding borders.

Fig. 2 During the keynote of Dr. Paul Fryer



Photo: Ewelina Barthel

The thematic sessions summarized a wide variety of border related topics from different disciplines and geographic areas. Regional case studies had been given by Dr. Reza Kheyroddin and Mehdi Razpour (Iran University of Science and Technology, Teheran) who talked about the Iranian/Iraqi Border region, Mehmonsho Sharifov (University of Bergen), focused on Tajikistan, Lucas Fulgencio (institute of Social Studies, The Hague) on the intra-southern migration between Mozambique and South Africa and Krisztina La-Torre presented a paper on cross-border trade at the Hungarian-Ukrainian border.

Fig. 3 Paper Presentation of Dr. Fulgencio L. Seda



Photo: Martin Barthel

A special session was dedicated to the border issues within Poland. Ewelina Barthel (Jagiellonian University Kraków) spoke about cross-border commuting in the area of Szczecin. Stanislaw Domaniewski (UEF) presented current issues at the border to Kaliningrad. Jan Smutek (University Szczecin) compared the international cooperation of Polish cities and Alicja Fajfer (UEF) spoke about the linguistic identity of Slavic minorities in Poland. The session on border theory was moderated by Dr. Joni Virkkunen (Head of Research at VERA), he was followed by Miika Raudaskoski (UEF), who presented changing concepts of the Finnish Eastern Border followed by Aaron Waggoner (University of El Paso). His presentation conceptualized religion, gender and development in the context of the global borderlands. Virpi Kaisto (University of Lappeenranta) talked about methods to

study borders from a spatial point of view just before Zvonimir Zavecki (Dag Hammarskjöld) concluded the session with reflections on Mackinders geopolitical viewpoints.

Fig. 4 Paper Presentation of Alicja Fajfer



Photo: Martin Barthel

The final session was moderated by Dr. Goran Bandov, the vice-dean of the Dag Hammarskjöld University College and was assigned for borders in former Yugoslavia. Polona Sitar (Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts) presented her research on cross-border shopping in former Yugoslavia and Giuseppe Pichecha compared the policies in multiethnic Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

Fig. 5 The workshop participants during an excursion to the Berlin Wall Memorial



Photo: Martin Barthel

Thanks to the involvement of Prof. Cengiz Demir, chief editor of the International Journal of Contemporary Economic and Administrative Studies (IJCEAS) selected papers are now published in two special issues, concentrating on implications of borders on administration, politics, culture and economics.

The scientific presentations created the academic frame of the seminar. The frame was filled with fruitful discussions and exchanges on the papers but as well thematic excursions along the former wall strip. Visits to the official wall memorial and an exhibition in a former border checkpoint provided a historic overview and hands-on insights on the current memory discourses. A second excursion was dedicated to the current situation of the wall strip. The excursion uncovered socio-economic trends in the city (as segregation and gentrification), the state of the reunification, the importance of the wall for the collective identity of Berlin and last but not least discourses on de- and re-bordering in Europe. Overall more than 30 scholars from 15 countries made the seminar a fruitful event, which will be repeated in 2016. The fall of the wall might be 25 years away, but the remaining impact of the wall was not just felt in the city but as well during the seminar.

The Scientific Committee:

Prof. Dr. James W. Scott, University of Eastern Finland, Director of Comparative Research Network e.V,

Prof. Ilkka Liikanen, University of Eastern Finland,

Prof. Goran Bandov, Dag Hammarskjöld University College of International Relations and Diplomacy Zagreb,

Dr. Paul Fryer, University of Eastern Finland,

Dr. Joni Virkunen, University of Eastern Finland,

Dipl. Geo. Martin Barthel, Comparative Research Network e.V.

Selected publications of participants and keynote speakers:

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