

INTRODCUTION: BORDERS, ECONOMY, CULTURE

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The study of borders has enjoyed something of a renaissance since the new Millennium, reanimating debates about their social, political, economic and cultural significance. More importantly, however, rekindled interest in border studies has opened up possibilities for investigating in greater depth the rationales behind everyday border-making by understanding borders as institutions, processes and symbols. Going beyond exclusively state-centred and territorial paradigms, the present state of debate emphasises that borders are not given, they emerge through socio-political border-making or bordering that takes place within society. Rather than focus strictly on physical borders as formal markers of territoriality, the bordering perspective is about the everyday construction of borders among communities and groups, through ideology, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and agency. Bordering also refers to the interplay between the ordering (of chaos) and border-making. In this way the rationale of borders is basically about creating places and thus a sense of order within space that appears incoherent and unintelligible.

With everyday ‘bordering and ordering’ practices we create and recreate new social-cultural and economic divisions between states, nationally and in urban contexts. As such, it is the process of border-making which brings diverse types of borders within a single frame of analysis. Borders are in this way receiving greater attention as a means to negotiate and manage the complexities of everyday life; the erosion of well-established boundaries (e.g. inner-city vs. suburbs) goes together with the emergence of new lines of differentiation, cleavages, enclosures and splintering. Borders are hence ambiguous phenomena depending on the subjectivity of those who are “within” or “outside” of a specific place and the social practises of

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different actors. The notion of bordering also suggests that borders are not only semi-permanent, formal institutions but are also non-finalizable processes.

As the contributors to this special issue indicate, state borders are complex political institutions that transect social spaces not only in administrative but also in cultural, economic and functional. Central to this perspective are multiple interpretations of border significance, border-related elements of identity-formation, socio-cultural and experiential bases for border-defining processes, power relations in society and geopolitical orders, as well as critical analyses of geopolitical discourses. Border studies have also been amenable to the cultural turn in the humanities and social sciences. This is evidenced by a questioning of the essence and the assumed immutability of national identities as well as by challenges to the notion that nation-states might be – out of some civilizational necessity – a permanent feature of the world system.

Furthermore, it is not merely the formal aspect of state borders that we are concerned with. Urban borders are very much about creating a sense of place which can be situational, instrumental and very often both. Borders are an attempt to suggest edges and limits and to construct a degree of order within an ‘unordered’ situation. At the same time such edges and limits often remain fuzzy and indeterminate and thus contentious. Furthermore, borders are always relational because they involve at least two different elements that define each other. Borders are ambivalent, Janus-faced in their simultaneous expression of contact, acceptance, avoidance and exclusion. Borders, in other words, are co-constitutive of differentiation, filtering and control practices, but also of merging, hybridization and border-crossing inventiveness. Borders do not necessarily support an exclusive or absolute use or meaning of space and place, they can also sustain interdependence, negotiation and adaptation. Put in more prosaic terms: a wall is the only place to find a door. Borders are a crucial condition for openness and cooperation. But these can be achieved only through multilevel, multi-sectoral and long-term approaches that involve transformation at the international, national and local levels. This, in turn, demands cultural changes and new kinds of thinking on both sides of any given border.

These tension-laden qualities of borders are intrinsic to the social production of space and it is therefore crucial to bring them back to the heart of the concept of place and place-making. Urban settings are laboratories that offer insights into how borders are created within society in different social, cultural and political circumstances. Borders also link different dimensions of social and individual

identity in ways that render them more legible. It therefore highlights a wider field of social practices and is more sensitive to micro-level processes of border politics and everyday practices.

This issue of IJCEAS reflects important aspects of conceptual change in the study of borders. They emphasise the fact that state borders are not wholly objective categories but are rather important social and cultural resources as well and thus highly subjective as well. The approaches developed in this collection allow us to compare and contrast how different and often contested conceptualisations of state borders (in terms of their political, social, cultural and symbolic significance) resonate in concrete contexts at the level of everyday life.