

Zeitschrift: Geographica Helvetica : schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geographie = Swiss journal of geography = revue suisse de géographie = rivista svizzera di geografia

Herausgeber: Verband Geographie Schweiz ; Geographisch-Ethnographische Gesellschaft Zürich

Band: 62 (2007)

Heft: 1: Grenzstädte - Stadtgrenzen - entgrenzte Räume = Border towns - city boundaries - boundaryless spaces = Villes-frontières - frontières urbaines - espaces sans frontières

Artikel: Conceptual remarks for the understanding of city and border systems in a global reality

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-872838>

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Essay / Essay / Essai

Conceptual remarks for the understanding of city and border systems in a global reality

Izhak Schnell, Tel Aviv

1 Introduction

Cities and borders may be viewed as elements in a single spatial system. This article discusses cities and borders as elements of the globalizing world. Cities are cores, centers of gravity that acquire the power to attract and radiate flows of capital, resources, products, human beings and information. Cities become intersections that generate flows in spatial reaches as well as cores of the multicultural assemblage of people and ideas, where knowledge and materials are creatively processed and transformed and entrepreneurship is exercised. Cities are «places» or stations that generate social projects in the spaces of flows. In contrast, borders signify limits to flow and barriers for the working of the forces of gravity.

Any attempt to view cities in their function as processing centers and intersections of flows and borders as limits to flow calls for an investigation of the fundamentals of spatial ordering. One characteristic of urban systems is their wholeness. Cores stand out only against the background of fields, and fields lose their solidity if not bounded. This basic structure of cores, fields, borders and bridges of flows constitutes the language that defines any spatial system, whether it is embedded in personal existential experiences or in social institutions.

The globalizing world is characterized by multi-scalar flows of ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques. A new balance between flows and stabilities is created by a whole set of organizations and structures. The new accelerating flows are not coeval, convergent, isomorphic, or spatially consistent. Instead, the paths or vectors taken by these flows have different speeds, axes, points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures in different regions, nations, or cities as the main engines of flows (APPADURAI 2001).

Within this complexity, borders used to be frequently defined in terms of binary distinctions between territories associated with groups of population and their sense of belonging. A new emerging paradigm views

bordering as a mechanism for making distinctions between «us» and «them» and for defining differences when «us» and «them» are territorially-defined. The aim of bordering and its embedding in social institutions is to protect insiders from external threats. It enhances the use of strategies of inclusion and exclusion. Borders enable the establishment of stable norms of human practices and meanings of «us» and «them», in this way reducing uncertainty and increasing an ontological sense of security (PAASI 2000). This definition implies a sharp distinction and separation along clear cut-off lines that separate polarities (NEWMAN 2006). Such a definition of borders allows distinguishing between two options – borders are closed or open, marginalizing any discussion on more blurred situations defined along a continuum between openness and closedness.

Awareness regarding the growing complexity of cities and borders is associated with the introduction of two contested concepts – the spatial turn, in which it is recognized that a socially constituted space becomes a major organizational principle of current reality, and the implications of globalization on the organization of these spaces. This article explores some principles of the emerging new paradigm of bordering in a way that will encompass their hybrid dynamics in a global reality. The article explores three changes in our understanding of borders: the transition into the study of bordering practices as part of the spatial turn, the impact of globalization and the growing awareness of borders as transgression.

2 The spatial turn in understanding borders

Unlike former border studies that focused either on the delineation and demarcation of borders and on the impact of borders on the constitution of border zones, the new paradigm focuses on social dynamics of bordering in a global reality. According to the spatial turn, first advocated by LEFEBVRE (1991), spaces are socially produced and they become the major principle in the organization of modern political economy and life-worlds (SOJA 1999). According to the spatial legacy, modernity is a project dominated by capitalist production of spaces of development, focusing on the politics of space (SMITH 2004). Capitalism tends to ini-

tiate flows on a global scale, while bordering remains a major weapon in the hands of political institutions controlled by nation states (TAYLOR 2004) but lately increasingly exercised by multitude of institutions.

Pre-globalizing urban systems were analyzed in Cartesian terms of space and nationalist concepts of social life. Space was defined as a static, continuous and homogeneous container that populates dynamic events that may locate and move in the container according to Newtonian mechanical principles. States are major sub-containers of space, which build institutions for the closing of borders as a means to control their territorial bases and their inhabitants (SACK 1986). In this vision, common in the early post-World War II era, space was conceived as tightly bounded along the axes of national borders, which contained a system of cities and regions to which they functioned as central places. The state played a dominant role in regulating space using borders as main mechanisms of regulation. In most cases, external borders were closed to competing flows of capital, labor, products and information, while internal borders among regions were open in order to remove barriers to free flows and equalizing forces.

This conception of space is intrinsic to the national ideology. The demand raised for individuals to identify themselves with anonymous members of the «imagined community» was too abstract (ANDERSON 1983). A way to overcome this problem was the territorialization of space. This was achieved by investing space with aesthetic meanings with the intention to recruit citizenry to identify with the concrete territory associated with the abstract community, and by closing borders as a means to «lock in» the community's sense of uniqueness (REDFIELD 2005). Territorialization by closing borders, is an act of purification in which state apparatuses are used to homogenize populations within territories (HOUTUM & NAERSSSEN 2002; SIBLEY 1995). This dual meaning of national spaces as containers of flows and aestheticized icons was recognized by GOTTMANN (1973). However, the closed national container model was also transferred to the understanding of local places in which norms of conduct and sets of beliefs were perceived to be controlled indirectly by means of exercising power over space (FOUCAULT 1977). In many cases, these places were conceptualized as constituted by local particularistic historical processes, but in accordance overall with common national narratives – a concept well articulated in the ideology of «Heimatkunde» (KONFINO 1997).

Within the logic of territories as closed containers, borders were studied as fixed points in space and time. The main challenge was to describe and explain how they were demarcated. Following the principles of gravity models the study of border zones emerged

as well (NEWMAN 2006). In accordance with the spatial turn, border studies shift to the investigation of the social practices of spatial differentiation or to the continuous human effort, supported by institutions, to structure cohesions of people and their activities in space in contrast to other collectivities across borders. This means that borders are constituted at many scales from delineating small vicinities through neighbourhoods, regions, states and global regions. They are structured while human beings practice their daily life and they are institutionalized into more or less formal entities.

3 Borders in a global world

The globalization of major economic and communication activities leads to the restructuring of the cities and borders system. Globalization raises awareness regarding the state's loss of monopoly in organizing societies and spaces. For some, global restructuring constitutes a network society in which borders melt and cities are viewed as intersections of global information, capital and population flows. The result is a scaleless space with few barriers for flows (AMIN & THRIFT 1995; ANDERSON, O'DOWD & WILSON 2003; CANEY 2005; CASTELLS 1996; HELD et al. 1999; KUPER 2004; LECHNER & BOLI 2000; MASSEY 2002). This image of globalization is backed by institutionalized economic interests led by global financial institutions and multi-national corporations, and a neo-liberal ethos of citizenship and individual rights (SHAMIR 2005; SOYSAL 1994). But this notion of cities and borders is collapsing with the mounting walls and barriers being constructed between the first and the third worlds, while some other borders are opening up (SHAMIR 2005). The construction of walls on the borders of the European Union (EU) with Eastern Europe and in Morocco, the border of the United States with Mexico and the Israel border with Palestine, as well as China agreement with Google to block free access to information in their sites exemplify the limits of globalization.

As global production of space intensifies, national states transmit authority in some spheres to a set of global and local institutions, changing their modes of operation. The result is the emergence of a set of borders controlled by a more diverse set of institutions. Three main changes may be observed in the emerging pattern of bordering under globalization: (a) the diversification of bordering social institutions that are less and less dominated by the state, where the interplay among their operations creates greater complexities, (b) the distribution of the power of the state within hierarchically ordered bordering institutions and (c) a growing awareness of the double characteristics of borders as limits and transgressions. As a result, sets

of borders are more open and flexible, neither dominated by global political-economic forces nor by nation states. Such an approach that moves beyond and around the model determined by a state-dominated political economy characterizes the reality of globalization (JAMESON 1993).

A non-deterministic model does not have to recognize the fact that different social institutions necessarily subject themselves to one institution, economic or political, nor are they discrete from each other. Rather, each set of institutions gains some autonomy while at the same time influencing and being influenced by the others (ALTHUSSER 1970; JAMESON 1993). Adopting ALTHUSSER's conception of social structure, six bordering institutions are recognized: economic, social, political, jurisdiction, ideological and cultural (GIAOUTZI et al. 1993; SCHACK 2000).

Economic institutions regulate market structures and barriers to flows of capital, goods, human labor and information. Within recent decades, economic elites have drastically changed the structure of economic borders. Social institutions regulate forms of interactions including communication, technologies and norms in order to create networked social systems as well as barriers to interaction. Cultural institutions regulate sets of beliefs that originated in sources like language, religion, ethnicity, and other collective myths. These laid the foundation for the institutionalization of collective identities as well as meaningful Others. Political institutions tend to regulate separation of power along clear-cut dividing lines. They may be articulated either on the base of democratic consensus or the application of force. Juridical legal borders are legitimized and coded officially, a privilege still reserved to a large extent to sovereign nation states as a prerogative. These then transfer some of their rights in a global world to international and sub-national regional organizations (LUHMANN 1995). Each aspect regulates some sets of borders in a way that may create increasing or decreasing tensions with borders in other respects. European examples show how the opening of economic borders was not associated with the opening of cultural borders (KRAMSCH & HOOPER 2004; VAN DER VELDE & HOUTUM 2000) and how the opening of political borders did not open up economic borders, largely the product of poor cross-border economic opportunities (SCOTT 2000, 2004).

The hierarchical structure of urban systems is also changing with shifts in concepts of state monopoly on border regulation. Hierarchies are stimulated principally by the simultaneous operation of localizing and globalizing forces. In the economy, this process is articulated by the bifurcation of economic activities into two basic sectors: first, the development of huge

assembly lines of standardized products which succeed in reducing production costs. The ability to transport large quantities and according to pre-planned dates also enables standardized distribution on a global scale. Production tends to disperse on a global scale, attracted to regions of cheap labor. Second, production of sophisticated products, which are characterized by high uncertainty and risk, tend to agglomerate in large metropolitan regions (SCOTT et al. 2005). Culturally, telecommunication devices increase flows of information and, by thus, act as homogenizing forces. Yet at the same time they evoke a search for the sense of uniqueness and identity, leading to a creative intercultural exchange of knowledge, ideas, art, values and lifestyles among localities (FEATHERSTONE et al. 1995; JAMESON 1993). The result is the emergence of a new order in which borders are structured in a dynamic way in a multitude of scales, contexts and realities. Some borders may be crystallized into more stable entities while many others may remain quite temporary and fluid. The result is a hierarchy of bounded territories which is complex and dynamic to a degree that any attempt to define hierarchical order and assign it an ontological status becomes impossible (MARSTON et al. 2005).

Despite it, a four ladder scale is frequently discussed as gaining higher jurisdictional salience in the political-economy of globalization. At the highest level is the global one. World regional organizations like the EU and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) constitute the second level, the state as a major political and ideological unit and the urban region as a key engine of creativity and innovation constitute the two lower levels (SCOTT et al. 2005). In addition, more localized communities create borders on lower levels as a means for the inclusion of certain groups of Us and the exclusion of certain groups of Others, like gated communities and edge cities (DEAR 2000).

This system of cities and their respective bounded hinterlands, organized around different scales, is not regulated just by the rule of a free market in a continuous space, as is assumed in central place theory. Rather, each of the aforementioned scales is managed by a certain bundle of economic, political, social, jurisdictional and cultural institutions. In this respect, the suggested model differs from TAYLOR's, which viewed the global scale in economic terms and the national in ideological terms (TAYLOR 2004). The global level is not just the result of the rapid growth of international trade, but more the result of the operation of multi-national corporations, global financial institutions like the World Bank and the agreement of most states to give up some of their rights for sovereignty concerning international trade by signing international treaties to limit taxes and customs. Their operation becomes possible by the

new information technologies that enable the transmission of meaningful information in real time around the globe, energizing the spread of a neo-liberal set of cultural values. A global bundle of economic, social, cultural and other institutions and regimes that govern them succeed in encouraging the free movement of some people like managers and experts of the global economy who easily obtain visas to cross international borders as well as work permits (SHAMIR 2005).

The upshot is osmotic borders which enable global institutions easy flows across borders established by institutions on a lower scale, while other flows may be blocked at these lower-scale borders. BAUMAN (2002: 84) articulates the osmotic character of borders as follows: «traveling for profit is encouraged; traveling for survival is condemned». He exposes the discriminating mechanisms of border crossing despite the promoted ethos of a world of free movement.

The impact of the introduction of regional organizations like the EU and NAFTA on the hierarchy is an object of debate. While BRENNER (1999) articulates the common view that the state loses power, shedding it to sub-and inter state regions, there is a growing understanding that states change modes of conduct, transferring some legal rights to alternative institutions on different scales. Since international institutions tend to promote neo-liberal values of global free markets and give priority to private property, traditional balances within states are shaken. Notions of public good and welfare policies as well as the power of civil organizations to balance the rising power of oligarchic elites are deteriorating. In particular, sub-national urban regions lose their voice in the national debate, due to government commitment to international regions and treaties. These leave urban regions highly exposed to global competition with less power to determine the terms of their participation in these global markets. Consequently, we find that while urban regions lose power to international regions, states maintain their power to join or leave treaties that may force them to change modes of operation (WARNER & GERBASI 2004). It should also be noted that NAFTA and the EU represent different types of international treaties. NAFTA tends to maintain national dominance over the hierarchical system, tightening border crossing among members of the treaty. By contrast, the EU opens economic and to a large extent political borders among its members widely, while digging in behind high protective walls. Many efforts are devoted to abolishing internal borders, and it is often the case that cultural institutions are the only ones that continue to exercise their partial autonomy in resisting these efforts (LEONTIDOU et al. 2005).

However, the more relevant conclusion for our study is that networks produced on higher levels of the scale

are currently crossing lower scale borders as if they do not exist. This is relevant principally in the case of telecommunication, which enables global corporations to manage intensive global networks irrespective of state borders. Here the different spatial scales lose their exclusivity, partly melting and merging into one another. As a result, information that can be blocked at a border of one set of institutions may cross that border through a network developed on a higher scale. The new hierarchical structure of bordering makes the traditional concepts of clearly demarcated borders irrelevant. Instead, scales interpenetrate each other, creating a nested system of borders further blurring borders and their fixed demarcations. The headquarters of a multinational corporation in any capital of any state can be embedded in Internet and the telephone network with a global system, managing in real time a decision-making process regulating choices regarding investments, sales and purchasing on a global scale. At the same time, the managers of the firm have an interest in developing intimate networks with the state local elite in order to secure the corporate interests in national regulations, taxes and currency policies etc. They are likewise interested in developing networks with experts, supporting institutions and competitors in their home metropolis as well as embedding major aspects of their daily lives in local networks at the scale of the metropolis. In this nested reality, it becomes impossible to define at what scale such headquarters should be analyzed.

The example of shopping malls, as a global consumption center, demonstrates the blurred scalar order developed under globalism. Shopping malls can be conceptualized as palaces of global brands. As architectural constructs, shopping malls are designed to stimulate a sense of «somewhere elsewhere». In this way, malls become distinct from local environments, being transformed into highly visible and attractive places at a local scale. In the same way, malls endeavor to become attractive to local communities, haunting their members to home shopping malls. That tendency is also used by members of local communities to transform their visit into a communal event (SHAKED & SCHNELL 2006). The conclusion from these examples is that borders may jump from one scale to another, or on the same scale regardless of distance friction (BRENNER & THEODORE 2002; MARSTON et al. 2005; SMITH 2000). In such a world, borders are less likely to be defined along clearly demarcated spatial lines. Instead, borders are partially opened, allowing more or less restricted flows of information, capital and people (GALLUSSER 1994). Accordingly, the study of borders should focus on the study of institutions that discriminate among flows in order to block some from penetrating beyond certain lines that remain open for alternative

flows. The multitude of open routes for flow among scales may end up with the unauthorized infiltration of some flows.

4 Borders as limit and transgression

One key reason to account for the blurring of boundaries is the growing awareness of borders as an embodiment of transgression. The limit first appears in Greek philosophy, where Peres is associated with the continuum. While limit intends to mark the end of a region in space, it simultaneously indicates the suppression of all separations. This is because it was understood that limits acquire meaning in relation to a «before» and a «beyond». Borders both connect and separate, creating a threshold or in-betweeness, a space in which unique forms of conduct may emerge. Such a conception of borders presupposes openings and closings. Individuals cooperate, making their co-operation a source of a power game that can lead to innovative ways of thinking about borders, open to the idea of some border crossing, yet at the same time restricting border-crossers access to other bordering institutions.

The example of migrant workers demonstrates the power of the new understanding of borders as limit and transgression to explain not only the creative constitution of cultural identities but also their exploitation by locking them in spaces of inbetweeness. While the opening of some aspects of the border allows scholars to describe borders as open and urban fields as unified across national borders, a more complex understanding of bordering may expose the operation of barriers between the two sides of the borders seemingly eliminated on the palpable surface of reality. DEAR & LECLERC (2005) provide a description of the post-border city-region in California–Mexico that can serve to demonstrate the shortcomings of the current understanding of borders. For them, urban fields located in proximity to each other on both sides of an international border are integrated into one city-region, merging cultural, economic, social and political traditions, frequently in striking originality. The opening of borders is measured by amounts of cross border flows. A more complex understanding of the new mechanisms of bordering is demonstrated by WRIGHT (1998). She shows how border crossing female workers maintain economic borders in terms of class and yet constitute new hybrid cultural identities. It is argued here that a simplified point of view blinds the observer to more hidden bordering institutions that demand a high price or toll, as it were, from border crossers. Intensive crossing of capital, passengers, workers and cultural traits masks the impact of well-established barriers that divide the city-region into an underclass of unregistered migrant workers, prostitutes, drug dealers and even underprivi-

leged registered migrants. All of them have in mind the traumatic experience of risking their lives while crossing borders from Mexico to the United States and their subordinate status in the labor market. While economic institutions invite them to cross borders seeking jobs in the United States, national institutions close borders for them in an attempt to maintain, in SIBLEY's conception (1995), a «purified national identity». Concentrations of migrant workers' neighborhoods on the American side of the border should be viewed as spaces of transgression. Being legally and nationally limited and at the same time economically invited to work in low paying jobs in agriculture and personal services, they remain either unprotected from exploitation by the law, or at least culturally and socially marginalized as guest workers. The opening of economic borders and closing of political borders create, whether intentionally or unintentionally, a new symbiosis in which economic elites enjoy the labor of a poorly paid obedient underclass that cannot rely on state and union protection. But this action of bordering may be exposed when the dual characteristic of borders as limit and transgression is considered in connection with a multidimensional set of institutions.

In many of these cases, the in-betweeness or spatial hybridity is mistakenly associated with the frontier (RUMLEY & MINGHI 1991). Frontiers are perceived to be spaces which expose pioneers to special challenges bound up with the gradual transformation between what is perceived to be civilized and savage spaces. Unlike frontier studies, which dehumanize the Others (MARTINEZ 1994), the opening of borders to creative integration between Us and the newly present Others involves their rehumanization. Some studies even focused on the emergence of new identities and loyalties in transition zones along borders (CHEN 2005; SMITH 2004), but hybridization within transition zones does not occur in all cases. In some, even the opening of economic borders may deepen cultural separation (NEWMAN 2006). Yet in others, there is a growing awareness of the fact that some borders are closing down, leading to the conclusion that different borders affect our daily life in different ways, and that these borders are managed by different bundles of institutions operating on different scales (BLATTER & CLEMENT 2000; BLOMELY, DELANEY & FORD 2001; SCOTT 2000, 2004).

The opening of borders in a global reality may have far reaching consequences that are rarely considered. While in the traditional reality transgression affected limited border zones, now a day, they may affect distant reaches. The introduction of communication facilities that move at the speed of light and that penetrate political, economic and cultural borders distort spaces. Distance is measured in terms of time, bringing closer some aspects of life, distancing others and distorting scales and per-

spectives (VIRILIO 1984). The result is that corporeal movements in everyday lives, which are exercised in Cartesian space, may be distorted in different aspects of daily life like ethnicity, gender, culture, politics, economics or administration. The growing awareness of the salience of telecommunication in the restructuring of societies and identities, force us to adopt a distorted conception of space as it was suggested by EINSTEIN (GIDDENS 1991; SLEVIN 2000). The result is that border crossing becomes a common practice in everyday life. Furthermore, each aspect is delineated according to different spatial pattern in a way that territorial continuity in one dimension is not maintained in another term.

The understanding of borders in terms of a tension between limit and transgression associated with multifaceted characteristics, and the operation of borders on different intersecting scalar orders, calls for new insights into the understanding of border characteristics and dynamics. In most cases, tensions between openness and closedness are articulated as tensions between global institutions interest in opening borders for global flows and the state's interest in closing borders in a bid to maintain national security. The model suggested here argues that bordering is a more complex process. The examples given illustrate how formal delineated borders are opened by economic forces while political and jurisdictional borders tend to remain closed. These examples of nationally fixed borders, restructured and blurred in different areas of the world, were chosen deliberately in order to demonstrate the power of the new order to restructure even more solid borders around the globe.

5 Conclusion

The recognition that space is socially restructured while human beings perform social projects, shift the traditional focus from the study of borders' demarcation and the analysis of border zones to the processes of bordering (Fig. 1). Bordering relates to the process of creating homogenized territories that distinguish between Us and Others. Whereas during the modern era, nation states played a salient role and national borders dominated the organization of space as binary lines of separation, globalization now brings into focus four more aspects of the new paradigm of border studies: the fundamental impacts of transgressions on the operation of borders, the significance of a multitude of social institutions in defining borders, the nested characteristic of bordering effects and the selective opening of borders. All four changes have led to the blurring of borders (Fig.1).

Borders should not be understood only in terms of limit to spatial flows, they necessarily also allow trans-

gressions. While in modern states effects of transgression were mostly felt in limited border zones, telecommunication and fast mobility expanded the impact of transgression into territorial hinterlands. The importance of telecommunication flows on the globalization of economic, cultural, political and social life has increased to the degree that space is more and more distorted. Physically distant information may become part of one's close vicinity in one's everyday life and spatial networks and vice versa. Such information may cross political and jurisdictional borders as if they do not exist.

But globalization affects border studies in a second way. It distributes legal power from nation states to a multitude of institutions, which gain power to constitute borders. The result is a multilayered space with each layer representing a different bounded set of territories practiced by different institutions. As a consequence, complex sets of territories and borders are emerging in multitudes of scales. Each set of territorial order limits only one aspect of social life with borders that are relatively open to impacts of transgressions and each of them operates on a different scale. The complexity of the multilayered and multiscaled territorial order leaves the hierarchical model of scaling useless as a methodological device in spatial analysis of borders. Despite it, literature on bordering in a global reality tends to emphasize the impact of four hierarchical levels on jurisdictionally and formally delineated borders: global, regional, national and urban (Fig.1). These highly formalized borders are still dominated by states that transfer some authority to other scales in the hierarchy. The examples demonstrate how even national borders are blurred by different forces of the global reality. In this way migrant workers in California find themselves on one side of the border in terms of economic space and on the other side of the border in terms of citizenship.

The new reality in which most places are exposed to different combinations of territorial units backed by different sets of institutions lead to the constitution of liminality or hybridity as common characteristics of contemporary places. The example of migrant workers in California demonstrates this idea. Their identity became hybridized through the new reality of incongruence between citizenship and work place. Among migrant women even a new feminist identity could be sent to be established. Furthermore, some marginal groups find themselves locked in in-between spaces. This is the case of the migrant workers who are absorbed in the USA as manual workers while they are excluded from the USA in terms of citizenship, find themselves exploited in the labour market without jurisdictional rights for fair benefits or even political power to protest.

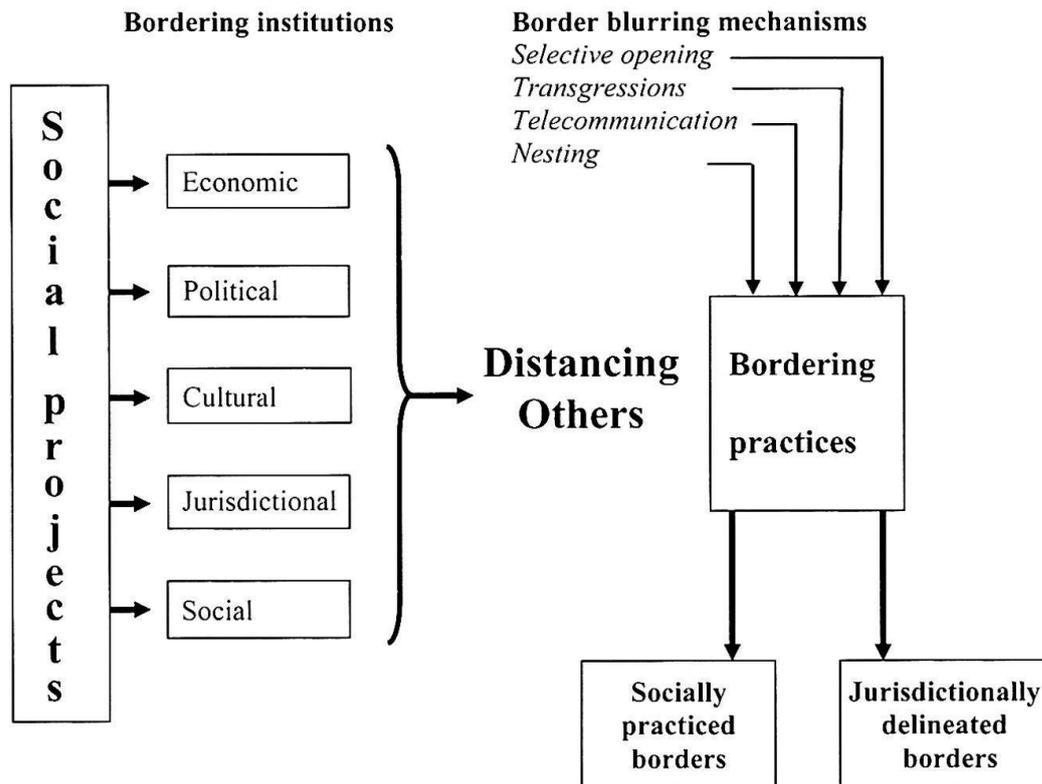


Fig. 1: Schematic model of border marking
Schematisches Modell der Grenzziehung
Modèle schématique du tracé des frontières

Cities and urban regions become the main arena in which social practices are performed in the global reality. As cores of telecommunication, transportation terminals and economic activities, as well as political and cultural centers, they become the main cores of the new territorial order while some borders cross them and divide people in them and other borders divide between them. In addition, borders at different scales from global to local are nested in the daily life of their citizens. In both cases, borders remain highly open, instable and flexible in the context of physically distorted global spaces.

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Abstract: Conceptual remarks for the understanding of city and border systems in a global reality

Globalized bordering methods differ from national bordering initiatives and practices in their more complex and less clearly delineated structure. They are controlled by bundles of economic, political, cultural, social and jurisdictional institutions that operate on a four-level scalar order. Flows on higher levels in the hierarchy may cross borders on lower levels. In addition, border characteristics as both limit and transgression are emphasized. As a result, the study of borders as a clear-cut dividing line remains irrelevant for the understanding of many bordering situations. Instead, borders become osmotic barriers in which elites gain the power to institutionalize discriminating practices of border crossing and limiting. In the light of these consequences, it is necessary in bordering studies to focus on identifying bundles of institutions that limit selective flows, unraveling their modes of operation in both limiting flows and creating transgressions, and in exposing the consequences of limits and transgressions on the deprivation of selected interests.

Zusammenfassung: Anmerkungen zum Verständnis von Stadt- und Grenzsystemen in einer globalen Wirklichkeit

Methoden der Grenzziehung im globalen Kontext unterscheiden sich wesentlich von solchen auf nationaler Ebene. Initiativen und Praktiken zu deren Etablierung sind wesentlich komplexer und weniger transparent. Sie unterliegen der Kontrolle einer Vielfalt von wirtschaftlichen, politischen, kulturellen, sozialen und gesetzgeberisch wirksamen Institutionen, die jeweils unterschiedlich auf einer Skala von vier verschiedenen Massstabebenen wirken. Durchlässigkeit von Grenzen auf höheren Ebenen der Hierarchie kann dabei anders ausfallen als solche auf tieferen Ebenen. Überdies werden die Charakteristika der Grenzen gleichzeitig als Barrieren und Übergänge verstanden. Folglich scheint die Erforschung der als Demarkationslinie betrachteten Grenzen nicht adäquat, um eine Erklärung einer grossen Zahl von Grenzsituationen zu erlauben. Vielmehr werden die Grenzen zu «osmotischen» Barrieren, über welche Eliten sich behaupten und diskriminierende Praktiken bezüglich der Freizügigkeit der Grenzen institutionalisieren. Im Licht dieser Argumente wird es in der Grenzforschung

nötig, die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Identifikation der Institutionen und ihrer Handlungsweisen zu lenken, welche grenzüberschreitende Bewegungen behindern oder ermöglichen können, ferner die Konsequenzen zu thematisieren, die diese Beschränkungen für ausgewählte Bereiche haben.

Résumé: Comprendre les systèmes urbains et frontaliers dans un contexte global: quelques remarques conceptuelles

Les méthodes permettant d'appréhender le tracé des frontières à une échelle globale diffèrent des initiatives et pratiques nationales en raison de leur structure plus complexe et moins clairement délimitée. Ces frontières sont contrôlées par un grand nombre d'institutions économiques, politiques, culturelles, sociales et juridiques qui opèrent sur une échelle à quatre niveaux. Les flux des niveaux supérieurs de la hiérarchie peuvent traverser les frontières aux échelons inférieurs. En outre, les caractéristiques frontalières sont vues à la fois comme des limites et comme des transgressions. En conséquence, l'étude des frontières considérées comme des lignes de démarcation semble inadéquate pour permettre la compréhension d'un grand nombre de situations frontalières. Bien plutôt, les frontières deviennent des barrières osmotiques à travers lesquelles les élites peuvent prétendre institutionnaliser des pratiques discriminantes du point de vue du franchissement des limites. A la lumière de ces arguments, il devient nécessaire, dans l'étude des frontières, de focaliser l'attention sur l'identification du grand nombre d'institutions qui encadrent les flux. Pour ce faire, il convient de démêler les modes opératoires de ces institutions, lesquels se caractérisent à la fois par une limitation des flux et la création de transgressions, et de montrer les conséquences de ces logiques sur les intérêts particuliers.

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Manuskripteingang/received/manuscrit entré le
24.6.2006

Annahme zum Druck/accepted for publication/accepté pour l'impression: 25.2.2007