

Zeitschrift: Regio Basiliensis : Basler Zeitschrift für Geographie
Herausgeber: Geographisch-Ethnologische Gesellschaft Basel ; Geographisches Institut der Universität Basel
Band: 22 (1981)
Heft: 2-3

Artikel: Political boundaries as a factor in regional integration, examples from Basle and Ticino
Autor: Leimgruber, Walter
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1088858>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 14.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Political boundaries as a factor in regional integration, examples from Basle and Ticino

WALTER LEIMGRUBER

1 Boundaries and integration

11 Boundary regions as peripheral regions

Politically speaking, boundary regions (i. e. areas along national boundaries) are peripheral areas, characterized by a gradual decline of state power. This, however, manifests itself distinctly at the border line (boundary markers, boundary fences, crossing points). Being politically marginal, these areas are often isolated from the remainder of the state¹. As the boundary restricts the mobility of the population border areas are often marked by centrifugal tendencies (not necessarily political in nature), opposing the centripetal forces of the state². – Looking at it from an economic point of view, however, boundary regions need not be classed as peripheral. It is true that they may be economically weak because they lack resources or infrastructure or because they lie off major communication routes. However, the politically peripheral situation need not be an obstacle to economic activities of greater than local relevance. The boundary does not only separate, it also enables contacts between different political and economic systems. Thus economic strength can develop also along boundaries, especially at crossing points. Looking at the situation in Europe in particular, one notices that certain border areas are of a considerable economic importance, even though mainly on a regional scale. Yet in certain cases economic activities in boundary regions may also be of national importance (e. g. chemistry in Basle).

One of the guidelines for further study of border areas is the consideration of boundaries not simply as separating entities and thereby restricting spatial interaction but rather of exercising a *selective effect* on human relations. Boundaries are therefore seen as lines of contact with a potential for regional integration.

12 Boundary region and international region

Boundary regions are usually defined legally³, on a uni- or bilateral basis. Such border areas (usually 10 to 20 kms wide on either side of the boundary) are destined to facilitate communication and local trade. The EC has stipulated a

Dr. Walter Leimgruber, Unterer Batterieweg 46, CH-4053 Basel

20 km belt to facilitate commuting⁴. Geographically speaking, however, such a zone may be of limited value. An international region can only be defined functionally; besides the psychological (perceptual) context might be considered, too. The boundary almost certainly limits the latter to some degree, it is also an obstacle to certain functional relationships (e. g. customs regulations as to the importation of goods, cost differentiation of public services such as hospitals, certain diploma and exams may not be recognized, etc.). Relationships existing in spite of such barriers point to a certain feeling of regional identity⁵. The boundary as a line of contact can thus become a factor of regional integration. Considering the fact that boundaries in Europe often cut through relatively homogeneous areas it is considered acceptable to use two apparently opposing notions such as «boundary» and «integration» together. This calls for a more precise definition of the latter.

13 The notion of «integration»

Literally it means «to combine (parts) into a whole»⁶. The term is met with in quite a number of contexts, e. g. in sociology, politics and political science, and in economy⁷. Examples for each of these three fields are: the social integration of foreign workers, the (political) European integration in the EC, and the removal of trade barriers in the EEC and in EFTA.

Integration as used in this paper does not refer to politics. The state boundary in its functions⁸ is not questioned. On the contrary, it is seen as having a dual function of separating and connecting. It is postulated that there exists a feeling of regional identity going beyond it and being conditioned by it. This kind of integration can be understood in a *social* sense, as the social organisation plays an important role; it can also be defined *culturally*⁹ – in fact in both study areas there is a strong cultural homogeneity across the boundary. At any rate it is founded on a *human* basis as it is human interaction across the boundary which is central to the concept. Quite naturally psychology plays its role, too, through environmental perception, attitudes and spatial evaluation¹⁰.

Summing up, it becomes obvious that the boundary may well be considered a factor in regional integration, seen from a social and human point of view. A feeling of regional identity may develop as a consequence of human relations and be complementary to the national feeling and/or to local solidarity. However, to achieve it is no easy task. This can best be seen from a comparison of our Basle investigation with one made 15 years earlier (see below ch. 4.1). The peripheral situation alone does not automatically lead to a feeling of regional identity¹¹.

2 Methodical considerations

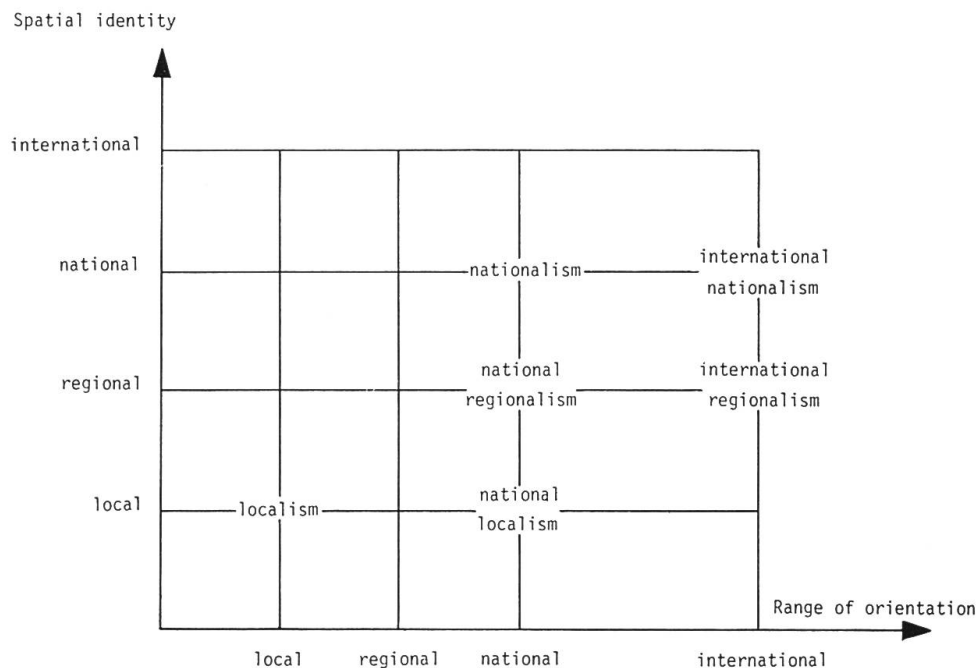
The sociologists Meier-Dallach et al.¹² have drawn up a model of spatial identities correlated with the personal range of orientation (fig. 1). According to this schema, regional integration in border areas equals «international regiona-

lism». It can be traced back to two essential components: traditional values and information gathered (selectively) on the one hand, personal experience (i. e. transborder relations) on the other. The methods used for this particular study tried to cover both components. The first was investigated by means of a semantic differential and is expressed by auto- and heterostereotypes. The second is represented by activities not documented by official statistics: shopping, visits to entertainment establishments, membership of associations, sunday and weekend trips, etc. Work (border commuting) could be included as an element, but its contribution to integration is considered inferior to the other activities as it may be founded on economic necessities.

One aspect, spatial cognition, is excluded from the present context, although it is of considerable importance (and will be included in the study of the Mendrisiotto/Lombardy region). Preliminary studies of mental maps on the southern border of Switzerland¹³ have revealed no significant differences in spatial cognition of Swiss and Italian respondents – a result which largely corresponds to that of spatial evaluation discussed below.

The results were obtained by inquiries in the two border areas. While those in the Mendrisiotto/Lombardy region form part of a more comprehensive research project, those in the Basle agglomeration were undertaken during a course at the Geography department of Basle University.

Fig. 1 Spatial identity and range of orientation (after Meier-Dallach et al. 1980, p. 19)



3 The study areas

As has been briefly mentioned before, both regions under investigation are culturally fairly homogeneous, and there are no language problems¹⁴. Besides the boundary can in either case be classed as «open». It can be crossed easily, and checks at the customs are routine and a mere formality. These two factors – language and open boundary – are essential prerequisites to human relations.

The *Ticino/Italy* border area includes the southernmost part of Switzerland (Mendrisiotto district) and a small portion of Lombardy (parts of the provinces of Como and Varese). It is a low lying area where the Southern Alps meet the Plain of Lombardy, partly flat, but mainly hilly country. The region under study lies on the edge of the Milan agglomeration¹⁵. The two provincial capitals Como and Varese are regional centres, and their hinterland also reaches into Ticino; in the Mendrisiotto district there is no centre of a comparable size, the nearest central place of a regional importance being Lugano.

The *Basle agglomeration* is a three countries' agglomeration with about 500 000 inhabitants. Thanks to its situation at the southern end of the Rhine rift valley, Basle has been a hub of commerce ever since the Middle Ages. The growth of industry since the 18th cent. added to its economic weight. Confined by national and cantonal boundaries, the agglomeration perforce developed outside the territory of Basle jurisdiction. As early as 1910 it had grown across both cantonal and national boundaries¹⁶, and it has expanded considerably since. Basle is *the* centre for the whole region, especially for the Swiss part; across the border there are two «rivals»: Mulhouse in Alsatia (30 kms from Basle) and Freiburg in Germany (60 kms from Basle). Their effect, however, is limited in the immediate vicinity of the boundary.

4 Regional identity and spatial evaluation

The following is a brief selection from the results of the two inquiries. They serve to illustrate the more theoretical discussion above. A further presentation will be more detailed and differentiated.

4.1 The Basle agglomeration

The component of «traditional values» has in this case been looked at from two angles: a set of questions asking after emotional relations across the boundary, and the semantic differential allowing to recognize auto- and heterostereotypes. The former aspect did not reveal a clearcut picture. On the average only about half the respondents displayed some form of emotional relationship across the boundary. However, it is clearly directed towards the regional population, not to the respective people as a whole. In other words, the inhabitants of Baden (Germany) are more sympathetic to the Basle respondents than Germans in general, Basle people more sympathetic to Alsatians than the Swiss as such, etc. On the whole there is certainly a feeling of regional identity, but it does not seem to be as strong as one would expect it to be.

The stereotypes can to some extent be compared with the results of a sociological inquiry of the mid-60s¹⁷. It is true that the methods used differ radically, but it is possible to compare the overall impression as well as a few details. Basle people are considered conceited both in 1965 and in 1980, but they are also called industrious and rich; in either inquiry the inhabitants of Baden are qualified as industrious, too, and the Alsatians as lazy and dirty. One significant difference, however, appeared in the 1980 survey: Basle respondents qualified themselves as conceited, too – auto- and heterostereotypes are thus congruous in this point. People from all three regions consider themselves and the others as conservative – with the exception of Basle respondents who judge themselves as progressive. The general impression of the 1980 inquiry can be summed up as follows¹⁸: «The semantic differential displays a fairly balanced judgement of the other two groups, often roughly consistent with their self-judgement. The self-image, however, is always somewhat more positive than the heterostereotype. The consistency was fairly pronounced among the German-speaking groups (i. e. inhabitants of Basle and Baden, where German is the official language), while the Alsatians were seen more negatively (rather poorer, rather dirtier).» It can be seen in more detail from fig. 2.

These results demonstrate the persistence of prejudices. They have remained the same for 15 years, a period which has seen considerable efforts in bringing the people of the international region closer together. However, and this must be emphasized, the overall impression is positive. Maybe we have to be content that this positive image has remained stable in spite of difficulties with trans-border cooperation on the official level.

Spatial interaction across the boundary is represented by leisure activities and visits to cultural and educational institutions¹⁹. As can be expected, Basle stands out as a centre for culture and education; visits to museums are very frequent, whereas few people from Baden or Alsacia frequent courses or evening classes. Concerts and theatres are of varying attractiveness, theatre performances being of interest mainly to the people of Baden (for reasons of language). Leisure activities undertaken abroad are mainly Sunday trips, walking, visits to monuments etc., while there are less visits to friends. Visits to restaurants largely depend on factors such as price, type and quality of food, eating habits, rate of exchange, etc. Thus Basle people quite frequently eat out (about 25% of the respondents), while very few Alsatians travel abroad to eat in a restaurant. In this case economic and personal considerations prevail, but also the difference in cuisine which puts Alsacia clearly before Baden and Basle.

Sunday trips, walking, visits to monuments etc. are not activities which promote a change in value judgement. During such occasions there are few contact possibilities with the regional population, as opposed to visits to courses or membership in an association. This may be one of the reasons why stereotypes have persisted over the past 15 years. Transboundary interaction as it has been described above does not favour human contacts. This is further confirmed by an examination of the visits to entertainment establishments: many Alsatians (over 50% of the respondents) visit cinemas abroad, many go to parties or to bars

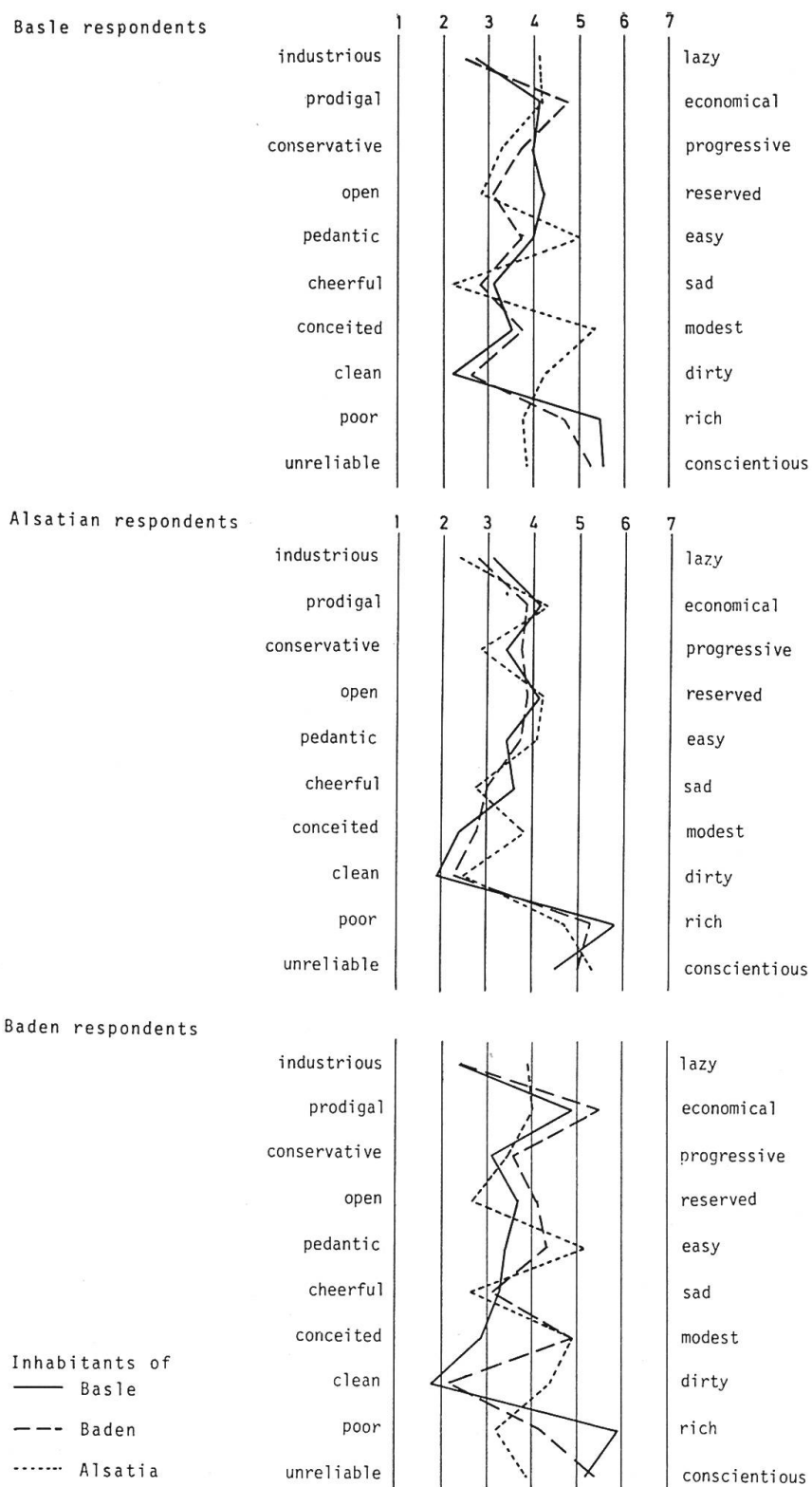


Fig. 2
Semantic
differentials of
respondents in the
Basle agglomeration

and restaurants/cafés, but on such occasions they prefer to go in groups and do not necessarily seek or get contact with the other population. The question after club membership has only rarely been answered affirmatively, thus this occasion to more intensive contacts is of no importance.

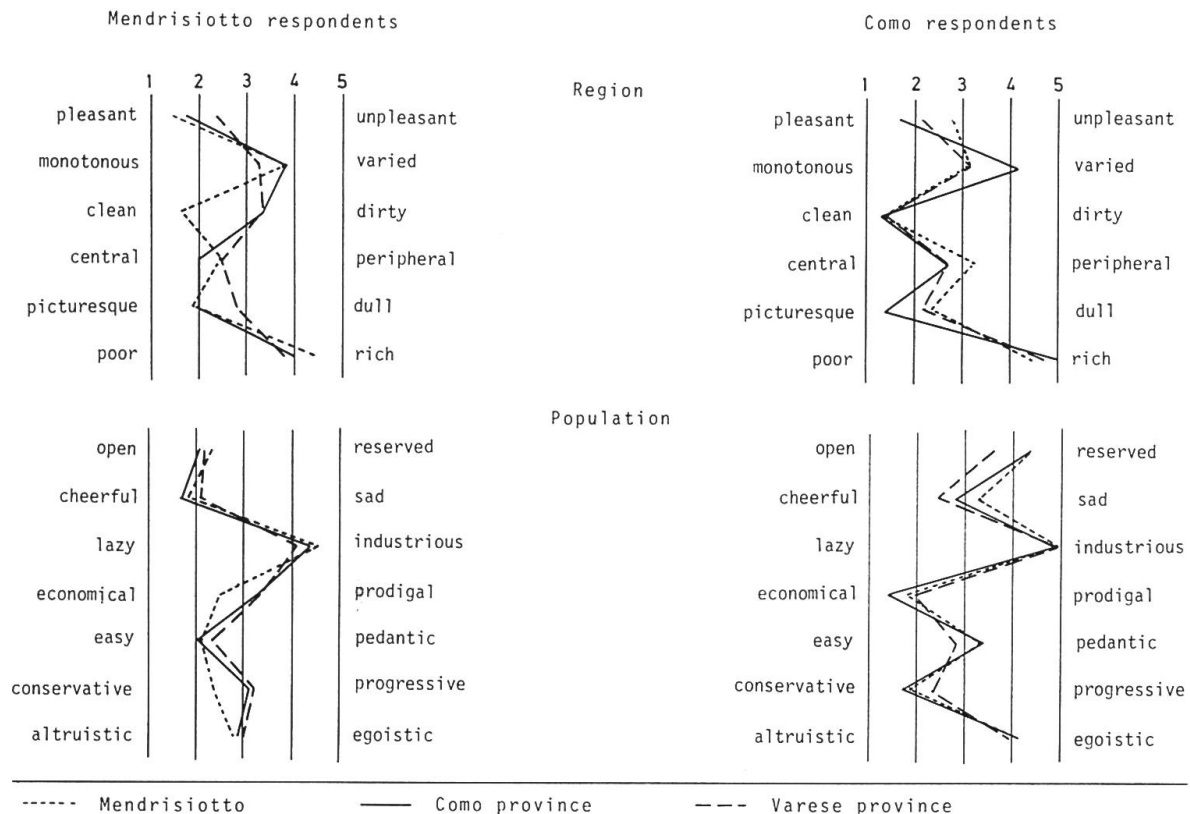


Fig. 3 Semantic differentials of respondents in the Mendrisiotto/Lombardy area

42 The Mendrisiotto/Lombardy area

Traditional values in this region have been studied by means of two semantic differentials, one concerning the region in question, the other the population. The Lombardy section of the study area has been divided into the two provinces as the study of mental maps had shown an influence of the provincial boundary on perception. The time being results from Como and from the Chiasso/Mendrisio agglomeration can be presented. One important conclusion one can draw from a comparison of the results is that the various differentials are fairly congruous, differences being gradual rather than basical (fig. 3). This means that the two populations (i. e. the respondents) have fairly parallel self- and hetero-images. Again, this is a fairly good basis for spatial interaction/human relations. However, very few such contacts turned up in the questionnaires – a fact which may be related to the sample ²⁰. The most significant differences in value judgement are found in the pair «clean – dirty» concerning the region: the Mendrisiotto population considers the Lombardy region as rather dirty, their own area as very clean. Similarly they see the Italian population as prodigal and themselves as economical. Finally the Mendrisiotto respondents appear to be more conservative than their neighbours in Lombardy. These, in turn, see the Ticino population as more pedantic than themselves, while they judge their region as being as clean as the Mendrisiotto, but much more central. The overall impression is again positive.

Judging from the semantic differentials one would expect intense spatial interactions. Reality, however, shows quite another picture (at least with reference to the respondents). Relations are rather unilateral, with the Swiss going into Italy but with few Italians visiting the Mendrisiotto. It must be said, however, that at the time of the survey the exchange rate favoured Swiss shoppers in Italy. Thus Italians only bought petrol and, rarely, cigarettes in Ticino. Mendrisiotto people went across the border to purchase food, beverages, clothes and shoes, and papers and books. The visit of cultural activities is characterized by the strong attractivity of Italy, in particular Milan. Nobody attends sports events which are obviously too much national in character. Visits to relatives and friends are very rare, and club membership is almost nonexistent. It must be pointed out, however, that these results are to some extent doubtful, especially on the Italian side, as respondents in Como were reluctant to participate in the inquiry.

Judging the situation in the Ticino one must consider that relations run into Italy rather than into Switzerland, i. e. centrifugally, while in the Basle agglomeration they show a reverse, i. e. centripetal tendency. This may be explained by the fact that the Ticino forms a «cultural appendix» to Italy. Economically, however, the flow is reverse, considering e. g. the border commuters.

5 Conclusion

The results presented do not automatically permit us to prove that a boundary is a factor of integration. One cannot deny that a certain feeling of regional identity exists. The present investigation, however, needs to be supplemented with larger samples and more detailed inquiries. One element, which has not been studied in detail in this context, is that of family relations and marriage customs ²¹. – Intensive contacts across the boundaries are opposed by certain barriers. Among them prejudices play a primary role. They have been built up systematically during time, mainly as a consequence of the political development in this century. Besides, there are economic motives, such as the floating exchange rates and differential inflation rates which favour or restrict shopping, visits to events of any kind, etc. Finally, economic disparities may be of importance, too, as they may cause a certain dependence of one border region on another (as exemplified by border commuters). This then may result in a psychological barrier: to be dependent on a region abroad for job opportunities may promote self-pride and thus reduce contacts across the boundary.

Being a contact line, the boundary fosters relations between people on either side, thus acting as a factor of integration. However, further studies are necessary to obtain a clearer picture of this role. In particular the sample size must be enlarged, and the range of possible transboundary relations has to be clarified. This will be a rewarding task for human geographers, and it may well serve to promote transboundary relations.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Guichonnet & Raffestin 1974, p. 147

² Leimgruber 1980 b, p. 70

³ Bundesgesetz ... 1925, Art. 28; Bundesbeschluss ... 1955, Art. 1; Arnold-Palussière 1979, p. 44 ff.; Witmer 1979, p. 27 ff.

⁴ Arnold-Palussière 1979, p. 44

⁵ Jenny 1969

⁶ Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 1975, p. 451

⁷ According to Der Grosse Brockhaus 1979 ff., vol. 5, p. 563 f., there are seven fields where the term is being used: biology, mathematics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, politics, and economics.

⁸ Guichonnet & Raffestin 1974, p. 48 ff.

⁹ Bassand 1981, p. 7 ff.

¹⁰ Leimgruber 1980 a; Leimgruber et al. 1980; Chiffelle 1981

¹¹ Stolz & Wiss 1965, p. 22

¹² Meier-Dallach et al. 1980, p. 19

¹³ Leimgruber 1980 a; Leimgruber et al. 1980

¹⁴ French has become predominant in Alsatia, especially in administration, and the younger generation knows German (or the Alemannic dialect) less than the older. However, an active knowledge of German is essential for those seeking a job in Germany or Switzerland.

¹⁵ Dalmasso 1971, p. 229

¹⁶ Eichenberger 1968, p. 118, 158; Weiss & Häfliger 1978

¹⁷ Stolz & Wiss 1965, p. 52 ff.

¹⁸ Berger 1981, p. 7

¹⁹ Frey 1981

²⁰ An investigation into the image of border commuters with the Mendrisiotto population seems to indicate that there exist more personal contacts than are suggested by the present inquiry. No definitive results are available yet, however.

²¹ Verhasselt 1977, 1981

LA FRONTIÈRE COMME FACTEUR D'INTERPÉNÉTRATION RÉGIONAL (BASEL-TESSIN)

La frontière n'est pas uniquement une séparation, elle est aussi un lieu de rencontre entre pays et populations voisins. En partant de cette réflexion, on peut dire qu'elle est un facteur d'interpénétration régionale. Ce terme d'interpénétration est pris au sens humain, social et culturel et peut se traduire par «sentiment d'une affinité régionale». On vérifie l'exactitude de cette thèse à l'aide de deux exemples régionaux (agglomération bâloise et zone frontalière Tessin sud/Lombardie). Il s'en trouve des éléments dans les préjugés et idées reçues (représentés par des différentielles sémantiques), d'une part, et dans les relations transfrontalières, d'autre part. Dans les deux régions étudiées, les préjugés portés sur les voisins sont plutôt positifs, bien qu'il existe des différences graduelles. Mais alors que dans la région bâloise, on constate un réseau serré de relations transfrontalières (surtout en direction de Bâle), ces relations sont assez rares dans le sud du Tessin, surtout en direction de l'Italie. Les premières données disponibles ne permettent pas de se prononcer sur l'effet d'interpénétration exercé par la frontière, mais on peut affirmer que le sentiment d'une affinité existe dans une certaine mesure.

DIE GRENZE ALS REGIONALER INTEGRATIONSFAKTOR (BASEL – TESSIN)

Die Grenze ist nicht nur eine Trennlinie, sie ermöglicht auch Kontakte zwischen den benachbarten Staaten und Bevölkerungen. Ausgehend von dieser Überlegung wird postuliert, dass sie ein Faktor regionaler Integration sei. Integration wird dabei in erster Linie in einem menschlichen, aber auch im sozialen und kulturellen Sinn aufgefasst und lässt sich ungefähr mit «Gefühl regionaler Zusammengehörigkeit» wiedergeben. An zwei regionalen Beispielen (Agglomeration Basel und Grenzraum Südtessin/Lombardei) wird diese These überprüft. Elemente sind

einerseits übernommene Wertvorstellungen (dargestellt an semantischen Differentialen), andererseits grenzüberschreitende Beziehungen. In beiden Untersuchungsregionen sind die Werturteile über die jeweiligen Bevölkerungen im Grundton positiv, wenn auch gewisse graduelle Unterschiede auftreten. Während aber im Raume Basel ein recht dichtes Netz grenzüberschreitender Beziehungen (vor allem nach Basel hinein) festgestellt wurde, waren sie im Südtessin nur schwach ausgebildet, zudem vorwiegend Richtung Italien. Diese ersten vorliegenden Daten lassen noch keine definitive Aussage über die Integrationswirkung der Grenze zu, immerhin ist auf der emotionellen Ebene das Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl bis zu einem gewissen Grad vorhanden.

REFERENCES

- Arnold-Palussièr, M.* (1979): La coopération transfrontalière régionale en matière d'aménagement régionale. Thèse, Strasbourg
- Bassand, M.* (1981): Introduction. L'identité régionale, un concept carrefour. NFP Regionalprobleme des Schweiz. Nationalfonds, Thema «Regionale Identität», p. 3–24. Saint-Saphorin
- Berger, J.* (1981): Emotionsmässige Bindungen der Regiobewohner. Final report Study group on «Boundaries and Integration in the Basle Region», Department of Geography, Basle University. Typescript
- Bundesbeschluss über die Genehmigung des zwischen Italien und der Schweiz vereinbarten Abkommens über den Grenz- und Weideverkehr* (vom 22. Dezember 1955)
- Bundesgesetz über das Zollwesen* (vom 1. Oktober 1925; Stand am 1. Januar 1965)
- Chiffelle, F.* (1981): La région perçue-vécue. NFP Regionalprobleme des Schweiz. Nationalfonds, Thema «Regionale Identität», p. 125–131. Saint-Saphorin
- Dalmasso, E.* (1971): Milan, capitale économique de l'Italie. Gap
- Eichenberger, U.* (1968): Die Agglomeration Basel in ihrer raumzeitlichen Struktur. Basler Beiträge zur Geographie H. 8
- Frey, Th.* (1981): Besuch von Unterhaltungseinrichtungen, Kultur- und Bildungseinrichtungen und Sonntagsausflüge in die ausländische Nachbarschaft. Final report Study group on «Boundaries and Integration in the Basle Region», Department of Geography, Basle University. Typescript
- Grosse Brockhaus, Der* (1979 ff), 18. A. Wiesbaden
- Guichonnet, P. & Raffestin, C.* (1974): Géographie des frontières. Paris
- Jenny, J. F.* (1969): Beziehungen der Stadt Basel zu ihrem ausländischen Umland. Basler Beiträge zur Geographie H. 10
- Leimgruber, W.* (1980a): Percezione ambientale nella zona frontaliere del Canton Ticino. In: *R. Geipel, M. Cesa Bianchi et al.: Ricerca geografica e percezione dell'ambiente*, p. 169–181. Milano
- Leimgruber, W.* (1980b): Die Grenze als Forschungsobjekt der Geographie. In: *Regio Basiliensis XXI/1/2*, p. 67–78
- Leimgruber, W., Auchlin, P., Kishimoto, H., Bänziger, U.* (1980): Perception of the environment. Geography in Switzerland in *Geographica Helvetica* 35, 5 (special issue). Bern & Zürich
- Meier-Dallach, H. P., Nef, R., Ritschard, R.* (1980): Präliminarien zur soziologischen Untersuchung regionaler Identitäten – ihre Determinanten und Funktionen in der Schweiz. NFP Regionalprobleme, Arbeitsberichte 10 A. Bern
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of current English* (1975)
- Stolz, P. & Wiss, E.* (1965): Soziologische Regio-Untersuchung. Schriften der Regio 2. Basel
- Verhasselt, Y.* (1977): Heiratseinzugsbereiche. Ein Beispiel für den sozialen Einfluss der Staatsgrenzen. In: *J. Matznetter* (hg.): Politische Geographie, p. 390–397. Darmstadt
- Verhasselt, Y.* (1981): Frontière politique: différenciation du paysage et barrière sociale. In: *Regio Basiliensis XXII/2/3*, p. 177–181
- Weiss, M. & Häfliger, Chr. J.* (1978): Dreiländeragglomeration Basel. Internationale Koordinationsstelle der Regio, Arbeitsbericht Nr. 4, Basel
- Witmer, J.* (1979): Grenznachbarliche Zusammenarbeit. Schweizer Studien zum internationalen Recht Bd. 19, Zürich