

OPENING-UP THE BORDERS: NEW CROSS-BORDER IDENTITIES?

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During the heydays of sovereignty borderlands have been studied from a state-centric perspective. Indeed, states were the main organizers of security for citizens, control of markets and cultural assimilation. Therefore borders had gained importance as barriers between security systems, markets and cultures. As a result borderlands became militarized, while due to their peripheral situation they often ended up at the edge of state-specific economic interaction systems. In addition borderland cultures and identities gradually lost their common cross-border features due to cultural assimilation. On the other hand borderlands were also an interface between state-dominated systems, resulting in specific borderland phenomena like customs, and in the form of legal and illegal economic activities as a result of differences in market regulations.

Today we are living in an era of post sovereignty in which states are no more containers of security, economy and culture. Borders have lost their role as military, economic and cultural barriers while new types of interfaces are emerging. Security issues have become a supranational affair with the consequence that military infrastructure characterizing the landscape of the Spanish-Portuguese borderland has not only become technologically obsolete, but has changed its function. Nowadays the castles and fortifications are a cultural heritage attracting tourists. In many parts of the world markets are no more regulated by individual states. Instead multi-state organizations try to regulate economic activities. At a global scale, however, multi-state organizations are not able to control undesired flows of capital. In contrast to security and markets where globalization and internationalization make the state increasingly a subordinate actor, culture is more and more organized at sub-state levels, particularly in multi-national states.

Globalization, internationalization and the devolution of cultural powers to the state's peripheries have created a unique setting for borderlands. As a consequence new borderland theories have emerged. Innovative constructs are rooted in the idea that transnational integration generates spaces of economic, political and cultural interaction, creating new cross-border identities. Several new approaches were bluntly euphoric regarding the potential for

economic development of borderlands, the formation of new spaces trans-border regionalism and cross-border democracy. These approaches, mainly rooted in post-modern theory, are here confronted with empirical evidence from borderland studies in the European Union.

International economic integration does not mean that all state control on markets has now transferred to supranational entities. States continue to have own systems to regulate economic activities, which implies that institutional conditions for development vary according to the state. However, integration implies a greater permeability of border for trade, capital and labor flows. Studies on the areas respectively along the Hispano-Portuguese, the Hispano-French and the German-Dutch borders reveal that economic interaction between the states has increased. However, most interaction continues within the states. Many borderlands are economically lagging behind. However, open borders as a result of European integration could not transform these peripheral areas into economically prosperous ones. Examples of stagnating borderlands are Oost-Groningen in the North of the Netherlands, the Pyrenean borderlands and practically the entire border areas between Portugal and Spain. Quite frequently economic activities continued shrinking, despite the occurrence of cross-border initiatives to stimulate development. For example, in the case the economically depressed areas in the Hispano-Portuguese borderland, new cross-border economic policies to foster tourism could not cope with economic and demographic decline.

Concerning the development of new cultural interaction and the rise of spatial cross-border identities there are hardly empirical cases that support this idea. Only if specific conditions are fulfilled, there is a probability that cross-border regions and concomitant regional identities arise. In order to systematically analyze the conditions for the formation of these new regions a typology has been developed. This probabilistic typology is based on a two-state model. The variables that determine the probability of the emergence of new spaces of identity are respectively the nationalization of borderland cultures and the importance of ethno-regionalism on each side of the border. According to this typology, the formation of cross-border regions as cultural and identity containers is most probable if two border areas share a minority culture in both states, endorsed by a significant ethno-regionalist movement on both sides of the border. However, the potential for new cross-border regional identities predicted by our typology can hardly be observed in present-day borderless Europe. Our typology explains why politico-cultural cohesion across most European borders has remained weak. This weakness is a result of complete nationalization in terms of culture and identity on one or two sides of the border, the absence of common minority cultures or the weakness of ethno-regionalist movements on one or two sides of the border.

Indeed, European integration has generated political and policy initiatives across the state borders in the borderlands. However, cross-border political collaboration has been real but relatively irrelevant in terms of a widely supported political movement. This is because cross-border projects have been confined to small elites of politicians and civil servants, frequently unobserved or ignored by the local population.

We conclude that borders continue dividing cultures and identities in a Europe of post-sovereign states. Borderland theories dealing with borders as palimpsests of state sovereignty in the past underestimate the success of centuries of state-organized cultural assimilation in the borderlands.