

published in Eskelinen, Heikki/
Liikanen, Ilkka/ Oksa, Jukka (Eds.):
Curtains of Iron and Gold –
Reconstructing Borders and Scales
of Interaction, Aldershot: Ashgate
1999, pp. 25-42.

Introduction

Since the end of Soviet rule and the disappearance of the Iron Curtain – one of the most hermetical lines of division between people in modern times – the theme of ›border‹ has paradoxically been drawing more attention in Europe than before. Not only is there promising new research emerging, but whole conferences are dedicated to it. For example, in 1998 the joint convention of the Austrian, German and Swiss sociological associations brought the term to the forefront when the organizers chose the title *Grenzenlose Gesellschaft (Borderless Society)*. Although there have been predecessors, such as the convention of the Austrian Sociological Association with its overriding theme *Gesellschaft an Grenzen (Society at Borderlines)* in 1987, the interest in the theme is currently much wider. Not only is more research on this topic available, but the term ›border‹ is being used increasingly, and more or less appropriately, in all areas of social science. Its growing use indicates a demand for theoretical clarification. In the following I will try to show how this challenge has been met in studies on borders in Central Europe: how the term ›border‹ is used and whether further theoretical insights can be drawn from the studies.

The Iron Curtain

As the burgeoning of border research obviously has to do with the disappearance of the Iron Curtain, the border which separated the capitalist and the communist world systems, I will briefly review this phenomenon. It is generally accepted that the metaphor ›Iron Curtain‹ dates back to a speech by Sir Winston Churchill at the University of Zurich in 1946: – From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. – The ultimate political border until 1989, it disappeared surprisingly quickly. The barbed wire, the watch-towers, the alarm wires, the land mines, etc. – everything is gone. One has to look long and hard to find any remnants of these old symbols.

Though in the public consciousness the Iron Curtain had a compact phenotype, in its final course from the Barents Sea to the Mediterranean it cut through completely different historical and social terrains. The technically perfect border of the German Democratic Republic was never comparable to the borders of the socialist Yugoslavia. In the north, the curtain formed the new postwar border between Finland and the Soviet Union¹; in Germany it cut straight through an established nation; in Austria it followed the border that was the result of the disintegration of the Danubian monarchy after the First World War; on the border between Italy and Yugoslavia, where it had already become more permeable in the 1960s, it was partly the result of the power constellations of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Nevertheless, as the Iron Curtain represented not only a national border but also a system confrontation on a global level, these differences were widely neglected; even more so were the historical forces behind them. These forces were also weakened if not neutralized by the universal approach of communism. What was rather obvious was the fact – that cross-border relations in the region were reduced to the lowest level since perhaps the Ottoman invasion in the 16th and 17th centuries. This was the logical result of a time in which politics dominated all facets of society (culture, social relations, the economy) and the state, individuals and organizations. In that period almost every cross-border interaction had a political connotation. At the same time, the border processes were relatively easy to overlook despite the differences mentioned.

The Challenge of Developmental Lags

Though the Iron Curtain was an extraordinary social phenomenon and was given regular media coverage for a long time, it did not receive much attention as a border in the social sciences. Of course there were the usual statistics about the devastating economic and demographic situation along this border, and while there was institutionalized comparative social research between communist and capitalist countries coordinated by the so-called Vienna Center from the mid-1960s on, to the best of my knowledge none of that focused on the border as such.

1 Cf. Eskelinen, H./ Oksa, J./ Austin, D. (Eds.): Russian Karelia in Search of a New Role. Karelian Institute, Joensuu: Univ. of Joensuu 1994 and Ahponen, P.: The Case of Karelia – a Remote Example of Border-Crossings. In: G. Eger/ Langer, J. (Eds.): Border, Region and Ethnicity in Central Europe, Klagenfurt: Norea 1996, pp. 183-202.

The first substantial contributions to the study of cross-border relations in face of the Iron Curtain can be traced back to the beginning of the 1970s, when the theme appeared as a highlighted area of research at the *Institut de Sociologia Internazionale* (ISIG) in the city of Gorizia, located on the Slovenian border in Italy. Some of the circumstances are worth mentioning: a) The ISIG was not a well-established research institution. b) The city of Gorizia in the region of Friuli-Venetia Giulia was a border town *par excellence*. c) Friuli-Venetia Giulia suffered heavily from its position as an Italian periphery at the Iron Curtain. At that time its GDP ranked 143rd among all EU regions, today it is 28th. d) Though this border between Yugoslavia and Italy was the most permeable section of the Iron Curtain, it was still a divide between the communist and the capitalist systems. e) Friuli-Venetia Giulia and its old harbor city of Trieste, rather than Czechoslovakia or Hungary with their capitals, was the first place in Central Europe where the idea of *Mitteleuropa* experienced a revival. Until 1918, Trieste was the major sea port of the Habsburg Monarchy and a prosperous commercial center. The Iron Curtain was perceived as a significant obstacle to again attaining a similar status.

A special configuration of these factors might have been the reason for the border becoming an object of research in Friuli-Venetia Giulia earlier than in other places in Central Europe. Though empirical and theoretical out-put on this topic at the ISIG goes back to the early 1970s, the most ambitious and far-reaching text theoretically is probably an article by Raimondo Strassoldo in *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* (1977). In this article, *The Study of Boundaries: A System-Oriented, Multidisciplinary Bibliographical Essay*, he not only tries to give reasons for boundary/border becoming an important concept but also discusses its use across a number of disciplines.

His starting point is the claim that in the 1970s, political scientists developed a new awareness of *spatial dimension* and this had two implications, »the reinforcement of the trend towards interdisciplinarity and the emphasis on boundaries« (cf. 1977, p. 81). He mentions the following as theoretical principles which guided the research of the ISIG group: 1) Every system is spatially located and bounded. 2) Social systems have also non-spatial, functional boundaries. 3) Spatial and functional boundaries interact and intersect. 4) Sharp boundaries are rarely found in reality, though there seems to be a mental necessity for man to draw them. 5) The more open and developed the system, the more crucial its boundaries. These principles imply that the state border is only a special type of boundary. The nation-state as a closed system will be succeeded by other types of political organizations (e.g. the cross-border region). The European Union, as a more complex system than the nation-state, must also have more differentiated borders (cf. Mlinar, 1996). Thus, theoretically speaking, the Iron Curtain could not simply have been eliminated, but only replaced by a more sophisticated border.

Strassoldo defines spatial boundary as »a line circumscribing the localities in which ... human (and material) components (of social groups and institutions) are placed« (cf. 1977, p. 84). He also distinguishes between *boundary*, *limit*, *border* and *frontier*, the first three simply indicating the end of a thing or a system. »The difference between border and boundary seems to lie in the fact that a border is usually zonal or areal, while a boundary is usually a line« (cf. 1977, p. 86). The frontier is assumed to be dynamic and a place of confrontation between the system and its environment. Somewhere in the course of his reasoning the author also notices that these terms are very language-specific. In German, for example, there is only the term ›Grenze‹ for all these distinctions, if we disregard the old word ›Mark‹ which might come closest to the meaning of the English ›frontier‹. Therefore we do not distinguish between ›border‹ and ›boundary‹ here.

The bulk of Strassoldo's essay consists of describing and discussing how ›boundary‹ is used in different types of disciplines from international law and economics to sociology and political science. In total, he discusses nine academic fields. In reference to sociology, in addition to Emile Durkheim and Max Weber he mentions Georg Simmel and Talcott Parsons in particular. Unfortunately, while criticizing Parsons's concept of ›boundary maintenance‹ as theoretically insufficient, Strassoldo does not go into detail about how these authors understood boundary or border, nor does he elaborate his own definition of it. Instead he points out that »numerous as the scattered contributions are, the concept of boundary and related concepts have not found their proper place in most sociological handbooks and standard reference works« (cf. 1977, p. 97).

In a later essay Strassoldo (1982) goes into greater detail. Taking up the thread from the 1977 article, he suggests that the mostly banal assumptions on boundaries are actually the cause of the weakness in the Durkheim-Malinowsky-Parsons tradition in sociology. There, all boundaries



2 Cf. Delli Zotti, G.: Transnational Relations in a Border Region – the Case of Friuli-Venetia Giulia. In: Strassoldo, R./ Delli Zotti, G. (Eds.): Cooperation and Conflict in Border Areas. Milano: Franco Angeli 1982, pp. 25-60.

3 Cf. Gasparini, A.: Le città di confine europee: caratteri culturali e socio-economici, città comuni, relazioni internazionali. Futuribili. Vol. 3 (1996), pp. 9-56.

resemble strict lines which enclose the modern nation-state like an »architectonic whole«. Strassoldo contrasts this closed system approach with the relational sociology of Georg Simmel and his idea of shifting social circles, which can be seen as the basis of modern network theory with its concern for unbounded structures. He points out that Simmel emphasized the functions of »bridges« and »doors«. Finally, he turns to the system theory of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, in which, he believes, the concept of boundary has thus far been given the most adequate theoretical consideration: »... Luhmann treats boundary formation as a complexity-reducing mechanism, and gives logical priority to the emergence of differences, i.e. boundaries, between system and environment, over the formation of a controlling center« (cf. 1982, p. 262). This leads to the emergence of concepts like symbolic versus spatial boundaries, functional boundaries, temporal boundaries, defended boundaries and boundary-maintaining mechanisms.

Unfortunately, the ambitious approach of Strassoldo, in which he screened the use of the concept of boundary not only in the field of sociology but across a number of disciplines has not stimulated a broader theoretical discourse in the academic communities of Central Europe. The discussions on »boundary« phenomena in different Luhmann circles which are still progressing are quite isolated events and cannot be traced to the local theoretical endeavors in northeastern Italy twenty years ago. Moreover, even the empirical research at the ISIG itself, with a few exceptions², shows a greater predilection towards minority and ethnic problems than the border as such. The institute recently carried out an excellent study on border towns³, but a kind of *black box* understanding of boundary where only the empirical differences count still predominates. Even Strassoldo himself, besides documenting and discussing the different uses of the term(s), did not elaborate further on a definition. It also appears that the theoretical contributions very often remained metaphorical or contextual in listing functions or just simply stressing the importance of borders.

Reconstructing Identities

Whereas the ISIG occupation with »boundary« (*»Grenze«*) in the seventies did not raise a similar awareness of the phenomenon in neighboring Austria or in Germany, the end of Communist rule in East-Central Europe (*»die Wende«*) did. Soon after the breach in the Iron Curtain between Austria and Hungary (27.06.1989), the theme was picked up by scholars, researchers and intellectuals inside and outside academia. The new opportunities to cross the borders also increased the desire to understand their character and especially their effect. Though the term »*Grenze*« became a catchword for all kinds of activities, at least a few contributions were also focusing on the phenomenon as such. This was not yet the case at the 1987 Austrian sociological convention on *Societies at Borderlines (Gesellschaft an Grenzen)* mentioned above, which was otherwise a significant premonition of the events ahead. At that conference, which attracted prominent scholars from all over Europe, not a single contribution expanded on the concepts of »border« or »boundary«. Initially, the emphasis was on comparing social structure and consciousness in capitalist and socialist societies⁴. A second but less visible emphasis was on the risks of human development (environment, technology etc.). The semantic link for both was to be the term »*Grenze*«, which in some other languages besides German also has a dual meaning: border as a place and border as a point which cannot be passed. Although the choice of the title pointed to the problem of the Iron Curtain, not much was said about it. However, it was not before the 1990s that enough interest was aroused to bring »border« closer to the center of academic interest.

Due to their critical economic situation, the communities along the Iron Curtain have of course been objects of regional policy and planning for a long time. But in this case the border was nothing more than the signifier of a peripheral location. The studies which emerged in the nineties have been different. Though most of them also sought to contribute to improving the living conditions of the areas in question, they were primarily intellectual endeavors to *reconstruct the identity of border lands*, to compare living conditions across the border and also to understand the character of the border as such. The individuals involved in this type of research came mainly from the fields of geography, history and sociology. It should be noted that not all sections of the former Iron Curtain received the same attention, to say nothing of the borders with Western countries which at first were more or less neglected by border researchers. In Austria it was the border to Hungary which received the greatest research attention. The different activities were well-coordinated and well-publicized.

4 Cf. Haller, M.: The Challenge for Comparative Sociology in the Transformation of Europe, Intern. Sociology. Vol. 5 (1990), 2, pp. 183-204.



5 Cf. Deinhofer, E./ Horvath, T. (Eds.): Grenzfall: Burgenland 1921-1991. Grosswarasdorf: Kanica 1991 and Horvath, T./ Müller, E. (Eds.): Hart an der Grenze. Wien: Verl. f. Gesellschaftskritik 1992.

6 Roma is a romani group living in eastern Austria.

As was the case twenty years earlier with Friuli-Venetia Giulia in Italy, it was again the desire of a marginalized region – in this case the Austrian province of Burgenland – which set the stage for a number of projects related to the border. This region belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary until 1921. It became a part of the Republic of Austria in the course of redrawing the border after World War I. The main reason given for this shifting of borders was the ethnic composition of the population: the majority was German-speaking. Most of the studies mentioned are a type of anamneses of what happened around and as a consequence of drawing the 1921 border⁵. Its impact on a wide variety of social areas from ethnicity and politics to education and the local economy is discussed. As in the studies on Friuli-Venetia Giulia, a significant part of the work is dedicated to ethnic relations, since although the borderline was drawn according to ethnic criteria, the new province of Burgenland still contained areas of ethnic Hungarians, Croatians and Romas.⁶

Although the *Burgenland-Network* did deal with various topics – political transition, the nation-state, identity, migration, local economy, social relations, religion, ethnic groups, education, border security, the perception of border, cultural policy, employment, social policy, and ecology – conceptual reflection on borders is rare. More often descriptions of the border can be found if the border is not simply considered as a *black box*, which is mostly the case. This means that either the connection between a subject discussed and the border is only assumed or that a variable is compared across the border without any operationalization of the border as such.

But not all of the studies treat the border as a *black box*. Quite frequently different features which the border took on during its 70 years of existence are analyzed. One could try to infer theoretical dimensions from these features. If we disregard the age of this border, it becomes obvious that the character of a state border is directly dependent on the political order of the states it separates. Whenever this order changes, the border also changes. The political order in Austria and Hungary has changed several times in the last 70 years. In Austria the following different periods are included: democracy (1918-1934), authoritarian regime (1934-1938), Nazi totalitarianism (1938-1945), democracy under allied occupation (1945-1955), democracy and neutral status (1955-1995), and since 1995 membership of the European Union. In Hungary, respectively, the periods involve: authoritarian regime (1918-1945), democracy under Soviet occupation (1945-1948), communist totalitarianism (1948-1989), and post-communist democracy (since 1990). On the other hand, ›border‹ is also an independent variable which must be considered when certain conduct in its vicinity needs to be explained, although frequently it will be difficult to determine how the variance has to be assigned to the border and to other variables.

The historical contributions in this research network also demonstrate that the mere fact that a state border exists at a certain location is always the result of a *geostrategic balance*. When this balance shifts, the border will also shift. Thus, the course of a border is in many cases not only the concern of the two neighboring states but of a broader international community. Even more encoded in the features of a border is the *mode* of its original installation. For example, the amount of force or negotiation involved during the installation can have an effect for many decades if not centuries. This can be shown by comparing the Austro-Hungarian border with the border between Austria and the former Yugoslavia, which is almost the same age and was drawn under similar geopolitical preconditions. In the latter case, where the level of violence in the course of its installation was significantly higher, the permeability for cross-border cooperation is still smaller, although the objective border regime today is the same.

When the border itself is discussed, it is usually through empirical description and only rarely through generalizations such as the border is the »memory of the territory« or that it is the »void which separates the here from the beyond« (cf. Tabor, 1992). The descriptions tell us something about the *course*, the *installations* and the *regime* of the border. What was the situation at the beginning in 1921? When the border between Austria and Hungary was drawn it was practically without any fortification, a simple marked line in the landscape with occasional official border checks. This line frequently cut through property (often of large private landowners), roads, railways and social relations. The premise of considering the ethnic status of the villages probably created one of the most zigzagging border lines in Europe. The confusing course of the border connected with a sparse border control and the need to take care of one's own property on the other side fostered smuggling and other kinds of illegal border crossings. People were tempted to cross the border anywhere.

It is well-known that the technical and administrative structure of this border after World War II was quite different. This is true, most of all, for communist Hungary, whereas on the Austrian



7 Cf. Lang, A.: Sichere Grenzen. In: Horvath/ Müller 1992, pp.141-152.

8 Cf. Komlosy, A./ Buzek, V./ Svatek, F. (Eds.): Kulturen an der Grenze. Wien, Weidhofen: Promedia 1995.

side it remained more or less as it did at the beginning. The Iron Curtain at this section of the continental divide line consisted of two fences, a trail for the guards and a strip for detecting illegal movement. The first fence ran 1,5-2 km inside Hungarian territory and was usually hidden from the Austrian side. It was equipped with an electric wire which was supposed to alarm the guards. But this was not enough and travellers approaching this border from the Hungarian side were already checked several kilometers before they reached these installations. Hungarian citizens entering this zone needed special permission. According to Hungarian sources, between 1966 and 1988 about 13 500 people tried to cross this border illegally, but only about 300 of them were successful⁷.

From these descriptions two border-related concepts can be derived: *openness* and *permeability*. *Openness* refers to the level of expenses needed to cross the border at official border crossings. This includes the status of the necessary documents (e.g. passport, identity card, permit), the papers (e.g. health certificate, personal invitation) needed for issuing a visa, the actual behavior of the border guards, etc. The term *permeability*, on the other hand, designates the ability of a border to prevent illegal crossings, inside and outside the checkpoints. *Openness* and *permeability* are not necessarily related to one another. According to our definitions, a closed border can be quite permeable and *vice versa*. For example, in the 1980s, while the border between Austria and Hungary still had a very low permeability but, it was quite open from west to east. Correspondingly, the degree of openness was lower. Whereas the degree of openness greatly depends on administrative regulations, permeability is connected with technical installations. History has demonstrated that these installations change: from the simple but gigantic structures of the ancient Chinese Wall through the electro-mechanical barriers which was the Iron Curtain to the flexible electronic response of the EU border security system.

There is another study, although not produced in the *Burgenland-Network*, that strongly focuses on reconstructing identity. It is a study from the Austrian-Czech border⁸. Scholars and intellectuals from both sides again contributed, most of them applying a historical approach. Though this border was also a part of the Iron Curtain, significant differences existed in comparison to the border to Hungary. The most important was the high *emotional loading* (anxiety, hope, triumph, malicious joy) which was connected with the expulsion of a large German-speaking population from Czechoslovakia after World War II. Several authors have dealt with this event. In addition, excellent historical descriptions have been given of the kind of borders which existed in the 18th and 19th centuries. One can clearly see how border controls gradually shifted through the centuries from the fiefdom and city to the dukedom and from there to the outer borders of the empire. Before 1775, the Habsburg lands were covered with many interior checkpoints. The purpose of these posts was mainly to collect customs duties from travellers. The movement of people between communities was restricted to an extent hardly imaginable today. Nevertheless it might not have been seen as a burden, because life was in any case bound to primary circles.

Towards New Horizons

With the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II (1995) and the Austrian millennium (1996), a still larger research network focusing on borders was initiated by the *Ministry of Science, Research and Arts* (BMFWK = *Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst*) in Vienna: *Grenzenloses Österreich (Austria without Frontiers)*. Whereas the contributions in the *Burgenland-Network* were bounded by a clear territorial approach, the thematic approach to *Grenzenloses Österreich* was wide open. The only criteria was a direct or indirect connection with Austria. A total of 87 projects were funded by this initiative. Quite frequently, but not always, the research groups were bi-national if not multi-national. In the end this initiative contained a very heterogenous set of projects which had difficulties staying within the thematic anchor ›Austria‹, to say nothing of the ›border‹. The network not only had members from all Central European countries but also represented a wide variety of academic fields from history to anthropology. Between 1994 and 1996, large workshops were organized by the Ministry to bring networks of scholars together to discuss the progress of their research.

Among other things *Grenzenloses Österreich* covered ethnic relations, cultural transfers, national identity, cultural traditions, travelling, migration, labor markets, ecology, history of arts, mass media, and family. Of the 87 projects not more than half a dozen tried to define border or at least give examples. A larger portion can be considered to be cross-national or cross-



9 Cf. Pohl, W.: Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen im frühmittelalterlichen Mitteleuropa. In: BMFWV (Ed.): Grenzenloses Österreich. Dokumentation 5. Wien 1997, pp. 249-254 and Reinitz, H.: Strategien der Orientierung. In: BMFWV 1997, pp. 255-262.

10 Cf. Heindl, W./ Saurer, E.: Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen (Passing the Border). In: BMFWV 1997, pp. 277-289.

11 Cf. Ahponen 1996 and Häyrynen, Y.-P.: Borders as psychological factors in Europe. In: Eger/ Langer 1996, pp. 69-92.

12 Cf. Langer, J.: New Meanings of the Border in Central Europe. In: Eger/ Langer 1996, pp. 49-67.

13 Cf. Zschokke, W.: In den Zellen der Geschichte. In: Die Presse v. 18.12.1993 (*Spektrum*, p. XI).

border studies using the *black box* approach. Still others tried to use 'border' in a non-territorial context: borders in societal development, borders for sustainability, etc. Those contributions which did elaborate on the border more extensively stressed its historical, functional and semantic dimensions. Two authors discuss the phenomenon of border during the medieval period in Central Europe.⁹ They point out the significance of two key concepts for understanding border between the 5th and 11th centuries: *limes* and *marca*. Whereas *limes* is assumed to have had some affinity with the modern linear state border, *marca* (Mark) is described quite differently. After the decline of the Roman Empire it succeeded *limes* more as a contact zone between Western Europe and tribes from the East than a border line. The authors emphasize the ideological role of both concepts in the era of nationalism. They also point to the rather diffuse character of borders in medieval times in comparison to the 19th and 20th centuries.

In another project the character of borders from the mid-18th to mid-19th century is studied.¹⁰ It indicates that conceptualizations of state borders in the first half of this century tended to use military and biological (natural border, border as skin of the state, etc.) metaphors to describe borders. This blurred its connection with the political system and made us forget that until the end of the 18th century state borders were very permeable. However, a number of domestic borders (custom borders, city walls, tax borders, etc.) existed. Only in the 19th century were these domestic borders replaced by the one state border as a distinct, marked and sometimes fortified line in the landscape. It provided an opportunity for the modern state to display power and authority. In a democratic political system such regulations must have a legal backing, and the border is the object of a number of laws (concerning citizenship, expulsion, border surveillance, immigration, etc.). In the late feudal order the city or community was responsible for its impoverished inhabitants. As a result city and community borders were much more significant than state borders. In addition to that traditional mentality, the lack of efficient transport, serfdom, etc. were additional barriers.

Another project in cooperation with Hungarian partners (*Közep-Európai Intezet*, Budapest) has drawn attention to the dimension of *border semantics*¹¹ citing examples of the Austro-Hungarian border¹². Between 1989, when the Iron Curtain was dismantled, and the mid-1990s the situation was less defined; different semantics appeared which seemed to express the *ambiguous feelings* connected to this border. Because the Iron Curtain was certainly a powerful symbol in the minds of several generations on both sides of it, one can legitimately consider if and how the Iron Curtain has been replaced in its semantic dimension. Above all, its dismantling has obviously opened up the earlier narrow view that the border population on both sides had to allow for more subtle differences. Consideration has been given to such incidentals as differences in road structure, design of telephone booths, office furniture, etc. along the border between Austria and Hungary.¹³ Another dimension is the language. Going eastwards in Austria one can notice street signs as well as commercial advertisements in Hungarian, even far from the borderline. Similar advertisements can be found in German on the Hungarian side. One can also add the cars and trucks on the highways and motorways going south from Vienna to these observations. Their national symbol shows that they mainly come from places in the former communist block. CZ (Czech Republic), SK (Slovakia), HU (Hungary), SLO (Slovenia) and PL (Poland) have far surpassed the D for Germany.

In addition, sculptures and other symbols have emerged which seem to express different kinds of feelings, thoughts and expectations of the local population and beyond. I consider the following four examples to be representative of the state of consciousness on the Austrian side of the border: 1) traumatic memories of the dark side of the border (e.g. an educational path for obscurities and the horrors of refugees), 2) desire for a new unity (e.g. Stonehenge-like stone sculptures surround a border pole), 3) the attitude towards the presence of the army, and 4) bilingual advertising.

The sculptures expressing unity at the border are Land Art, but not just that. They also seem to have a kind of exorcistic function, keeping the bad spirits of history away. They seem to express badly-injured and sinister feelings as well as hope. Anybody who wants to reestablish social bonds to the other side of the border will have to cope with these feelings even after the physical obstacles have completely disappeared. The two other semantic arrangements are more down to earth. The dismantling of the Iron Curtain in 1989 led to an enormous increase in illegal border crossings. The local population is positive about the military presence. The dismantling of the Hungarian border barriers that were so difficult to cross was greeted euphorically at first, but later insecurity in some of the local population caused by the loss of the Iron



14 Cf. Seger, M./ Beluszky, P. (Eds.):
Bruchlinie Eiserner Vorhang. Wien:
Böhlau 1993.

15 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 13.

16 Cf. Lisiecki, St. (Ed.): Die offene
Grenze. Potsdam: Verl. f. Berlin-
Brandenburg 1996 and Burkhardt, M.
F.: Grenz-Transformationen. In:
Langer, J./ Pöllauer, W. (Eds.): Small
States in the Emerging New Europe,
Eisenstadt: Verl. f. Soziologie 1995,
pp. 352-369.

17 Cf. Anderson, M./ Bort, E. (Eds.):
Boundaries and Identities. The
Eastern Frontier of the European
Union. Edinburgh: Univ. of Edinburgh
1996.

Curtain has emerged. The military presence helps to psychologically cushion the withdrawal symptoms. The bilingual advertising has a cultural importance, it is helping to eliminate the psychological barriers that the Iron Curtain left behind.

Besides the two major research networks, other individual border projects should be mentioned. The Iron Curtain was still in place when a very prominent study was launched by geographers comparing two distinct border regions in Austria and Hungary.¹⁴ The authors try to apply a variety of social science theories (e.g. modernization theory), but again there is no particular elaboration of the concept of border. The preferred approach is the border area. Still, the authors seem to be aware of the problem: »The choice of a border region as a focus of investigation would demand a re-thinking of the concept of border itself as well as its various effects« (translated from German).¹⁵ Nevertheless, none of the four suggested theoretical perspectives reflect the border itself very much. The border is mainly seen as a variable dependent on a) the political system, b) center-periphery relations and c) historical factors. Only in d) the theory of potential differentials is the complexity of the border as such touched on by mentioning the role of the number of *border crossings* and *customs regulations* in channelling the potentials. Although here and there other characteristics of borders like *border zone*, *type of border*, etc. are occasionally reflected on, it is clear that no comprehensive theory of border has been applied or developed. The Seger and Beluszky study is, however, probably the most systematic and resourceful study which exists about characteristics of areas on both sides of the former Iron Curtain, even if the direct impact of the border only rarely comes to the surface.

Further north, in Germany, a large amount of transborder cooperation (e.g. Euroregions) catch the eye. One can assume that border-related research projects and studies developed in parallel after 1989. But it seems that research networks similar to those in Austria do not exist. Bibliographical searches lead to individual projects. One major locale for border research appears to be the newly-founded University Viadrina at Frankfurt/Oder. Again the object of the researchers in Frankfurt and their counterparts in Poznan (Poland) is not so much the border as the *border region*. Territorial, cultural and ethnic borders are distinguished; the concept of *contact zone* is emphasized; attention is given to the circumstances of drawing the border (e.g. imposed borders). The contributions concentrate on *border consciousness*, demographic and economic development of border regions, ethnic questions, twin cities, the impact of increasing the permeability of borders, cross-border cooperation, etc.

The previously-mentioned periphery-center dichotomy and border as the dividing line between the known and the unknown carry some theoretical weight in this research context. Terms like *normal border* are also used. The border regime (e.g. border tax, customs) at an external border of the EU is considered to hinder cross-border cooperation. Like the Czech-Austrian border, the Polish-German border is also emotionally-loaded. Again it is the expulsion of the German-speaking population and the reduction of territory which is behind the sentiments. On the Polish side it is the uncertainty about the finality of the course of the border. Long after World War II, on the West German side it was not a border but just a temporal demarcation line.¹⁶

Further south the character of the border between Germany and the Czech Republic is similar, but also very different. It is similar because of the millions of German speakers (Sudeten-deutsche) – not German nationals, because they were never German subjects except under Hitler – who were expelled from Czechoslovakia after World War II. Thus this border, like that between Poland and Germany, has encoded the experience of expulsion. On the other hand, it is quite different, because it already stems from the time of the Habsburg Monarchy. This increases its acceptance and appearance as a *normal border*. Today it is prominent because of the attempt to establish cross-border Euroregions, exploding cross-border traffic and crime. At a recent conference largely related among other things to this border, the notion of *administrating* and *policing borders* was added. In the projects noted so far in Central Europe this aspect, which is contained in the dimension of border regime, is widely neglected¹⁷.

In Central Europe one cannot of course ignore the constructivist system theory of Niklas Luhmann, where the phenomenon of border has received broader consideration than in any other theoretical approach in sociology. Paradoxically »this theory has not dealt to a sufficient extent with the analysis of territorial boundaries« as Luhmann himself already admitted in 1982 (cf. p. 235). Under these circumstances it is not surprising that none of the studies quoted above have borrowed from this theory; but it is astonishing that neither Luhmann nor other advocates of constructivist system theory have in the meantime elaborated further on territorial borders. The only text available seems to be that of Luhmann in 1982. Generally speaking, boundaries are



18 Willke, H.: Systemtheorie. Stuttgart: Fischer 1991.

seen as essential to system theory. »A system exists as a difference in relation to its environment and it reflects this difference by means of boundaries« (cf. 1982, p. 236). It is the double function of boundaries to differentiate the system from its environment and at the same time to relate it to other systems contained in it. Territorial borders, according to Luhmann, just like any other border, have historically lost their content due to the process of functional differentiation. They no longer limit entire societies but only political systems. If they still affect social, economic, academic, etc. relations, then it is because politics still affect these areas. Luhmann comes to the conclusion that highly differentiated societies can no longer merely rely on territorial borders to regulate their relations with the environment.

In constructivist system theory boundaries are usually discussed at such an abstract level that it is not easy to break the definitions down to the question of territorial borders. What can be concluded is that their state reflects the problems of the political system, if not the whole society. In other words, boundaries are the results as well as the preconditions of the reproduction process of a system. They also increase the likelihood of otherwise unlikely developments. Among others, Willke¹⁸ uses the example of the walls of a monastery. Only within such walls could something like asceticism develop. Again, like any boundary, territorial borders will also strengthen identity, particularly political identity. The border regime could also be understood as a complex of selective mechanisms which determine what may or may not belong to a society. Such theoretical deductions can be enlightening and increase the insights into the essence of borders, but they seem to be of little help in describing and analyzing the impact of concrete state borders.

Conclusion

Since the dismantling of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the number of border studies have sharply risen in Central Europe. One of the main reasons for this is that only under the new circumstances can the investigations be comparative. Under communist rule at least one side of the border was always a high security area with restricted access even to its own citizens. Still, this does not completely explain why on the western side, where such restrictions did not exist, the research community showed so little interest. Maybe it was because in Central Europe social sciences, with few exceptions, did not look to the east at all and politically the border areas were abandoned to nature and depopulation. Now at some sections of the former Iron Curtain the situation is being reversed. New political options are arising, and this also attracts research interests. It was the aim of this chapter to look for the theoretical implications of this new genre in countries which were directly affected by the former Iron Curtain.

In summary, a theory of borders as such hardly exists in the studies examined. The term ›border« (›Grenze) is used in a variety of contexts, ranging from the attempt to indicate a *situation* with not yet specified *risks* as well as opportunities through traditional *cross-national studies* to describing the regime and installations of *state borders*. Though usually the term stands for something connected with state borders, it can designate all kinds of limitations. This ambiguous and diffuse character is shared with notions like ›culture« or ›Gesellschaft«. As we know from the latter, diffusiveness and ambiguity need not be a disadvantage for using a term in communication, but the opposite often seems to be the case. From this point of view border certainly has the potential to become even more prominent in intellectual discourses in the future.

On the other hand, this epistemological characteristic seems to create difficulties to operationalize *border* in empirical research. Nevertheless, most of the studies having *border* in their titles turned out to be empirical. Very often it is not the border as such nor its impact but the border area which is investigated. The term border appears either as a *catchword* or a kind of *black box*. Whether the variation of a variable is really due to the border or actually caused by another factor is seldom convincingly proved. In most cases the theoretical approaches of the disciplines involved are applied. Usually these approaches lack conceptualizations of border. The difficulties of grasping the phenomenon theoretically are also indicated by the frequent use of metaphors like ›bridge« or ›door«. Despite these inefficiencies, a number of the studies contain results or reflections which can be used to classify or characterize borders. Together with the non-empirical assumptions of constructivist system theory such abstractions can help to design a theoretical framework to better understand the border phenomenon.

From the system theory of Luhmann (1982) one can conclude that border is, firstly, a *universal* phenomenon. There is a continuous process of borders disappearing and emerging.



Secondly, the evolutionary process of increasing the *differentiation* of society in ever more sub-systems logically results in more borders. Other than in primitive societies, a distinction between social, cultural, political, economic, etc. borders is necessary. They do not congrue anymore, for example, the state border is above all a political border and does not limit social, cultural or other types of relations. Thirdly, the border always *participates* in the formation of the system, and it is at the same time a result of its reproduction. With respect to political borders, of which the (nation-)state border is a special version, one can expect that the characteristics of the border chiefly reflect the state of the political order. If this order changes, the border will also change. As a result we cannot expect the end of borders in the future. Statements of this kind are naturally very general, but they are more than metaphors. Still, they do not say much about the dimensions of borders. This can more easily be drawn from empirical observations.

The studies examined provide a number of clues from which additional theoretical characteristics and dimensions can be drawn. State borders are not simply a line circumscribing a politically-defined territory, but directly or indirectly display a variety of characteristics and qualities. The following is a list which deserves attention when considering the impact of border:

The *age* of the border. This variable can, for example, influence its legitimacy in the adjacent population.

The *mode* of the emergence of border (e.g. by negotiation, through external powers, through force).

The *course* of the border (e.g. straight, zigzagging, through difficult terrain, along a river).

The *border semantic* (e.g. appearance of installations like watchtowers, decoration with land art).

The *border regime* (e.g. procedures at checkpoint, type and frequency of border patrols).

Permeability of the border (likelihood of successful illegal crossing).

Openness (e.g. necessary documents, taxes and fees).

Technical *equipment* and installations (e.g. green border, electronic devices, mechanical traps).

Status of border (e.g. border between member countries and external border of EU).

The *emotional loading* of border (e.g. unjust borders).

We believe this to be a theoretical basis from which *border impact studies* can depart. The system approach combined with the dimensions listed allows us to ask meaningful questions and relate the border to other realities in society. At this point we suggest distinguishing between *border impact studies* and *border studies* in general. The latter will treat the border as a *black box*, i.e. the border will not be operationalized with respect to distinct and observable characteristics. The investigation will be dominated by the specific theoretical perspectives of the academic disciplines involved. In contrast, the *border impact study* will pay attention to the societies on both sides only insofar as their characteristics are reflected in the border itself. The border is taken to represent the whole. This is necessary to separate its influence from other factors. On the other hand, border impact studies need not be restricted to adjacent territories like border studies are, but can include the whole society. It is assumed here that the border discloses the typicality of a system (society) more clearly than any other reality. Therefore it is imaginable that this kind of approach will develop into a major new strategy in social studies comparable to network analysis or agency theory.

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