

**(De/Re)Constructing borders – narratives and imaginaries on divided towns in Central Europe in comparative perspective**

Processes of European integration and globalisation have a tremendous impact on nature and function of borders as well as their perception. In both, academic and public discourse the notions of *borderless world* and *transnational identities* are widely discussed. However, if it was possible to abolish border controls and to introduce free movement of people in a short time period, it is more difficult to overcome the mental barriers and prejudices among border regions residents. Furthermore, recent developments, such as refugee crisis, Brexit and increased Euroscepticism, demonstrate, how fast de-bordering and de-territorialization processes may change into re-bordering policies and securitisation discourse.

The changes of border functions apply particularly to divided towns, as it is there that one can observe both organisms uniting best. While in divided towns we unintentionally ask ourselves the questions of how it feels to live right ‘at the very border’? What do the inhabitants of these towns think and how they feel—in this case these are Słubice and Frankfurt (Oder) as well as Cieszyn and Český Těšín—as they see the border past their window? Have the residents of these towns already got used to living in the shadow of the border—even if so invisible as the Schengen one—and are these moods in line with the local authorities’ actions? Do these people feel that they are any more of Europeans? Are the visitors from the other bank of the Olza and Odra rivers—encountered in a shop or restaurant, sometimes being the same people—perceived as neighbours, residents of the other town or citizens of another state?

In their everyday lives the inhabitants of divided towns remain under the influence of information and other stimuli that get to them from various sources. The most significant include personal experiences, an individual’s company’s opinions, voices from the scientific circles and the messages formulated by political elites (on the central level and—particularly—on the local one), usually reaching the audience by means of media. All these signals make up an information but also affective mosaic that creates in the local community members’ heads a story about living in a divided town, right ‘at the border.’ It is these narratives that we would like to gather in the course of focus group interviews conducted with these people and elites of the towns, as well as by getting familiar with the documents produced by these towns’ authorities. Furthermore, during ethnographic field studies by analysing the information dress of the towns, we intend to prove, how the towns “tell stories about themselves”, to what imaginaries – local, national, transnational or European do they relate?

Among the opinions concerning limited attractiveness that the EU enjoys among its citizens one can find suggestions that the process of integration has detached from ordinary people’s everyday lives. Taking such voices seriously we are going to join the discussion over the consequences of making state borders fully permeable by accentuating the stance held by borderlanders who—by virtue of living right at the border—appear to have much to say in this matter.