

“Infrastructuring Borders”

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Abstracts

Dominik Gerst (European-University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder): Infrastructuring borders

While infrastructures have been a key interest in border studies since its foundation, a renewed interest in the intertwining of borders and infrastructures may contemporarily be observable. Influenced by interdisciplinary research and concepts such as “boundary infrastructures” (Star/Ruhleder), infrastructures may be understood to be not only the physical materiality but also the communicative as well as affective enabling conditions of borders. As ordered and ordering structures, they assemble/arrange people and objects, technical systems, discursive and non-discursive practices and provide the basis for collective social processes. Taking a praxeological stance towards these complex, standardized, and sometimes invisible borderings, the actual doings (“infrastructuring”) that constitute borders should receive analytic attention. Decoding the interwoven practices of infrastructuring, then, may provide insights in how the widely-claimed complexity of contemporary borders works.

Martin Klatt (University of Southern Denmark): Spaces of Place or Spaces of Flows? The resilience of territorial border infrastructure in a globalized world, examples from Europe and North America

Globalization as well as discourses on borderless Europe have challenged the idea of the borders from being lines into border zones or flow-oriented borders. Pooling of border control as in the Schengen area, as well as Smart Border technologies of surveillance and control, or pre-clearance of customs have moved border functions from the line to end points of flows like airports or logistic centers. Furthermore, infrastructure construction projects like the Channel Tunnel, the Øresund Bridge as well as the planned Fehmarn Belt connection and a Helsinki-Tallinn connection express metropolises’ strategies to connect across borders in a globalized, cosmopolitan world. But have these reconfigurations of border functions really ended borders’ territoriality?

In my paper, I will concentrate on examples of attempts to use cross-border infrastructure to integrate cross-border public transport to create cross-border metropolises (Øresund, Basel, Geneva, Strasbourg) or just improve connectivity in rural areas (Germany-Denmark, Germany-Poland, British Columbia-Washington State). I will demonstrate that, in spite of serious political attempts and considerable funding from the EU, the border as a line has remained or even reshaped itself in technical differences and practical impossibilities, continuing to discriminate cross-border mobility.

Holger Pötzsch (University of Tromsø): Managing Migration: On iBorder and Technological Zones/Work

The present contribution scrutinizes the interrelation between information and communication technologies, and processes of bordering. In particular, it addresses the ways through which biometrics, dataveillance, predictive analytics, and robotics enlist the human body, networks, and human-machine assemblages in practices of managing migration at the contemporary dis-located, and 'smart' border. Through a brief description of the socio-technical apparatuses underlying biometric, algorithmic, and automated border work, the contribution develops the term iBorder, and connects its specific affordances to an emergent late-modern regime of security. In introducing the concepts of technological zones and technological work (Walters 2011), I argue for a bottom-up perspective that problematizes the aspirations of a global security apparatus from the vantage point of everyday border practices.

Katrin Sowa (University of Cologne): Officers, Passports and Machines: Immigration Law Enforcement at a Border Post, Perspectives from the Global South

This contribution presents an anthropological perspective on national border regimes. It focuses on work practices of state officers who are deployed at border posts in order to surveil, control and manage cross-border movements, whereby constantly reinforcing the existence of the border.

Law enforcing officers are part of the state's official infrastructure for border control. Their work environment is the border post, designed to pre-structure cross-border movements. Work mainly consists of the categorization of people and relies on passports in combination with technologies like passport- and fingerprint-reading machines. These practices are highly standardized, and with regard to Richard Rottenburg standardizations have to be translated into the local context. Such a translation-process often develops its own dynamics. In many contexts, officers face border porosity and movements "out of state control", the legitimacy of their work might be challenged by locals with a different perception of the border and the state. In practice, officers sometimes have to develop further unofficial infrastructures (e.g. with non-state agents) in order to fulfill their duties.

The underlying ethnographic research took place at a border post between Uganda and South Sudan. It can be shown that the area reflects similar developments that can be found in Europe or elsewhere. While the region inhabits the largest refugee camps worldwide, East African states increase their efforts "to man borders", control passports, introduce new identification technologies, and even build walls.