

## **Borders and Administrative Legacy, Ljubljana, 24–26 November 2016**

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The international conference *Borders and Administrative Legacy* was organised by the Institute of Contemporary History and the Department of History of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and was held at the National Museum of Contemporary History. Although the three-day conference was organised by historians, the event was not limited to the history of borders, their transformation through time, and their demarcation purposes. According to the head of the conference, Marko Zajc, the aim of the event was to “critically assess the methodological and conceptual power of the concepts of phantom borders and administrative legacy, and to subject it to theoretical and empirical historical research”.

The first day of the conference started with the opening remarks by the Director of the Institute of Contemporary History, Damijan Guštin, and the Director of the National Museum of Contemporary History, Kaja Širok. The organiser and the principal investigator of the project *The Phenomenon of Border Rivers*, Marko Zajc, gave the introduction lecture bearing the title *Phantom and Possessed Borders*. The metaphor of the phantom borders – the historical borders that lost their political meaning some time ago, but still reappear in different social and political conditions – is already established in the theory of borders. In his lecture, Zajc suggested that, following the same spirit, another metaphor could be added – possessed borders. The expression can be used for political borders possessed by the “historical phantom”.

The keynote speaker on the first day was Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, Professor of Public Policy at the University of Victoria. He is the principal investigator of the project *Borders in Globalization* and the chief editor of both the *Journal of Borderland Studies* and the *Canadian-American Public Policy*. He presented the lecture, a part of his research project that is still in progress, on the functioning of the borders, how they are woven into the local and global, cultural, economic, and political life, and on the appearance and disappearance of borders, and the techniques to achieve their permanence.

The first panel, *Administrative Legacy as Imperial Legacy*, featured three lectures about borders before and after the fall of the empires. Irina Marin presented a cross-border comparison of rural uprising along the frontier between Austria-Hungary, Tsarist Russia and the new Balkan states, Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia. The Millet System and its legacy in the post-imperial Turkey was the topic of Elif Becan's lecture. In this panel, the issues of identities and nation-building were unavoidable. Harrison King presented the more recent border engineering following the ethnic key in the Post-Soviet states, and the phantom of Bolshevik borders in the South Caucasus.

The panel called *Living “on” the Border, Living “under” the Border* focused more on people living on the borderlines. Hrvoje Čapo researched criminal behaviour data on the Croatian Military Frontier. Bojana D. Savić presented insights into the chronicle

Ta'rih-i Vak'a-ı Hayret-nümâ-yı Belgrad ve Sırbistan, written around 1870, and its value as a source for studying borderland society. In the same panel, Machteld Venken presented the edited volume of *Borderland Studies Meets Child Studies: A European Encounter* dated 2017.

As the name alludes, the panel *Constructing Provincial Borders, Making Future State Borders* focused on how the formation of state borders was influenced by past provincial borders. The first three presenters concentrated on the provincial borders between the Slovenian-Croatian border of today. Filip Čuček started with the Austro-Hungarian period and the regulation of the Styrian-Croatian border. Stipica Grgić continued with borderland micro-regions of Štrigova and Razkrižje between 1910 and 1953. Aleš Gabrič concluded the panel with the post-World War II period and the topic of changing the border in the region near Gradin. The final presentation of the day was Ekaterina Mizrokhi's lecture on the phantom border of Berlin after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

On the second day, the keynote speaker was Bernhard Struck, Associate Professor in Modern European History and the Founding Director of the Institute for Transnational and Spatial History at the University of St Andrews. The lecture bearing the promising title *Travels in Lotharingia OR What if ... Napoleon had spoken Esperanto? A spatial, long-term analysis of the inner Empire and its legacies (including zinc, code, and small (very small) territory)* did not disappoint. Struck analysed the consequences of the breakdown of Napoleon's Empire, the rise of new phantom and political borders, and how the Empire's administrative legacies affected the future states.

Bernhard Struck mentioned the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a long-term consequence of the fallen Napoleon's Empire. It became a phantom border, which was analysed in greater detail by Catherine Gibson. Lili Zách talked about how the Irish nationalist circles saw new border settlements after the Great War. She focused on how the work of the North-Eastern Boundary Bureau and the Boundary Commission was influenced by European precedents. In his talk, Shay Rozen focused on the Baha'i's aspect of the Israeli-Syrian border, which was established during and after the First World War as the product of British and French negotiations. Staying on the desert topic, Magnus Halsnes researched the development of the political and administration borders between Jordan and Saudi Arabia. He pointed out that the fragments of the old frontier between the nomadic and sedentary places remained included in the administrative divisions of the new states.

Moving from the desert to the waters, the leitmotiv of the next panel were border rivers. The phenomenon of border rivers was initially approached from a more geographical point of view. Matija Zorn presented a paper made in collaboration with Drago Kladnik, which explored border rivers as a type of natural borders that are globally often transformed into political borders. Rok Ciglič (in paper collaboration with Mateja Breg Valjavec and Matija Zorn) pointed out the issue of administrative demarcation of the rivers. By analysing historical maps of certain Slovenian border

rivers, they demonstrated how much the rivers can change their courses. Using the Detroit River border as an example, Ramya Swayamprakash demonstrated how a political border can be seen as an infrastructure and what new analytic ground it opens when seen as such. Matjaž Geršič presented a project on the conceptualisation of natural borders. Through a comparison of cognitive maps drawn by people from different parts of Slovenia and the former provincial maps, it was established that rivers are the most enduring delimiting markers.

In the last panel of the second day, the focus was on the administrative legacy. In terms of establishing contemporary borders, the administrative legacy is fundamental for their legitimisation. Vanni D'Alessio lectured on the legacies of administrative borders in Rijeka and the Upper Adriatic, and on how they affected the creation of new political units. Scott Moore discussed different kinds of administrative legacy. Through patriotic celebrations in the Imperial and the Republican Austria, he showed how bureaucratic memory can survive long after borders and states change.

The last day of the conference started with a presentation by Alexandru Lesanu on the case of Transnistria and the issue of being an unrecognised state in the global economy, with all of its trade being practically illegal. For the demarcation of the eventual phantom border in the Primorje–Gorski Kotar County, Petar Bagarić analysed the contemporary election results at the municipal level. At the conclusion of the panel, Jasper Klomp discussed the case of the Oder–Neisse Line as the Polish–German border in 1990, and how politicians chose different administrative legacies for the legitimisation of different parts of the border.

Nataša Sardžoska focused on the border artwork of Tanja Ostojič, a Serbian artist who expatriated to Berlin during the wars in the former Yugoslavia. She questioned the purpose of mapping the borders in today's world, which has become so culturally liminal. From an anthropologic perspective, Raluca Mateoc presented boundaries as identification factors, using the example of the Turks and the Tatars. In the identification processes, it is necessary to consider both the spatial and the social boundaries that divide social groups. The lengthy, but educational and interesting conference came to a close with the concluding remarks by the head organiser Marko Zajc.

In conclusion, I would like to paraphrase the sentence from the beginning, on the aim of the conference: The methodological and the conceptual power of the concepts of the phantom borders and the administrative legacy was evaluated interdisciplinarily, critically, and employing a variety of approaches. Although border studies are not a novelty in the Slovenian research circles, the studies in this field remain unsystematic. The conference was a great opportunity to gain insight into the state of the global border studies, and to popularise the subject itself.

The conference was filmed by SIStory – History of Slovenia and is available at: <http://www.sistory.si/11686/37178>.