

Editorial

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„Man braucht jetzt ein Visum für jedes Land extra!“ sagte mein Vetter Joseph Branco. „Zeit meines Lebens hab' ich so was nicht gesehn. Jedes Jahr hab ich überall verkaufen können: in Böhmen, Mähren, Schlesien, Galizien“ – und er zählte alle alten, verlorenen Kronländer auf. „Und jetzt ist alles verboten. Und dabei hab' ich einen Paß. Mit Photographie.“ Er zog seinen Paß aus der Rocktasche und hielt ihn hoch und zeigte ihn der ganzen Runde.“ „Dies ist nur ein Maronibrater“, sagte Chojnicki, „aber sehn Sie her: es ist ein geradezu symbolischer Beruf. Symbolisch für die alte Monarchie. Dieser Herr hat seine Kastanien überall verkauft, in der halben europäischen Welt, kann man sagen. Überall, wo immer man seine gebratenen Maroni gegessen hat, war Österreich, regierte Franz Joseph. Jetzt gib'ts keine Maroni mehr ohne Visum. Welch eine Welt!“

Joseph Roth (1938) *Die Kapuzinergruft. De Gemeinschaft, Bilthoven, Kapitel 30*

[“Now a separate visa is needed for each country! “ said my cousin Joseph Branco. ”All my life I have not seen the like of it. Every year I could sell everywhere: in Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Galicia“– and he recounted the old lost Crown lands. ”And now everything is forbidden, yet I have a passport, with photograph“. He drew out his passport from the trouser pocket and held it high and showed it to the whole table. ”This is only a chestnut roaster“, said Chojnicki, ”but look here: it is almost a symbolic profession, symbolic for the old monarchy. This gentleman has sold his chestnuts everywhere, in half of the European world, so to say. Everywhere, where his roasted chestnuts have been consumed, was Austria, and reigned by Franz Joseph. Now there are no chestnuts without visa. What a world! “]

Dass die politische Entwicklung so hinter der wirtschaftlichen herhinkt, ist ein rechtschaffenes Unglück. In Südosteuropa aber hat dieser Widerspruch besonders katastrophale Folgen: denn hier bestand schon einmal die Wirtschaftseinheit der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie. Ihre Zerstörung als Rückwärtsbewegung zu bezeichnen, hat man dann das Recht, wenn man gleichzeitig betont, dass die Zerschlagung der politischen Einheit ein Fortschritt war.

Max Herb (1938) *Südosteuropa – Form und Forderung. Editions Nouvelles Internationales, Paris, p.19*

[That the political lags behind the economic development to such an extent, is verily a misfortune. In South Eastern Europe this contradiction has exceptionally catastrophic consequences: because there existed already the economic union of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Describing its destruction as a step backwards is justifiable as long as at the same time it is stressed that the destruction of its political structure was progress.]

Europe's territories undergo a continuous process of transformation. At the end of the 20th century, which was shaped by severe political and economic deteriorations, an era of common interest and common visions seemed to dawn. Borders were overcome, at least political borders, in terms of 'freedom of movement' in the countries of Western, Southern and increasingly also in Central Europe, the latter being integrated step by step under the umbrella of the European Union.

After an era of more or less obstructive state borders, of unscalable border walls, electrified fences and minefields dividing Europe into two following World War II and plenty of border crossing regulations between countries in general, it has become possible to travel from the Adriatic coast of Slovenia to the easternmost fringes of Slovakia without being forced to show up at border inspection points. This freedom however means more than some kind of civil liberty which is increasingly misunderstood as a *carte blanche* for 'anything goes' for everybody at any time and at any place. By contrast, freedom implies a new dimension of making use of that liberty responsibly. The European citizen should understand that taking long-term advantage of that freedom requires acceptance that though or because individuals have gained a wealth of 'democratic' rights they have at the same time to fulfil respective obligations in support of peaceful and solidary coexistence at regional, national and European levels. Crossing political borders without restrictions allows for the stepping at will from one region to the other, each characterised by its very specific cultural traditions, languages and socio-economic as well as socio-ecological ways of interaction between people and resources and its specific attitudes and folklore.

After 20 years of experiences of a 'Europe without borders' it has become obvious that based on the fact that this specific 'Europe' represents only a privileged part of the European territory and the term 'open/closed borders' embraces a surprising variety of different types of 'borders', the political border is but one of many. When political borders disappeared new types of borders gained influence. The assumption that a 'Europe without borders' will, at the same time, foster cross-border understanding and solidarity is not at all self-evident. Borders of language, of different levels of economic wealth, of ethnicity became more important and replaced the 'trivial' border-line marked by fences, or at least by border stones and warning signs. Above all it is a matter of fact that the formerly closed Central European state borders were only shifted to the east. The new (old) 'hard' borders now exist between the European Union and the neighbouring non-member states such as Belarus, Ukraine and Serbia, while the borders between the Soviet satellite states and the Soviet Union itself have been 'hard' borders before 1989 and remain so to this day. Additionally mental borders emerge and fade in space and time depending on oscillations of political and economic developments and changes. Xenophobia wafts here and there, fuelled by ill-fated movements, fear and agitation. The Europe of the early 21st century is far off from a unified, at least solidary federation of (former) nation states.

The human being needs borders, searches for them, always creating new ones. They are the markers of identity formation, or more precisely: border as question of identity and identity as question of border.

Benjamin Grilj (2012) Border – Attempt of a Phenomenology, in Csaplovics E (ed) Lost Landscapes - Reflections from Central European Border Regions. Murska Sobota, p.94

Funding programmes such as EU-INTERREG are therefore all the more indispensable and a means to support the development, implementation and establishment of cross-border and transboundary initiatives of enhancing common understanding, cooperation and coexistence at the European level. They bring together actors in different fields of interest, from economy and society to cultural affairs and environmental protection. These programmes stimulate understanding and common action for balancing heterogeneous interests and the establishment and maintenance of platforms of

communication and networking and, importantly, promote tolerance, mutual respect and friendship (without borders).

Dealing with the 'natural world' makes things easier when talking of and dealing with borders. Nature as such does not recognise (state) borders or boundaries except those which are imposed by climatic, geological and ecological characteristics.

Étudiées pour elles-mêmes et en elle-mêmes, montagnes, rivières et forêts livrent peu à peu lentement leurs secrets. Des limites? Souvent, sans doute. Dans la mesure où elles sont réellement des obstacles. Mais des traits d'union aussi, de centres d'expansion et de rayonnement, des petits mondes attirants doués de valeur propre, liant entre eux étroitement des hommes des pays mitoyens. En tout cas, des limites „nécessaires“, jamais!

Lucien Febvre (1922) *La Terre et l'Évolution Humaine. Introduction Géographique à l'Histoire*. La Renaissance du Livre, Paris, p.366

[When studying mountain ranges, river landscapes and forests as such they disclose their secrets step by step and slowly. Are there limits? Often, no doubt. Given that they represent real obstacles. But they are also links, centres of expansion and of presence, little worlds, attractive and gifted due to their very own values, closely interlinking people of separated countries. In any case, they are never "necessary" limits!]

Europe is increasingly shaped by 'industrialised' landscapes and a steadily decreasing amount of traditional cultural, semi-natural and 'wilderness' landscapes. Borders in traditional cultural landscapes were shaped by interactions of humans with the environment in a more or less ecologically balanced way, such as extensive grazing, small-scale agriculture and selective silviculture. Borders in disturbed environments were and are however largely created by more aggressive forms of human impact, i.e. by agro- and sylvo-industrial exploitation, drainage of wetlands, urbanisation and fragmentation due to expansion of traffic networks. Secondary effects such as spread of invasive species and deterioration of soils and groundwater due to discharge of pollutants, fertilisers and pesticides also have an impact as do oscillations of local and regional climate. *Natura* in its various manifestations serves as a mirror of the complexity of external (environmental) impacts and effects in a holistic sense of understanding. Vegetation explicitly behaves as a more or less immediate responsive matter to external drivers, be they of 'natural' or artificial/human origin.

Vegetation in its ecological complexity and the patterns of interaction between flora and fauna provide a protective shield against environmental impacts of different kinds as long as biodiversity, density and vitality of vegetation cover remain distinctive and resilient. Networks of vegetation of high ecological value, thus ecological networks, provide a precondition for the preservation and long-term maintenance of highly valuable Europe-wide green infrastructure. They interlink different eco-climatic zones, ecological regions and biotopes of varying scales and by that create a network of ecologically and 'aesthetically' outstanding landscapes as a backbone of a 'Green Europe'. Ecological networks are therefore an indispensable means for sound protection and management of natural resources and of ecological services and green infrastructure.

Transnational Ecological Networks (TransEcoNet) is grounded on a platform of actors coming from transdisciplinary fields of interest, from regional planning and socio-ecological development to landscape ecology as well as from nature conservation to geoinformatics, at different institutional levels, from universities to NGOs in nature

conservation and to regional agencies. It is located in six different (in terms of e.g. eco-climatic, socio-economic and political characteristics) regions and in six different countries of Central Europe.

Borders are subtle entities depending on the causes and reasons of their evolution and of their mimicry as well as on their manifestation in space and time. Ecological networks overcome, depending on time as a crucial factor, any kind of disturbance which is often represented by a boundary-type structure, be it the result of political or economic impact. Sound documentation and qualitative and quantitative analysis (of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) as well as valorisation of the benefits of ecological networks are key elements in combatting environmental deterioration as a fatal by-product of the „immobilité fulgurante“ [racing standstill, A/N] of current political structures found in contemporary societies.

Mythomanie d'une quantification encouragée par le développement constant de l'informatique et de ses effets d'entraînement sur les exigences d'une communication où la rapidité du résultat prime sur sa qualité.

Paul Virilio (2007) L'université du désastre. Galilée, Paris, p.25

[This mythomania of quantification which is encouraged by the continuous development of informatics and of its practical impact on the requirements of a communication where the speed of achieving a result dominates over its quality.]

Participative approaches to raising awareness, to re-establishing eroded regional identities (in marginalised border regions), valorising the qualities of ecological network structures for the benefit of the respective local/regional population, reinventing traditional ways of cultivation, of crafts based on local resources, of new (old) ways of intercommunication at local to transnational levels, i.e. in the local and regional, the cross border and also the European dimension, have become the driving force for networking based on common socio-ecological and socio-ethical values. In a second step, common interest in sound development of the protective management of heritage of cultural and semi-natural landscapes as well as of remaining patches of wilderness landscapes all over (Central) Europe can be established.

TransEcoNet in our understanding is thus both a means for creating responsible approaches to the conservation, the ecologically-balanced development/management and to the valorisation of the ecological qualities of landscapes rich in biodiversity via a Europe-wide network approach as well as a strong and efficient catalyst to stimulate the creation and development of local and regional interest and participation. As a consequence the benefits of ecological network approaches are passed over to the communities concerned and a process of networking between 'nature and people' is communicated and established. To this end *TransEcoNet* plays a significant part in contributing to the continuous further development of (European) fora of ecology-minded individuals and of respective interest groups towards an expansion and maintenance of strong ties of urgently needed intercommunication and solidary action in 'ecological networking' from local to European levels.