

Editorial

Borders and Administrative Legacy

Ljubljana, 24–26 November 2016

Identities, Categories of Identification, and Identifications Between the Danube, the Alps, and the Adriatic

Ljubljana, 20–21 April 2017

“We are faced with a process of making borders and undoing them. It is like the process that never stops and is still going on today.”

Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, Ljubljana, 24 November 2016

“Identities are categories that serve to represent social realities by simplifying them / ... / Identifications are choices made by people about the groups or categories to which they wish to belong.”

Pieter Judson, Ljubljana, 20 April 2017

Borders and identities: two concepts, two conferences, and yet a single great topic for historiography. There are no borders without identities and identifications. Identities cannot exist without borders. Are we dealing with the two sides of the same coin? Both concepts (borders and identities) can only be discussed in the historical (and geographical) context. Both phenomena are clearly apparent and recurrently problematic in human societies, and both are undoubtedly never-ending processes. They are never the same, but always there.

In the framework of the project *The Phenomenon of Border Rivers* (financed by the Slovenian Research Agency, 2014–17), the Institute of Contemporary History

supported two international conferences. The *Borders and Administrative Legacy* conference was envisioned as the culmination of our work on the project. The main organiser was the Institute of Contemporary History in cooperation with the Department of History at the Faculty of Arts and the National Museum of Contemporary History. The purpose of the conference was to critically assess the methodological and conceptual power of the administrative legacy (borders) and landscape relations, as well as to subject it to theoretical and empirical historical research. Why “administrative legacy”? The administrative legacy represents the phantom past, structured in the official records of the states. It is vital for the legitimacy and status of the present. The legitimacy and meaning of the contemporary borders stem merely from the official records. Furthermore, borders can outlive the states that have created them. As the political space changes, the obscure parts of the administrative legacy suddenly become important: cadastral municipality borders, police districts, etc. The Slovenian–Croatian maritime border, for instance, never existed in Yugoslavia, but what did exist was the administrative practice of (federal) police supervision over the waters of the Adriatic Sea. When the issue of the maritime border between the newly independent states arose, the technical “division of labour” – police supervision – became a question of national interest.

The Department of History at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana was the main organiser of the second event, the conference entitled *Identities, Categories of Identification, and Identifications between the Danube, the Alps, and the Adriatic*. Recent research has shown that even after the rise of nationalisms, nation-ness was not (and still is not) relevant for the entirety of the populace, and it has not been relevant in all situations. Many scholars see group identities as a result of non-determinate processes, which have always had alternatives. Those unrealised options are not historical mistakes (as the traditional national historiography has assumed), but simply alternatives that have not been successful. The very fact that they have appeared proves that they have had a certain potential. The aim of the conference was to respond to these challenges with historical case studies: how have the identities and identifications in the region between the Danube, the Alps, and the Adriatic appeared, disappeared, or transformed.

The Canadian political scientist Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, the keynote speaker at the conference on borders and administrative legacy, reminded the historians (who are used to studying concrete historical situations) of the importance of the “bird’s eye view” and the “longue durée” perspective. Since the beginning of agriculture, borders have been a permanent attribute of human political life. Brunet-Jailly identified two long-term trends: the trend of political fragmentation (there are now more independent states than ever before), and the trends of discipline (societies based on borders in space) and supervision (societies based on the control of the “flows” of people and goods). Due to the development of biometrics, people now carry borders “within themselves”.

Are people as “walking borders” really a new phenomenon? The “bird’s eye view” can reveal historical structures “from above”, but only the “worm’s eye view” of

historical case studies can reveal how historical structures actually work. Pieter Judson, a professor at the European University Institute in Florence and the keynote speaker at the conference on identities and identifications, emphasised the importance of case studies for understanding the difference between identification and identities. If historians truly want to understand nationalism and other competing loyalties, they need to concentrate on identifications, not identities. Identities are in fact only narrow categories of people. Identifications are more precise; they are “made” by people themselves in order to negotiate their existence in a complex society. If we boldly develop his advice further, we can entertain a thought that people had been “walking borders” long before the invention of digital biometrics.

The organisers of both conferences decided to disperse the papers to different publications in order to promote the achievements of both conferences in different environments. Our issue contains seven contributions: four papers that were presented at the *Borders and Administrative Legacy* conference, and three from the conference entitled *Identities, Categories of Identification, and Identifications between the Danube, the Alps, and the Adriatic*. Lili Zách, Stipica Grgić, and the author of this editorial dealt with borders “in the field” as well as the borders captured in the official records. Lili Zách investigated the transformation of political space in Ireland and Central Europe in the period after the First World War. The establishment of the borders in the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire has had an interesting impact on the Irish border question. Stipica Grgić offered a profound analysis on the issue of border changes in the Štrigova and Razkrižje micro-region (today divided between Slovenia and Croatia). Marko Zajc, on the other hand, chose the combination of environmental history and border studies approach to analyse two long-term aspects of the border river phenomenon with the example of the Mura River: the relationship between the river and the boundary line, and the relationship between historical structures and border disputes. Scott Moore did not focus on borders, but rather on the issue of the Habsburg imperial legacy: the post-war Austrian schools used programs identical to those from the Habsburg period in order to develop patriotism in students.

The three contributions that were presented at the conference on identities and identifications focused on the period of the late 19th and early 20th century. Igor Vranić chose the Croatian art historian and politician Izidor Kršnjavi as the subject of his interest. He analysed Kršnjavi’s interpretation of the role of Croatia in the Imperial (and European) symbolic geography. Étienne Boisserie and Martin Jemelka presented detailed case studies of the Slovak national movement. The former explored the relations between family networks and patriotic activities, while the latter focused on the workers’ religious and national identifications and changes in the Ostrava region.

Most of the presentations from both conferences were recorded and are available at our Sistory.si portal as video lectures.

Marko Zajc