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Borders - identities - home: Theory-based approaches to constructs and concepts in a cross-border context

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Borders – Identities – Home: Theory-based approaches to constructs and concepts in a cross-border context

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BORDERS – IDENTITIES – HOME: THEORY-BASED APPROACHES TO CONSTRUCTS AND CONCEPTS IN A CROSS-BORDER CONTEXT

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Abstract
Life in the border regions within the European Union has become normal for many people, especially for younger generations. Crossing the borders is part of everyday life. In recent years, until the refugee crisis, national borders had lost significance due to their increased permeability, although neither borders nor border demarcations have ever become meaningless. National policies and frameworks determine fundamental orientations that have specific implications on both sides of borders. This is associated with processes of inclusion and exclusion, (regional) identities, feelings of belonging and issues concerning a sense of home. Against this background, this paper provides a theory-based introduction to the central constructs and concepts that gain significance in the cross-border context: border(s) and border demarcations, (spatial and regional) identities and home. Identification processes are illuminated and categorised using the example of the Greater Region.

Keywords
Cross-border context – theory – identities – home – Greater Region

1 Introduction: Everyday experience and scientific issues

For numerous people, especially younger ones, living in regions of the European Union that are frequently described as 'border regions' has been 'normalised', and crossing borders has become part of everyday life. With the Schengen Agreement of 1985 and its political implementation on 26 March 1995 (e.g. Euro-Informationen GbR Agency for Consumer Communication 2015), crossing the national borders between Belgium, Germany, France and Luxembourg is often almost imperceptible (see also the paper by Wille/Roos in this volume). The experience of border crossings, e.g. between Germany and France, with border posts, border officials and barriers, is a fading memory. The buildings and structures of the border stations are slowly disappearing; they have been demolished or repurposed as residential buildings, and only people who know where the border ran for decades still notice the signs in passing. The temporary suspension of the Schengen Agreement, e.g. for the G7 Summit in Elmau (Bavaria) in June 2015 or the resumed border controls in connection with the 'refugee crisis', on the other hand, appear rather strange as people have grown used to crossing national borders in their daily life without having to undergo ID checks or passport controls. Yet, 'borders' and 'border demarcations' have never become meaningless. National policies and frameworks determine basic orientations, which entail specific implications on both sides of the borders – with regard to transport and infrastructure, the economy and labour market, education and science, law and spatial planning, etc. The 'Greater Region' (see also the paper by Hartz/Caesar in this volume) is presumed to have about 213,000 cross-border employees (*IBA* [Interregional Labour Market Observatory] 2013), although public transport in particular has not been sufficiently adapted to this development as yet. Public services also still tend to be provided on a national basis. Although it is increasingly becoming common practice to live in one country and work in another, there are still obstacles in regard to employment contracts, legal regulations or medical insurance. On the one hand, there is the example of the Schengen Lyceum in Perl as a joint school which has emerged from the collaboration between Saarland and Luxembourg (cf. Pallagst/Hartz in this volume), yet on the other hand, there are still language barriers that can impede cooperation. Cross-border cooperation is increasingly enabled and strongly pursued, as evidenced by INTERREG or opportunities for the establishment of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), yet different planning cultures and planning competences have not at all become irrelevant as yet (cf. the papers by Damm or Pallagst/Hartz in this volume). It is, moreover, important to focus on (regional) identities, on a shared sense of belonging and of 'home' when considering the future of cross-border cooperation. With whom are people interacting and with whom are they spending their leisure time if they work, e.g. in Luxembourg but live in Rhineland-Palatinate? Do they look for social contacts among Luxembourgers or do they make new friends among people from Rhineland-Palatinate 'quickly and easily'? What do they consider to be 'home'; with what do they identify?

The following discussion will seek to provide a theory-based approach to constructs and concepts such as 'border(s)', 'identity/identities' and 'home' and place them in relation to each other – as a structural framework for the paper by Spellerberg/Schönwald/Engelhardt/Weber and other papers in this volume.

2 Border(s) and border demarcations

Despite globalisation, increasing interactions, market liberalisation, the elimination of trade barriers and customs duties, etc., 'borders' are still perceived as 'borders' – both on the political level (e.g. through various laws and provisions) and on the social level (e.g. through language barriers or different cultural habits). They are institutionally embedded on many different levels, in many different ways, and remain pervasive. At the same time, they are not incontrovertible and one-dimensional, as shown by the changing interpretation of the border between Bavaria and the Czech Republic over a short period (see in this regard Weber 2013, 2015). The history of this national border between Germany and the Czech Republic changed over the course of less than two decades from an Iron Curtain border to an external EU border and later, in 2004, through the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union, into an internal EU border and eventually into a Schengen border in 2007.

Against the background of borders in the sense of 'artificial' border demarcations, border studies evolved as an interdisciplinary field of study, which now examines social, political, economic and cultural processes and analyses borders. A corresponding social-constructivist perspective has become established in cultural studies and the social sciences since the 1990s (cf. Doll/Gelberg 2014: 18).

As an abstract concept, a 'border' (see also the paper by Pallagst/Caesar in this volume) is first and foremost presumed to designate a line that separates different territories, causing them to be distinguished from one another. A border can also be visualised on different levels: as a territorial border marked by border controls or walls, as a social border characterised by status symbols, or as an aesthetic border which can be perceived and construed in different ways (cf. Doll/Gelberg 2014: 15). Bös and Zimmer (2006: 162) classify the functions of territorial, political borders into four groups:

> The **identity function** refers to the processes of reconstructing national identities and preserving established identity formations.

> The **solidarity function** refers to the types of solidarity within national borders (e.g. welfare state) and also to solidarities that exist across borders.

> The institutional **stabilisation function** designates the general legal conditions that stabilise the welfare state systems or economic framework or contribute to their destabilisation, either because they are outdated or too novel for a society.

> The external **regulatory function** structures the international system, both in the sense of limiting the nation state's spaces of power and in extending those spaces across borders (e.g. through military power).

In nation states, established border demarcations are (re)produced that are stabilised through constructs such as national identity as well as specific welfare and economic systems. At the same time, the nation state's scope of action is in part undermined through globalisation processes, while other points of reference, such the orienta-

tion on local and regional affairs – key word: glocalisation – become increasingly important (see e.g. Chilla/Kühne/Weber et al. 2015; Kühne/Meyer 2015; Robertson 1995, 1998). But here, too, border demarcations separate – the 'own' from the 'other'; a differentiation is made: 'every border demarcation is an act of differentiation, which is associated with the constitution of meaning, as any definition is based on the principle of exclusion' (Doll/Gelberg 2014: 17; see also Weber 2013: 51 et seq.). The establishment but also the shifting and 'elimination' of borders can be viewed as constitutive for the production of 'order' – as the basis to which reference can be made.

According to Simmel (2006: 21), the border is the 'spatial expression of that standard relationship between two neighbours, for which we do not have an entirely standard term and which we could describe as the state of indifference of being defensive and offensive, as a charged state which latently harbours both, whether it develops or not'. This state of indifference of being defensive and offensive is nowadays frequently characteristic of social borders. Accordingly, 'the border is not a factual spatial situation with sociological impacts but a sociological fact which is formed in space' (Simmel 2006: 23). In other words, it is not the countries, parcels of land or city districts which set up boundaries between each other; instead, the inhabitants themselves produce and effect the impact of the border (cf. Simmel 1992: 697). Social practices can thus serve to shift or confirm borders, e.g. from a bottom-up direction. Borders are formed not only by nation states, but by citizens who demarcate the borders or modify – or even reject – them ('Borderwork', e.g. in the healthcare sector in the EU; Rumford 2006). In order to remain constant and effective, borders must be reproduced (which also includes their breaching), otherwise they would eventually become irrelevant and disappear.

Michel Foucault additionally suggests that borders must be crossable in order to be perceived as existing: borders can only be experienced when they can be crossed. Borders, border demarcations and border crossings are closely related notions. Walter Benjamin later described crossings as thresholds (Benjamin 1991: 1025), i.e. as 'transition zones', where negotiation processes constantly take place. In this way, borders turn into spaces of interaction (Doll/Gelberg 2014: 24). Accordingly, everyday border-crossing practices – activities that would generally be considered 'normal' outside the context of a national border – gain special meaning through or make sense only in this context. This includes, for example, the purchase of cheaper products (e.g. fuel, tobacco, coffee or alcohol) and work or residential migration or visiting friends or acquaintances (cf. Wille/Schnuer/Boesen 2014: 339 as well as Wille/Roos in this volume).

Closely connected with the question of borders is that of identities and how they function in border regions.

3 Spatial and regional identity/identities and language

Identity can be described as a continuous, always provisional and open-ended as well as a contradictory process of self-definition, which is formed in social interactions (cf. Kmec/Reckinger 2014: 35). It can also be viewed as a subjective individual performance or an act of construction (cf. Reckinger/Wille 2010: 12). Inspired by Judith Butler, 'identity' can be described as performative and staged; this amounts in principle to a rejection of the notion of a 'real' identity, which can offer permanent stability and strength. Just like borders, identities must be understood as mutable. They are not based on an 'essential core', but are created (Butler 2008) – in other words, there are no 'perfect, whole and definitively determined identities' (Glasze 2013: 80). At the same time, constructed identities have become so pervasive in everyday life that they are accepted and reproduced as given (Weber 2013: 56). The fall of the Berlin Wall, for example, did not lead to a change in food purchasing behaviour on either side of the wall, even if businesses in the other part of the city were more easily accessible (Scheiner 1999). At the symbolic level it is to be expected that making use of and partaking in opportunities on the other side of the border expresses an open attitude and is more appreciated in modern milieus than in more traditional environments, especially if it requires bilingualism.

In addition to attempts to define one's own identity, there are also references to 'collective identities' based on joint attributions and allocations as part of a 'larger' framework (see also Glasze 2013). The notion of a collective identity is determined not only by being part of a group, but rather by a framework shaped by moral principles and customs, by which individuals perceive themselves as part of a collective. The collective can thus be of a structural (e.g. age, state of health), social (e.g. family, networks, level of education), everyday cultural (e.g. intimacy, understanding of norms, consumption and lifestyle, values) or national nature. This shows that such references are not exclusive – overlaps can occur, which may partly contradict each other; they testify to the fragmentary nature of identities.

To examine the notion of 'identity', Brubaker (2007) distinguishes between the phenomenon of identifying certain categories of people according to social stakeholders or discourses, cognitive self-presentation or self-identification, as well as a sense of community or a feeling of collective belonging. This means that identification can also be understood as categorisation. In other words, individual self-identification within a group occurs if choices were made based on personal decisions and socialisation (cf. Kmec/Reckinger 2014: 39 et seq.). The groups from which social identity is drawn may vary depending on the situation (Tajfel 1982). Differences thus arise between groups, which are distinct from each other. The 'stranger' is thus not seen as part of the group: the group has no relationship with the person, who is viewed as both proximate and distant at the same time. There is a tension between the two elements: since the stranger shares only the most general commonalities with the group (being human), the aspects that are not shared are emphasised. As a rule, the interaction is based less on the individual than on the origin of the stranger, which is analysed and stereotyped (cf. Simmel 1992: 770). Identity is therefore created precisely and especially by that which is not part of one's 'own' identity or realm, i.e. based

on a delineation of 'self' from 'other' – the 'alien'. Delineation and exclusion processes can thus be seen as constitutive for the creation of identities (see extensively in this regard Glasze 2013).

Globalisation leads increasingly (according to Giddens (1995)) to *dis-embedding*, i.e. a loss of orientation among humans, which they seek to compensate 'through *re-embedding*, by re-establishing a sense of local context' (Kühne 2006: 113). Identity is spatially manifested as a spatial identity; when the focus is on the subnational level, as a 'regional identity'. Regional identity is shaped as the 'regressive reference to what is close and familiar, as an anxious response to the lack of transparency of globalisation processes, which are reflected in the permanent presence of strangers' (Häußermann/Roost 2000: 81). Global and local processes are thus not mutually exclusive; they mutually influence and change each other, as emphasised by Robertson (1995, 1998) with the term of glocalisation.

Spatial identities can be examined in different ways. The identification with spaces within different groups of people can be analysed, such as being part of a cross-border region, or such identification can be determined by examining space-related representations. For example, the sense of being part of a border region that people feel and can identify with depends on their ties with their place of residence and everyday activities. Hence, a change of residence is often associated with a change of aspects of their identity (cf. Wille et al. 2014: 340).

The relationship between constructions of space and constructions of identity can be examined by observing the affiliation of a group of people with a region, nation, professional group, family, gender, etc. Various identities are generated at these levels. The analysis of identities is becoming more complex through the increasing differentiation, individualisation, pluralisation and globalisation of societies; values and traditions in regard to identity are de-traditionalised and scrutinised. Individuals now also have greater freedom in their life choices, but also greater responsibility regarding their goals in life. The opportunities for new lifestyles are juxtaposed with risks or failures resulting from a certain lifestyle (cf. Reckinger/Wille 2010: 11). As a person's place of residence evolves into an element of their identity in the course of the socialisation process, this identity is challenged – in the case of 'residential migrants' – through the elimination of routines and things taken for granted. 'Identities are shaped in particular through linguistic and everyday cultural interactions as well as through spatial representations and in the confrontation between one's self-perception and the perception of others' (Reckinger/Wille 2010: 20).

Language is another important instrument to 'understand' identities. Apart from the communicative function, language has a socio-symbolic function, which is closely related to identity. Language also characterises a speaker and provides information about the speaker's affiliation with a group, e.g. through dialects. 'Dialect continua are characterised through increasing linguistic differences in their spatial expansion while remaining mutually intelligible with regard to neighbouring dialects' (Sieburg/Weimann 2014: 347). When political borders separate a language or dialect area, spaces with different linguistic usages can arise. German may become a barrier compared to French, for example, which can have various implications. Language

becomes a barrier to entering the labour market in the neighbouring country; at the same time, interactions among scientists become more difficult if they cannot rely on English as a 'lingua franca' (see also Weber/Kühne 2016). A further object of consideration is the difference between the language which is used in everyday conversation and the language used for formal, media or written communications.

4 Home

The notion of home can be viewed as a key counterpoint to the alienation and individualisation processes that occur in the course of globalisation. It becomes a narrative, as described by Lyotard – an element of making sense of things in a pluralist world (see Kühne 2006: 113). Constitutive elements of 'home' are social embedding, opportunities for expressing oneself and for taking part, and a positive identification with the local socio-spatial situation. Today, home is perceived as playing an anchoring role in terms of stability and identification in a globalised world, as well as a means to decelerate modernity (cf. Schlink 2000: 22). At the same time, it has been proposed that the sense of home is being lost due to individualisation, increased mobility, global mass communication media and online contacts (Heinze et al. 2006: 8). Yet home is mostly understood in a spatial sense, as demonstrated by a study by Kühne/Spellerberg in 2010 (see Table 1), although 'place' is not equivalent to 'home'. Home is equated with feeling safe and secure, i.e. the congruence between personality and living environment. The sense of feeling at home is lost, for example, when a person relocates, when city cores are regenerated, farmhouses converted, settlements expanded and when shrubs begin to grow on meadows. Hence, relocating for work purposes in border regions raises questions about where 'home' is perceived to be. Does the new place of residence become 'home', does 'home' remain the place where the work migrants originate, or do the ties to home become more pluralistic? Even today, the term produces ambivalent and contradictory responses: from the 'positive power of the local link' to the image of looking backwards.

When home is described in spatial terms, the borders of the space of identity become apparent through shared values and preferences for certain symbols, i.e. literature, food, location, landscape and social structures into which a person has grown (see also the paper by Spellerberg/Schönwald/Engelhardt/Weber in this volume). Symbolic attributions are also used to draw borders vis-à-vis strangers, by separating one's own sphere from that which is alien.

Home is …	Percentage of answers	Percentage of respondents
where I feel safe and secure.	15	77
where I spent my childhood.	15	76
where the house in which I live is located.	15	76
where my friends are.	14	74
where my language/dialect is spoken.	11	59
where my familiar landscape is.	11	58
where people who think and feel like I do live.	9	45
where there are familiar customs and traditions.	7	38
the place I yearn for.	3	16
an ideal place that does not exist.	1	5
Total	100% n=6205	n=1185

Table 1: The meaning of home / Source: Kühne/Spellerberg 2010; data: Kühne and Spellerberg, postal survey in Saarland 2007

5 Identity/identities in border regions: the example of the Greater Region

The above discussion on borders, constructions of identity, spatial identities and the notion of home offer various indications for exploring how identity in border regions can be illuminated. The following section focuses on the Greater Region (see also the paper by Hartz/Caesar in this volume) and examines the identity relationships which hold there.

It is unclear how a Greater Region identity or a sense of being part of a cultural community can be formed, and what impact this would have on the actions of actors in this region (Wille/Hesse 2014; Weichhart/Weiske/Werlen 2006). The Greater Region under study here has some characteristics that make it particularly interesting for the exploration of identities and stereotypes because the internal and external territorial borders of this area have always been characterised by a 'variable geometry' (Schulz 1998). According to Brücher (1989: 526), the borders in the SaarLorLux area have been the most unstable borders over the past 200 years. The Greater Region has a population of 11 million and spans a comparatively large area of 65,000 km² (IBA 2010: 7). Furthermore, the Greater Region is characterised in many ways by a pronounced heterogeneity. Three languages, German, French and Luxembourgish, are spoken in the region. The sub-regions, which belong to four different nation states (Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg), have different administrative and legal concerns and interests. The individual partners have different powers to act, and

there are also significant economic differences. The cooperation in the cross-border area of the Greater Region is comparatively intense. For example, the Summit of the Greater Region, which has convened annually since 1995 and is composed of the highest-ranking representatives of the individual sub-regions, the joint SaarLorLux+ Spatial Development Scheme, the Economic and Social Committee of the Greater Region *(Wirtschafts- und Sozialausschuss der Großregion, WSAGR)* or the Espace Culturel Grande Région (Greater Region Cultural Space) are proof of the high level of interconnectedness.

As explained above, borders are increasingly perceived as constructs – thus not as rigid and immutable – and can be scientifically observed. Social considerations such as shared interests, language, symbols, or even the idea of a shared benefit to be gained from cooperation, have been proven to be significant identity-building factors, which can form even without a specific spatial reference. 'Conservative' concepts of 'home' and regional identity, harking back to a shared source, such as being a long-established resident, common origins and history, are no longer the sole and decisive factors in current constructions of identity. In the international scientific discourse, the studies by Paasi (e.g. 1996), Rumford (e.g. 2006) and Newman (e.g. 2006) which have decisively advanced and shaped border region research and the discourse about regional identities since the 1990s are noteworthy.

The determination of qualitative Greater Region identity types (cf. Table 2; for further discussion see 2012, 2015), which should be understood as sub-identities, indicates a changed construction of identity in border regions in the sense of an orientation towards 'as-well-as' identities (Beck 2004). Conventional reference points for identity, such as national identities, remain relevant but are time and again replaced by different reference points in various contexts. Identity type 1 is of a specific nature: the 'territorial Greater Region identity', which is predominantly shaped by the Greater Region spatial category as an identifying characteristic (similarly to a national identity), exists in the minds of interviewees as an (unattainable) ideal of a Greater Region identity, but is not experienced in daily life. Contemporary 'either-or' notions frequently form the basis for the public discourse about identity, but are not decisive for identity forming processes in daily life today. Types 2, 3 and 4 are to be expected especially in cross-border interactional areas: they are determined by a sense of individual benefit created through the border location and its commonalities, and by its role as a potential model region for Europe. Identity types 5, 6, 7 and 8, on the other hand, are by no means found only in border areas, although they are manifested in a particular way there.

	Type	Characteristic
1	Territorial Greater Region identity	Self-image: Greater Region resident; the Greater Region as a category is generally relevant
2	Added benefit identity	Motivated by the added benefit of cross-border cooperation
3	Sub-type of European identity	Greater Region is not a category of its own but a 'model for Europe'
4	Cross-border regional identity	Everyday border experience in the present and the past creates a sense of community
5	Cultural identity	Cultural commonalities in the foreground; language
6	Value-based identity	Peace, tolerance, freedom
7	Transnational identity	Plurilocal, permanently structured relationships across nation states, without the nation states losing their significance (Pries 2002)
8	Cosmopolitan identity	Being different is acknowledged, and no hierarchies of differences are created; instead they are appreciated (Beck 2006)

Table 2: Identity types in the Greater Region / Source: Schönwald 2012: Identity types of the Greater Region. Data: Empirical survey in the Greater Region in 2009 and 2010 (29 stakeholders were qualitatively interviewed)

The physical borders of the Greater Region as a construct does not play a significant role in the Greater Regional identity types. Only in the case of identity type 4, 'cross-border regional identity', does the physical space appear constitutive due to the emphasis on the proximity of the place of residence. The interviews that were conducted, however, show (for details see Schönwald 2012) that here, too, the notion of a physical border is not rigid, but can be described as subjective and situational. This is because the interviewees do not act only within the official boundaries of the political Greater Region construct; they often define the Greater Region as a larger or smaller space, depending on the context.

In the case of cross-regional identity, the border is the identity-forming characteristic. The sense of community is based on the everyday, past and current experience of the border with all its resulting advantages and disadvantages. Creating a Greater Region identity by demarcating what lies outside of it scarcely appears possible, as there simply is no internal homogeneity within the Greater Region which would be conducive to making such a demarcation. A specific Greater Region awareness does not require internal homogeneity – it can even be based on difference. Schönwald's study (2012) shows that the heterogeneity (and the conscious appreciation of this diversity) is viewed to some extent as a unique feature and thus itself serves as a form of demarcating what lies outside of the Greater Region.

6 Conclusions

As illustrated by our theory-based discussion, border(s) and identity/identities are closely interrelated. Constructed identities are not only related to self-ascribed characteristics and self-assumed definitions, they are also always based on demarcating oneself from others. In the cross-border context along national borders, this is particularly evident. On the one hand, borders become blurred: crossing the borders between France, Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium has become a normal occurrence. Luxembourgers live in Germany but work in their 'homeland'. Germans frequently buy petrol or work in Luxembourg. Living and working in different countries has become an everyday reality for many residents of the Greater Region. Yet, on the other hand, 'borders' continue to exist: borders in people's minds, prejudices, borders due to language barriers, administrative obstacles and different planning cultures. Globalisation has destabilised these 'unique' relations and identifiers even more, but they have not at all become irrelevant in people's daily lives. Indeed, the notion of 'home' is becoming all the more an anchor with a very specific emotional connotation in the cross-regional context. Living environments in border regions and cross-border cooperation are confronted daily with these different facets and variations in practice, as is also documented by the other papers in this volume.

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