# Expanding Border Temporalities: Toward an Analysis of Border Future Imaginations

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*Even though questions about the future have played a central role in recent times of polycrisis, border studies have long been relatively silent about the future. Our article develops a research perspective through which the sensitization of border research for the temporal dimension of the future can be achieved. To this end, social and cultural studies' perspectives on the future are mobilized to approach the interplay of borderwork and/as futurework. We develop a foundation for an analysis of what we call "border future imaginations". In this way, this study expands our understanding of border temporalities with reference to the future orientation of contemporary societies.*

Keywords: border temporalities; future; borderwork; futurework; sociology of time.

## Introduction

The omnipresent and multiple experiences of crisis have led to the present being a time of a changing and open future (Urry 2016; Delanty 2021). Terrorist threats to open society, humanitarian catastrophes in the context of flight and migration, worsening socio-economic inequalities, a global pandemic, a war of aggression in Europe, and the looming certainty of an existential climate crisis hovering over everything have promoted the state of affairs to that of a "polycrisis" (Dinan 2019; Zeitlin et al. 2019). In these times of crisis, the question of the future comes to the fore and challenges national and global self-understandings. In Western societies

especially, where a linear, progress-oriented idea of the future touches the core of modernist and capitalist conceptions of society (e.g., in the form of an imperative of development and growth), the question of the shape of the future has repeatedly been raised in recent years. This "struggle for the future" is particularly evident in the European Union (EU), where these assumptions about societal, political, and economic developments are eroding (ibid.). The EU is responding to these changes with an increased self-positioning toward what is to come—no less than a search for the "future of Europe" (Grande 2018).

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While the topic of the future has been increasingly entering the spotlight in some disciplines, border research to date can be characterized by a restrained focus on the future. This is despite the fact that the occupation with the temporality of borders has made a significant contribution to border research in recent years (e.g., Pfoser 2020; Leutloff-Grandits 2021). It must be noted that systematic analyses of *border temporalities* encompassing different time dimensions are rare and that the futurity of border making has so far been addressed incidentally at best. This is astonishing because borders are treated as important focal points for societal debates about the future. For example, in discourses on the prospects of migrants staying, the permanence or abolition of transit spaces at borders, the risk-related scenario analyses of Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency), the security of (energy) supply in border regions in times of climate change, or the shifts of borders in the Anthropocene, it is noticeable that central societal debates (on immigration, solidarity, social risks, or nature–culture relations) are linked directly to practices and discourses of border making. The resulting assumption motivating this contribution is that current forms of *borderwork* are more and more oriented toward the future by their incorporating aspects of *futurework*.

Based on this general assessment, our contribution aims to develop a research perspective through which sensitization of border research on the temporal dimension of the future can be achieved. To this end, we first discuss how time and temporality have been addressed in border research (section 2). By applying social and cultural science approaches to the future, we then aim to overcome the disregard of the future in border research (section 3). We outline the core elements of future-sensitive border research, centring on the relationship between borderwork and futurework (section 4). This article concludes with a call for research that focuses on the future of borders to arrive at a more adequate understanding of border making under the conditions of contemporary European societies in an era of crisis and uncertainty (section 5).

## Time and Temporality in Border Studies

Like all cultural phenomena, borders exhibit a specific temporality. They unfold in the flow of time, as well as being subject to temporal changes in their manifestations, interpretations, and evaluations (Adam 1995). In border studies, temporality usually comes into view by addressing the fundamental changeability of the border. Borders exhibit a specific history, which is considered a significant characteristic (Anderson & O'Dowd 1999; Paasi 1999). Thus, Paasi (1999, 670) calls for making the "changing meanings" of borders the starting point of border research. Accordingly, the historical processes of change are examined, and an understanding of temporality is applied. For example,

Reitel (2013) refers to the sequence of border episodes. In this way, temporal transformation processes come into view. Temporality is usually equated with changeability by applying a retrospective perspective (Nugent 2019). As an influential example, the widely acknowledged life cycle model for border regions can be mentioned here. Baud and van Schendel (1997) distinguish the historical phases of border-regional integration. Recent studies have examined more closely the conditions and expressions of border change, conceptualizing the transformative dynamics of borders, whether as a result of their multi-perspectivity (Doevenspeck 2011; Rumford 2012), the variability of local border practices (Amilhat Szary & Giraut 2015; Brambilla 2015), or changing global macro-phenomena (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic) (see Ulrich et al. 2021; Brodowski et al. 2023). With regard to these studies, one can differentiate between representational and materialistic approaches. In the first case, studies have traced the changing meaning of borders by analysing memory narratives in border regions for their contribution to border identities (Stokłosa 2019; Pfoser 2020) or by examining historically solidifying border narratives as border imaginaries (Acero-Ferrer 2019; Weinblum 2019; see below). This is contrasted with materialistic approaches, which describe the shape-shifting nature of borders, for example, in terms of their changing practices of fortification, control, and exclusion (Sassen 2015; Nail 2016; Mau 2022). What these approaches to the temporality of borders have in common is that they often operate with a linear and progress-oriented understanding of time, which usually conceives of the future as a seamless extension, or at least a causal consequence, of the present.

In addition to considering the changeability of borders, border studies in recent years have increasingly addressed the intrinsic temporality of borders and related aspects thereof. Such a perspective benefits from the fact that border studies have opened up to influences from the social and cultural sciences. Telling in this regard is research at the intersection of border and migration studies (e.g., Donnan et al. 2017), in which the temporal orders of border crossing, the rhythm of transnational migration movements, or the duration while waiting (at the border crossing, in the "reception camp", and at the immigration office) come into view. In addition, the connections between geopolitical changes and their perception as discontinuities and temporal boundaries are elaborated (Höfler 2019). However, the futureness of the temporal border phenomenon has not received further attention so far. Worth highlighting is the concept of "complex temporalities" (Little 2015), which aims to grasp the multiplicity of temporalities that emerge *at, through,* and *across* borders. The concept is also interesting because it not only leads to a sensitivity to the interplay of different temporal border phenomena, but also to a critique of the predictability of border developments. As early as the 1990s, Barzilai and Peleg (1994) designed a model for predicting

border developments, using the Israeli–Palestinian border as an example, to allow border-specific path dependencies to be extrapolated into the future—a task whose success is highly doubted when following a perspective of complex border temporalities.

The conceptual development and theorization of border research increasingly benefit from both tendencies (the changeability of borders and the intrinsic temporality of borders). On the one hand, the characteristic of the historical changeability of borders moves to the centre of contemporary conceptual designs, in which borders are conceived as borderscapes or assemblages "in the making" (Brambilla 2015; Sohn 2016). On the other hand, sensitivities to the inherent temporality of border phenomena ground theories of borders in motion (Konrad 2015; Schiffauer et al. 2018) and a theory of the border that starts from the circularity of movements (Nail 2016).

However, an approach to the futurity of borders that goes beyond a linear understanding of time can benefit only from a few preliminary studies. When the future of borders is addressed, it usually appears as a "by-product" or as an aspect of subordinate relevance. For example, this concerns research in the field of cross-border cooperation that treats a *border future*, identified by actors, as an opportunity or risk of cross-border cooperation, but does not pursue the plurality of possible futures of the border itself (e.g., Pallagst et al. 2018).

Some studies in different contexts have suggested that borders can become sites where questions about the future become pervasive. Green (2012) juxtaposes border narratives from two Greek border regions at different times to show that speculations about spatial relocations and thus border change are embedded in everyday narratives. Studies on security of supply in border regions indicate that adaptations to changing environmental conditions include a future dimension. While Fishhendler, Dinar, and Katz (2011), use the example of the Isreali–Palestinian water dispute to show how the choice in favour of a "uilateral environmentalism" results from the anticipation of future political tensions, Biemann and Weber (2021) devote themselves to the conflict over nuclear energy in the German–French–Luxembourgish border region and work out that divergent national discourses on future-related security of supply and threat scenarios constitute a cross-border conflict. At the intersection of border and migration studies, visions of alternative futures are linked to migrants' border crossings (Leutloff-Grandits 2017). Conversely, the unpredictability of a future beyond borders can make them relevant as a "decision-making site" for refugees (Mapril 2019). A different perception, in which borders are associated as sites of emerging threads, leads to the phenomenon of preparedness. These reactions to expected threats, as Binder (2020) elaborates, show a clear orientation toward the future in pre-emptive logic. In another study, seeing and anticipating are described as specific optics of border management, in which the predictability of future threat scenarios is a resource of border control practice (Fojas 2021). Könönen (2023, 2801) deals with practices of entry bans to nation states as well as the Schengen area and conceptualizes them as "forward-looking governance of migration". In a few studies in which the "imaginability of future borders" (Trauttmansdorff 2022, 146) is explicitly made the subject, the construction of future borders is situated in terms of a narrative of digital transformation (Trauttmansdorff & Felt 2021). The latter four studies demonstrate that the futurity of borders is being discovered at the intersection of borders and security. At the same time, however, the emancipatory impetus of some critical border (control) research leads to a future-engaging position: for example, an approach can be identified that starts from a vision of an open and peaceful border defined as a future ideal, and ends pointing out ways to this preferred future. Drawing on scenario theory, which distinguishes "possible", "predictable", and "preferred" futures, Weber (2015, 9) introduces a "preferred-future method" for developing desired border effects.

In summary, when border studies discover the temporality of borders, they do so with sensitivity to either the past or the present of temporal bordering. When the futurity of borders is addressed, it tends to be *en passant* as an incidental by-product or, alternatively, in the context of normative approaches intended to lead to scientifically driven border change. Although sporadic initial approaches within border studies are emerging that recognize the future as an efficacious temporal mode of borders, it should be noted that the concrete (overlapping, contradictory, self-sufficient, etc.) forms of the future have received little attention in border studies to date. Given the presence of what is to come in contemporary border discourses, and the advanced engagements with the future from the social and cultural sciences, it is apparent that research on the temporality of borders is still based on a simplistic understanding of the future. We argue for a greater consideration of insights from social and cultural science into the topic of the future. In what follows, we identify key insights from this field of research with which border studies can be brought into productive dialogue.

## Future in the Social and Cultural Sciences

In recent years, the topic of the future has received increased attention in many disciplines of social and cultural science, not least as a result of the social developments mentioned in the Introduction. From the rapidly growing research on the future, these studies are of particular interest for border research that refers to cultural fabrication and, therefore, the contingency

character of the future (Coleman & Tutton 2017; Beckert & Suckert 2021). We want to consider some aspects of this *future-as-a-cultural-form* approach.

Fundamentally, in these studies, the future is not seen as an ontological entity but as a cultural form. What counts as the future within a society is variable in terms of scope, shape, and relation to other time horizons. Therefore, the form of the future depends on the socio-cultural conditions of its recognition, imagination, description, and more. This has been emphatically pointed out by historical studies (Koselleck 2004; see also Minois 1996) that have identified the formation of new temporal orders with the emergence of an industrialized, capitalist, mass society (Delanty 2020). Whereas pre-modern times were mainly characterized by a notion of the recurrence of the same or a fundamental rupture, such as "the Day of Judgement", the temporal order of modern contemporary society is characterized by an "open future" (Luhmann 1976, 131). This openness—and, thus, the changeability of futures—have recently been highlighted in more detail in various studies (Rosa 2015; Urry 2016; Krämer & Wenzel 2018). Such an understanding is underpinned by an anthropocenic self-image. According to Bensaude-Vincent (2022), the age of the Anthropocene goes hand in hand with a radical questioning of chronological concepts of time. In the face of ecological crises, Western metaphysical notions of linear temporality are eroding and the view is widening towards polychronicity and "a variety of heterogeneous temporal trajectories" (ibid., 206). The sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1976, 148) reserves the term "present futures" for the ideas that a society currently has about what is to come. By contrast, the futures that will occur are called "future presents" (ibid.). Subsequently, this sensitivity to different temporal modes has been extended. On the one hand, the influence of futures on the present time has been emphasized—that is, the control of the present from the future (Anderson 2010). On the other hand, the influence of societal considerations in the present on the future has been more clearly elaborated (cf. Adam & Groves 2007). Therefore, engagement with the future is not a purely virtual speculation but is also a momentous practice for the present. Beckert (2016) elaborates on this by using the term "performativity" to highlight the current effects of imagining the future.

In addition to the cultural variability of futures, another important point is the shaping of the concrete forms of futures. In recent studies, there has been an increased emphasis on efforts to bring imagined futures to life. The coming is marked as something that is not only variable but is shaped and actuated by various practices, discourses, and technologies. Such a perspective sensitizes concrete work on the future. It considers the "anticipatory practices" (Groves 2017, 34), "practices of speculation" (Cortiel et al. 2020), "future-practices" (Wenzel et al. 2020; Krämer 2022), and "future-making practices" (Meyer et al. 2018), thus emphasizing

the routinized material (i.e., technical and corporeal accomplishments) involved in the identification, shaping, and dissemination of present futures as part of effective discourse practice arrangements. Studies in this context point to the potential and the promising characteristic of the imaginaries of the future, or question the uncritical enthusiasm for technological solutionist narratives (for example, Färber 2019; Bachmann 2021). Various studies have also pointed to the technological and social preconditions of future techniques, such as forecasting and scenario analysis (Bradfield et al. 2005; Krämer & Wenzel 2018; Reichmann 2019). In turn, other analyses focus more strongly on the discursive and narrative routines of producing future imaginaries (Gibson 2011; Horn 2018) or highlight the communicative and conversational modes of interpersonal future production, for example, in the domains of family or institutional communication (Ayaß 2020; Leyland 2022). Moreover, future practices are often stabilized by different types of "future objects" (Esguerra 2019).

From a process-oriented perspective, research that analyses the actual production of the future is interested in the conditions of production *with* and *in which* the future is created. The question then arises as to who designs the future and who is not involved in these designs, a topic that plays a major role in, for example, the climate debate on sustainable lifestyles (Adloff & Neckel 2021). Accordingly, there are actors that have more "communication power" (Reichertz 2011) than others with regard to the interpretation of the future. Such power asymmetries are not only reflected in the successful creation of speaker positions and publics, but also in professional practices of modelling, simulating, or sensing what is to come. We refer to this as *imagining*. Therefore, the details of modelling the future, whether by means of scenarios, traditional planning tools, or technical simulations, are not neutral procedures but rather effective epistemic time regimes with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion (Andersson 2018; in general: Krause 2021).

The growing number of material-based historically and present-oriented studies has shown that the future in contemporary societies occurs in the plural. Accordingly, in different social fields, different things can be considered part of the future. This simultaneity of different conceptions of what is to come makes researchers speak of future*s* in the plural (Urry 2016; see also Luhmann 1976). Specifically, in the English-speaking discussion on futures, corresponding conceptual considerations have been advanced (Adam & Groves 2007; Urry 2016; López Galviz et al. 2022). Currently, different futures not only stand side by side but also against each other. Futures can reinforce, hinder, question, or even clearly contradict each other. This can be summed up as a "synchronization problem". The plurality of futures produces different temporal rhythms, tempos, and dynamics. These different

temporal orders can produce considerable tensions, especially in globalized and functionally differentiated contemporary societies.

Various empirical studies have provided individual results that can further sharpen the understanding of the future in border studies. Sociological research on future orientation in the financial market (Beckert 2016; Esposito 2018) is worth mentioning. It points to the character of a "future as a resource" without which speculative products would not exist at all. Beckert (2016) reserves the term "imagination" for this. Oomen, Hoffman, and Hajer (2022, 253) point out that the performative effects of futures must be taken seriously, as "the identification, creation, and dissemination of images of the future shape the possibility space of action, thus enacting relationships between past, present, and future".

With the insights gathered into the future as a cultural form, a perspective can be drawn for border research that aims at the production of specific *border futures*. The central question is not what but how the border is designed as a prospectively changing object. What is relevant is not the ontological time but the praxeological time analysis of the future. Therefore, the analytical focus sheds light on the time mode of the future as a concrete gestalt produced by conventionalized routines integrated into the corresponding contexts of production and reception. In the following section, we discuss how border research can be constructed to pursue borderwork and its relation to futurework.

## Borderwork and/as Futurework

This article reacts to a restrained thematization of the future in border research. To focus on the social production of border futures and to adequately address an increasingly important feature of contemporary borderwork, an expanded understanding of *border temporality* is needed that addresses the futurity of borders. We propose that border research interested in the future of borders must start by considering borderwork and futurework more closely together. Work on borders, in the sense of its production, processing, and transformation, is increasingly connected with work on the future. In bringing together border-analytical and future-analytical insights, interconnected research perspectives emerge that can point to a better understanding of contemporary borders. As we argue in more detail below: first, it is fruitful to adopt a practice-theoretical perspective in which the accomplishment of border futures comes into focus. Second, such a social-theoretical grounding can be profitably linked to a focus on the work of coherent border future imaginaries. This requires a reorientation of the concept of the imaginary that has been prominently taken up in border research. Third, engagement with these border future imaginaries is especially promising if the multi-dimensional internal structure of such imaginaries is explored in more detail. Fourth, such an approach can be placed in tension with a perspective that looks into the relationship between designed border futures and alternative temporal orders (of the past, present, and future). Fifth, the specific in/stability of border futures can be questioned by addressing their epistemic status and social effects.

### Praxeology of Border Futures

Border futures are cultural forms whose production, social dissemination, and modification are based on a specific interplay of border and future practices. Border futures can be understood as a kind of focal point at which various activities merge. The analytical access point is borderwork, referring to an opening of border research to practice-theoretical approaches that have been taking place in recent years (Wille 2015; Connor 2021). In practice-sensitive border research, "the border" is conceptualized as, for example, "bordering" (Houtum 2011; Yuval-Davis et al. 2019), "borderwork" (Rumford 2013), "border-making" (Brambilla et al. 2015), or "doing borders" (Hess 2018). The shared focal point of praxeological border analyses is a focus on the knowledge-based and bodily enactment of the activities of the involved border actors. Such an analytical perspective of border praxeology provides three impulses for an understanding of border futures.

First, practice-theoretical approaches sensitize us to the activity dimension of borders and to the plurality of actors involved in the work of future borders. The previous prioritization of state actors is countered by the fact that a vernacularization of borders can be observed (Rumford 2013; Jones & Johnson 2016), insofar as border actors can be identified in different social fields. This means that "everyday border-making" (Kolossov & Scott 2013) gains relevance. Looking at the everydayness of border futures (for the everydayness of the future, see Spurling & Kuijer 2017; Pink & Postill 2019) sensitizes two aspects. On the one hand, work on the future of borders is dispersed. This can be seen, for example, in the case of intra-European cross-border economic cooperation and the border future imaginaries unfolding in these contexts, these being oriented toward the future of European economic activities. Here, various actors, such as chambers of commerce, economic development institutes, local administrations, private companies, and even individuals with their hopes and desires, are involved in the border future's accomplishment. On the other hand, in terms of work on the *futures of the border*, different groups of actors work on their specific border futures. In the case of cross-border cooperation, the interests of economic development agencies may differ from those of private local companies. Peña and Durand (2020) show by reference to the case of Basel–Mulhouse region and Tijuana–San Diego region how different actors with

different imaginations of the future are involved in joint planning activities.

Second, border practices can take on different "levels of activeness" (Parker & Adler-Nissen 2012). In this way, practices can be identified that produce non-intended side effects on the border future and activities that explicitly aim at the shape and meaning of borders. Accordingly, forms of explicit and implicit border futurity can be distinguished. For example, the border management agency Frontex is responsible for an explicit treatment of the border future. In its continuously produced "risk analyses", forecasts of migration movements and global "megatrends" are translated into scenarios to provide a future-oriented basis for current border practices (Horii 2016). More implicit border-related future processing can be recognized in the Polish government's effort to prolong the operation of the Turów open-cast lignite mine located on the borders of the Czech Republic and Germany. In the resulting dispute with the Czech government, a future component became visible insofar as the procedure was set in the framework of climate policy and the future of the border region (cf. Kurowska-Pysz et al. 2022).

Third, a fundamental processual unfixity of the border can be observed (Kolossov & Scott 2013; Brambilla 2015; Sohn 2016). As contingent cultural forms, border futures are understood as productions of constant becoming that require specific stabilization work. Depending on how open—for example, as a general horizon of possibility (cf. Kramsch 2017, 27)—or how certain the border future itself is designed, this stabilization work is based on reassurance procedures (to be discussed in section 4.4). From a practice-theoretical perspective, the border and its future are a result of a process shaped by plural influences and groups of actors. Therefore, ambivalences, paradoxes, and conflicts resulting from the interplay of distributed borderwork can come into focus (Hess 2018). This was particularly evident in the context of the question of border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did divergent national visions of the future clash—for example, on predictions about pandemic events and their transborder transmissibility—but conflicts also arose with regional perspectives that opposed border closures in the sense of shared border-regional visions of the future (Renner et al. 2022).

*Imaginations of Border Futures*

From a praxeological perspective on the work on the future of borders, questions of how border futures are concretely expressed and how they become public, recognizable, and describable phenomena have arisen. Here, we suggest understanding border futures as interweavings of borders and future imaginaries (Trauttmansdorff 2022). This suggests a notion that

can capture the constitutive *material provisionality* of futures, as future presents can only occur in virtuality. In border studies, the concept of imaginaries is becoming increasingly popular (e.g., Dorsey & Diaz-Barriga 2010; Brambilla et al. 2015; Bürkner 2017; Turunen 2021).

In the present article, we discuss *imaginations*, a term that brings the time dimension into focus as a horizon of possibility and connects more closely to tangible, empirically observable forms. By *imaginations of the future*, we refer to collective ideas about what is to come, as expressed in shared images, scenarios, myths, and stories. Drawing on various theoretical traditions from philosophy (Ricoeur 1978; Bergson 1988) and social theory (Schütz 1932; Castoriadis 1987; Taylor 2004), imaginations denote social phenomena in the state of being imagined. The concept is grounded in the fundamental capacity of human imagination and imaginative power (Schulte-Sasse 2001). It begins when there are social implications, that is, when socially relevant imaginative worlds are produced. In doing so, imaginations support the "social imaginary" as an "unconscious" edifice of ideas, an effective order of knowledge (Taylor 2004).

Since imaginations provide a foundational orientation for social practice (Herbrik & Schlechtriemen 2019), a separation between reality on the one hand and imagination on the other seems to be misguided. Practice and imagination are in a constitutive relationship: border-future practices can be seen as "processings" of imaginaries (Bürkner 2017) in the same way that border imaginations are shaped by the "performance effects" of border-future practice (Langenohl 2010). Above all, these practices become significant through their collective binding power. As "collective fabulations" (Bergson 1988), they are discursively repeated and shared and create differences with collectives in which alternative imaginations are established. Characteristically, they also have a normative component, as they seek legitimacy for implicit notions of normality. This makes the clash of conflicting imaginations particularly interesting (Weinblum 2019; Trauttmansdorff & Felt 2021), for example, when it becomes apparent that hierarchies of imaginations are formed and counter-designs of the future are suppressed.

To reconstruct the central imaginations of the future, it is necessary to start with the observable (discursive) practice of relevant actors, as border futures attain social relevance and stability as repeated practices. (Discursive) border future practices are a central context of reference through which the discursive construction of future imaginaries can be empirically described (Beckert 2016; Urry 2016; Haupt 2021). Thus, statements about future borders have emerged in daily newspapers, such as in the course of the so-called refugee crisis (e.g., Rheindorf & Wodak 2018); in political pronouncements, such as those

published by the Commission of the EU (e.g., "White Paper on the Future of Europe"); and in documents of organizations, such as the risk analyses of Frontex. Furthermore, specific events of border future-related communications are also of interest, such as panel discussions, parliamentary debates, citizens' forums (e.g., the Conference on the Future of Europe), and interpersonal conversations. This also includes semiotic and artefact-related accesses. Images of and about borders are a central means of making demarcations discursively available. Objects, such as walls or fences, can also become important symbols of communicative referencing (Brown 2010; Rael 2017).

## Multi-Dimensionality of Border Future Imaginations

Border future imaginations not only allow for a preoccupation with the ways and means of their production in and through discursive practices: coherent border future imaginations also bundle ideas of future borders, and their internal structures provide information about their social meanings. At least four aspects can be emphasized with regard to contemporary border formations.

First, border future imaginations can be understood as outputs through which collectives design themselves and distinguish themselves from others (Castoriadis 1987; Taylor 2004). The dissolution or "shift" of the EU's internal borders in the course of the so-called EU enlargements, for example, was accompanied by different imaginations of what the future EU as a confederation of states and as a "European society" should look like. In this sense, European funding and cultural programmes, which are supposed to create social cohesion between the "old" and the "new" member states, carry implicit expectations for the future; their expected effectiveness is linked to ideas about the coming European society and is thus supposed to help contain an "uncertain future after EU enlargement" (Vaughan-Whitehead 2003, 463). Projections of social boundaries are at work here: just as borders produce current structures of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, notions of future borders are oriented toward existing, anticipated, and desired (changes in) modes of social relations. Who will and should belong? Which regimes of distinction are marked as prospectively relevant?

Second, border future imaginations exhibit specific temporal orders. The "complex temporality" (Little 2015) of border future imaginations is fed by two interconnected temporal references. On the one hand, imaginations exhibit inherent temporal horizons through which a basal distinction between past, present time, and future is established and specifically qualified. The "White Paper on the Future of Europe" published by the European Commission in 2017 (European

Commission 2017) was based on a future horizon of 2025, with five scenarios describing anticipated paths to this future. Moreover, this assembly of futures was based on a recurrent recourse to the last 70 years of peaceful coexistence. *The Ventotene Manifesto* (1941) is used in the "White Paper" as a historical starting point of a development narrative that provides a shared past framework for the future imaginations inscribed in the scenarios. On the other hand, border future imaginations can be based on notions of rhythms, duration, sequentiality, development, and the identification of tipping points/thresholds (cf. Schiffauer et al. 2018). For example, the strategic documents of the EU reveal the coherent progression of a European idea. The EU and its predecessors are considered a response to the equally social and geopolitical rupture after 1945 (Dockrill 1994). The current debate on how to deal with migration movements also shows the orientation toward tipping points and thresholds, which, as "limit values", significantly structure future perspectives for action (cf. Rheindorf & Wodak 2018).

Third, also of interest are the spatial aspects of border future imaginations, such as geopolitical structural imaginations in which the EU or distinct social fields (e.g., economy, security, and culture) conceive themselves in relation to their borders (Bürkner 2017; Turunen 2021). For example, the so-called "EU enlargement to the East" was preceded by notions of spatial change, as an envisaged enlargement was supported by a geopolitical reinterpretation of "European space", which stimulated thinking about future "East–West relations".

Fourth, in light of the currently emerging smartification and digitization of the border (Pötzsch 2015; Löfflmann & Vaughan-Williams 2018; Mau 2022), special attention should be paid to socio-technical imaginations (Jasanoff & Kim 2009; Trauttmansdorff & Felt 2021). Examples include anticipated or announced technological changes and their position within border future imaginations. Trauttmansdorff and Felt (ibid., 10–18) show how the imaginary of a "digital transformation" shapes the work of professionals in the field of border security and their orientation toward a "secure future". They trace how the development of border control technologies is supported by the idea of a future marked by crises and undesirable dangers, which are used to legitimize the mentioned innovations.

## Future Relations

Border-related future imaginations are not only characterized by a future that is imagined in each case but also by specific time horizons that come into play in the process. Border future imaginings can have different forms of what is to come, for example, cultural utopias and dystopias, or planning processes that secure expectations. In turn, these are associated with divergent influences on shaping the future. Based on

this, the study of border future imaginations is especially informative for understanding border temporality when the relationship of articulated border futures with other temporal orders is considered. This is based on the insight that border futures are not usually conceived as relationless entities but as an interplay of different temporal dimensions. Accordingly, Hurd, Donnan, and Leutloff-Grandits (2017, 4, emphasis in the original) state in their conceptualization of border temporality that "past, present, and future may *coexist* in experience and imagination and/or *follow* one another".

First, this shows the position of different futures in relation to each other, from which a coherent (or conflictual, see below) border future imagination is fed. For example, the current future imaginations of Frontex are characterized by the fact that processes with diverging future horizons are synchronized within the framework of a "master narrative" and integrated into a coherent future imagination. Predicted time horizons of migration movements are linked to long-term economic developments, such as influential political changes in neighbouring states or the technological development of surveillance tools in the Global South. However, the relation of contrary future imaginations to each other is also of interest. It is worthwhile to question the link of imaginations to "alternative" or "revolutionary" border imaginations (Fellner 2020; Brambilla 2021), as various relations can be observed. Heretical positions can be studied as deviations from established future dimensions. For example, security policy imaginaries regarding Frontex are flatly rejected by other actors who replace them with alternative narratives. This can be seen, for instance, in the activities of the No-Borders Network, which seeks alternative border narratives in its events and output, such as the No-Borders Festival, conferences, and publications. Similar to the direction of "another future is possible", various artistic positions argue against contemporary border practices. Debates about visions of the EU's future are conducted in the context of "border art" and border-related cultural organizations. Artists and scientists who produce visions of tomorrow include Charles Heller (2020), who pleads for the reduction of global obstacles to mobility based on a forensic architectural study of the island of Lesvos. In these contexts, border art and border culture become utopian and dystopian discursive spaces. In other words, border art aims at "demonstrating the performative function of contemporary walls and barriers, designed to impose a geopolitical vision through landscape changes" (Amilhat Szary 2012, 213). Therefore, it encourages a different perspective on borders and their future—a perspective that is fundamentally attributed to the art field (e.g., European Commission 2018).

Second, the relationship between imagined border futures and time horizons (i.e., to pasts or presents) is also of interest. Futures are discussed as continuity or as a break with past or present conditions. What is to come then appears, for example, as a radical change or as a resumption of past, even forgotten aspects, or as an (invisible) extension of established conditions. The exact empirical relations are manifold, as evidenced by the justifications around border shifts in various discourses, such as Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine (Von Löwis & Sasse 2021) and the EU's Neighbourhood Policy in North Africa (Bürkner & Scott 2019). In our context, it is interesting to note that the order of temporal relations itself becomes a strategic argument with powerful consequences, as it qualifies the revolutionizing, the preserving, or the unifying of the respective border future imaginations. This can be seen, for example, at the Ecuador–Colombia Border where "futurism" is an education strategy to prevent young people from joining armed conflicts which overshadow the present lifeworld in the border region (Rodríguez-Gómez 2022). Here, various pathways to a peaceful future are pointed out which aim at "controlling young people's relationships to the present" (ibid., 314).

## In/Stability of Futures

Thus far, we have suggested that border future imaginations should be understood as practical accomplishments and that the plural and contingent characteristics of futures should be taken into account in the analysis of present border practices. The indications of multi-dimensional internal differentiation and the links to other temporal orders also suggest that border future imaginations should be conceived as complex achievements. Both features—the principle incompleteness and plurality of the future, as well as the heterogeneity of its discursive contouring possibilities—make it necessary to finally consider the epistemic mode of bringing forth imaginations. Generally, different forms of imagination (prediction, planning, anticipation, estimation, hypothesis, etc.) are tied to divergent degrees of articulation of certainty. Making the future of the border an object means making use of discursive and objectual assurances and uncertainties to (de)stabilize the respective border futures. Therefore, imaginations of border futures can be analytically located on a continuum of stability and instability. To do so, it is necessary to focus on actors and their positions and alliances, the arenas of future expressions, and the agendas behind the imaginings of the future. Who are the beneficiaries of future stabilization? On which inclusions and exclusions does this stabilization build, and which one does it reproduce? Könönen (2023) for example analyses national and European entry bans and shows that fictions of certainty about future mobilities play a role on the part of the authorities, while uncertainties are stabilized on the part of the migrants insofar as they become part of a "particular group of banned migrants, who are subject to recurrent removals and detention due to entry bans, and for whom deportations are indeed 'a form of life'" (ibid., 2812).

Furthermore, the duration of stabilization activities must be addressed. This shows that the inscribed uncertainty of border futures spreads out and that various *fictions of certainty* can be analysed. Forms of this incidental assurance of a border future can be reconstructed, for example, through the in/coherence of narratives of the future. In Frontex's risk analysis, expected migration movements to Europe are traced, in which the respective expectation horizons differ and are provided with different discursive markers of certainty and uncertainty. Thus, futures are sorted in terms of their probability of occurrence on a continuum between the poles of path-dependent development and possible change.

Finally, the socio-material constellations in which futures are stabilized by *future objects* should be examined. Esguerra (2019) distinguishes three types of future objects, each of which is used to produce different degrees of certainty about futures: 1) objects that are used to extrapolate the present, that is, to anticipate a linear development to secure the present (e.g., statistics on developments); 2) experimental objects through which new futures and visions of the future are to be created (e.g., future conferences); and 3) objects in the making (e.g., prototypes) that can be considered as still part of the future.

## Prospectus: Toward the Future of Borders

In this article, we have argued that the future is (again) becoming increasingly important to social practice in times of polycrisis. Although borders are becoming prominent sites for negotiating the future, border studies have not been sufficiently interested in the futureness of borders. We observe that contemporary forms of borderwork can exhibit an orientation toward the future in a variety of ways. Taking the EU as an example, it becomes clear that European internal and external borders become focal points for questions of future community, economic exchange, ecological stability, and the scope of rights. Here, implicit and explicit assumptions about the future of borders are embedded in the current design. These imaginations of the future have decisive effects on the now. This raises the question of how border research can analytically position itself vis-à-vis this circumstance. Against this background, we aimed to develop a research perspective that would sensitize border research to border futures.

The starting point is the observation that border research is concerned with the temporality of borders. Approaches to border temporality have attracted the interest of border research in recent years, and the temporal dimension of borders has been discussed in many ways. However, the future has been understudied as a specific temporal mode. Therefore, we argue that a recourse to social and cultural studies of the future

holds illuminating insights that can be used to reorient border research. Central to this is to understand not only borders but also the future as a cultural form, which entails questions about its production, meaning, changeability, and relationality. In combining border research and future research, we have outlined the core elements of future-sensitive border research based on this. These elements revolve around the impulse to describe observable border practice (borderwork) in terms of its future orientation—that is, to make the interplay of borderwork and/as futurework the topic. Therefore, we propose analysing border futures in terms of their practical production. This means empirically determining observable border future imaginations and focusing on the work on their more or less coherent forms. In doing so, it makes sense to decipher the complex internal structures of border future imaginations as they are represented in social, spatial, temporal, and socio-technical ways. In particular, the relationships among different futures should be examined to trace the tensions, contradictions, and struggles in the interpretation of border futures. In view of the current erosion of social assumptions of certainty, it is of particular interest to include the respective stabilization efforts for the production of border futures to address the work on the certainty of specific border futures and their strategic use.

In summary, contemporary border research must take the temporal dimension of the future seriously, take a holistic look at the temporal orders of the border to discover their relationship with the pasts and presents, emphasize the contingent characteristic and the contested nature of border futures, and, lastly, reveal the practical achievements of the future. In this way, border research can react to the multiple crises of the present and expand its analytical basis to accompany them appropriately.

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