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# INTRODUCTION

## Border Temporalities in and Beyond Europe

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*How are borders and time related? Are borders shifting state lines enshrined in history, the landscape, and cultural heritage? Are borders places where new understandings of time and space can be formed? Are temporalities of borders the material appearance, transformation, and disappearance of borders or the social practices which leave us with traces of times, tidelines, phantom, or ghost borders? Have we paid enough attention to the experiences of people from different ages passing borders? This special section of *Borders in Globalization Review* presents twelve articles developed from papers presented on the conference on “Borders in Flux and Border Temporalities in and beyond Europe”, which was organised by the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH), the Transfrontier Euro-Institut Network (TEIN), and the Franco-German Jean Monnet Center of Excellence<sup>1</sup> in cooperation with the UniGR-Center for Border Studies and *Borders in Globalization* (BIG) on 15 and 16 December 2022 in Belval, Luxembourg. The conference examined the temporal dimension of borders, borderlands, and border regions. The articles shed light on temporalities of borders by exploring the relationship between temporalities—in their broadest sense, understood as the way time is experienced and lived—on the one hand, and border practices, border discourses, and border regimes on the other. They focus on four approaches: the past, the present, the future and borders, diachronic studies of borders and border regions, age and borders, and new understandings of time and space at the border.*

Keywords: borders; temporalities; border temporalities; Europe.

### Prelude

The old granite border pole is less than a metre high (Figure 1). It stands in a pine forest, about 50 metres from the beach in the village of Przebrno on the Vistula Spit, a small strip of land between the Vistula Lagoon and the Baltic Sea which connects Poland to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad (Figure 2). Engraved on three different walls of the pole are the inscriptions “Versailles 28.6.1919”, the letters FD and the letter D.

Occasionally, tourists leave the beach for a stroll, bump into the border pole and ask themselves what border there may have been more than 100 years ago.

The pole was erected following the signing of the Treaty in Versailles on 28 June 1919, which changed the course of many borders on the European map out of a belief that the continent could be mapped to peace (Venken 2021;

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**Figure 1.** An old border pole on the Vistula Spit in Poland.  
Photo credit: Machteld Venken.

Macmillan 2002). The Treaty gave birth to the Free City of Danzig ("Freie Stadt Danzig" or "Freies Danzig", FD in abbreviation), which was independent from, but found itself within, the customs territory of the Polish Second Republic (Ramonat 1979). The territory of the Free City of Danzig was incorporated in the German Third Reich on 1 September 1939. After the end of the Second World War, it became an integral part of the Polish state and the administrative name of the city changed to Gdańsk.

In collective memory, the spatial area of the historical Free City of Danzig is associated with the cities of Danzig/Gdańsk and neighbouring Sopot, which are 70 kilometres away from Przebrno. An important reason for the imaginary reduction of its space is the fact that back in 1919, two third of the estimated more than 350,000 inhabitants lived in its two major cities (Museum of the Second World War 2020). Another reason is the rare material remains of the period in the landscape, as well as their difficult accessibility. Only five of the original border poles of one of the seven sections of the 290 kilometres long border of the Free City of Danzig can still be found today if one makes the effort to find them in the forest (Proszę Wycieczki 2021).

On the Vistula Spit, the interwar border poles stood outside the territory of Poland. As a result, to the astonishment of tourists, there is no letter P engraved on them (Proszę Wycieczki 2021). The letter D refers to the interwar German Weimar Republic. The eastern part of



**Figure 2.** Satellite Picture of the Vistula Spit today taken by NASA. Source: Wikipedia Commons. "Vistula Lagoon" (Public Domain): from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vistula\\_Lagoon.jpg?uselang=en#Licensing](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vistula_Lagoon.jpg?uselang=en#Licensing). The picture has been modified by adding annotations in yellow based on estimations, which were determined by comparing the satellite image with Google Maps.



**Figure 3.** The Russian-Polish border on the Vistula Spit today. Source: Machteld Venken. The picture has been modified by removing three individuals walking on the Polish side (left) of the border for privacy reasons.

the Vistula Spit belonged to its province of East Prussia, which stretched until Königsberg, the city of birth of the philosopher Immanuel Kant. Crossing the interwar border between the Free City of Danzig and Germany was possible when one possessed a passport—the Free City produced its own—and passed custom control (Sobański 2019, 59). Whereas a big part of Eastern Prussia was included into the Polish state after the Second World War, other parts were in the Soviet Union (including Soviet Lithuania). Today, Königsberg is known as Kaliningrad and is part of the Russian exclave between Poland and Lithuania (Krickus 2002).

The current border between Poland and the Russian exclave is situated 20 kilometres to the East of Przebrno (Figure 3). Tourists can walk, but not drive their cars, until the state border line. A fence clearly divides the

beach into a Polish and Russian part and ends into the Baltic Sea. Whereas on the Western side of the fence the sand is well-trodden, the Eastern side is deserted, except for a guard in a border tower about 30 metres from the fence (Belsat 2024). Since the dissolution of Eastern Prussia following the Second World War, crossing this Polish–Russian border line is forbidden, and today, illegal crossing can lead to “imprisonment for up to three years” (Art. 264 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation). Overseas cross-border traffic gradually diminished over the course of the last 20 years and has come to an almost complete standstill. The ferry between two local Russian and Polish cities on the Vistula Spit terminated its services after Poland’s accession to the European Union in 2004. Moreover, a Vistula Spit canal creating a connection between the Vistula Lagoon and the Gulf of Gdańsk without having to use the Russian Strait of Baltiysk was opened in September 2022 (Stosunki Międzynarodowe AMW 2022) (Figure 2).

Although the status of the Russian–Polish state border did not change over the last twenty years and remains the closest border of the European Union, under the influence of the Belarusian–Polish border conflict that started in the late Summer of 2021, Polish citizens have begun to refer to the Russian–Polish state border as peaceful and safe (Belsat 2024). Shortly after the European Union enacted multiple sanctions on Belarus for a presidential election that the opposition labelled as fraudulent, migrants from the Middle East and Africa arrived at the western Belarusian border. This surge, according to Polish and Baltic politicians orchestrated with Russian support, led to around 150,000 illegal crossings (Allik 2024). In September 2021, the Polish state declared a state of emergency in municipalities along the Polish–Belarusian border, which lasted for 90 days (Dziennik Ustaw 2021). The death of a Polish soldier in June 2024, who was stabbed in the chest through the bars of the border fence by what Belarusian authorities claim was a migrant, but Polish journalists suggest was a representative of the Belarusian authorities, caused the reinstalment of the 60-kilometre (40-mile) buffer zone along the border with Belarus, as well as a 200-metre-wide area along the border line restricted to all non-residents (Rzeczpospolita 2024).

As the example of the Vistula Spit demonstrates, time plays an important role in how people manage and experience borders. But border temporalities can be understood and interpreted, lived and perceived in multiple ways. This special issue highlights the interlinkages between borders and temporalities by means of four approaches. It examines the interrelationship of the past, present, and future at borders and within border regions, introduces readers to diachronic studies of borders and border regions, discusses how age and borders interact, and provides insight in new understandings of the way time and space are interlinked at the border.

## The Past, the Present, the Future, and Borders

We argue that the study of temporalities in border studies, which is still an incremental field, necessitates a deeper look into the conceptualisation of border temporalities for researching the past, present, and future, including the terminology, layers, and perception of time in relation to space. If one starts from the idea that borders are “time written in space” (Kavanagh 2000), temporalities in border studies can first of all be identified as the shifting demarcation lines of national borders, which, since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, have become the visible limits of states’ sovereignties and have been constantly displaced throughout history, following territorial claims, border disputes, and wars (Brunet-Jailly 2005). Alongside this physical demarcation, the state border also fulfils different functions of openness and permeability on the one hand and separation and closure on the other, functions that change over time, depending on the respective historical context. The example of the Berlin Wall, which hermetically separated West Berlin from the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) between 1961 and 1989 by means of tons of concrete, watchtowers, and ammunition, shows that a once a shared open space could change to a deathly barrier within weeks, and to an open space again within a fairly short period of time, after the collapse of communism. The historical processes of change at the border with regard to temporalities can thus be designated as a sequence of “border episodes”, as can be demonstrated when analysing the integration processes of European borderlands following the Second World War (Reitel 2013). However, reducing border temporality to a changing state line and its functions would not sufficiently take into account the diversity and complexity of borders and their material, non-material, visible, or invisible manifestations. Even when a state border disappears, it might therefore still be represented in the collective memory, in the landscape, and in architecture as a so-called “phantom border” (von Hirschhausen et al. 2019). Temporalities of borders therefore englobe the remnants of past state borders in the present, but also the borders of the future, as conceptual approaches also include future imagination of past, present, and future borders (Beckert 2016).

This special issue contains three articles engaging with the concept of border temporalities to unravel the interrelationship between the past, present, and/or future at borders or within border regions. In her article “*Border Temporalities of an Old Letter*”, Machteld Venken applies a hermeneutic approach to unravel multiple levels of temporalities attached to a historical borderland. Focusing on a case-study of a female migrant from the Luxembourgian–German–French borderland region in the early 20th century, Venken analyses how time was experienced differently by

borderland residents compared to French lawmakers, exposing how these differing temporal experiences impacted access to the French social welfare system. In addition, the article discusses how understandings of time in archival practices and research funding today impact the feasibility of transnational historical studies.

Applying the concept of border temporalities to the present, Dorte Jagetic Andersen examines the persistent impact of historical conflicts and state-imposed divisions on the everyday lives of people living in the Northern Irish borderlands more than two decades after the Good Friday Agreement in her article "[Living in the Time of the State: Border Temporalities in the Northern Irish Borderlands](#)". The author demonstrates how historical relics from the times of the Troubles and the island's British imperial past exist in the landscape of the Northern Irish city (London)Derry, and how they shape the present by haunting the collective memory and daily practices of the people. Andersen combines the concepts of temporality, space, and practice to show how the temporalities of historical borders perpetuate their influence over contemporary life, creating a continuum from the past to the present.

In their article "[Expanding Border Temporalities: Toward an Analysis of Border Future Imaginations](#)", Dominik Gerst and Hannes Krämer develop a research perspective that they term as "border future imaginations", a perspective that considers borders not only as sites of present and past negotiations but also of future-oriented actions. By focusing on the polycrisis state of the European Union as a case study, the authors suggest a future-sensitive approach in the study of border temporalities, advocating for an analysis that examines the production, meaning, and relational aspects of borders as cultural forms. This approach aims to uncover the practical and strategic efforts involved in stabilizing and contesting border futures amidst ongoing crises, thereby enriching the analytical scope of border studies.

## Diachronic Studies of Borders and Border Regions

A dynamic consideration of time ranging from the past into the future also allows for diachronic studies of borders and border regions. The analysis of border temporalities facilitates in this respect the comparison of border perceptions and cross-border practices at a specific border during distinct historical periods (for example, before or after the Cold War, in the interwar period and post-Second World War, etc.), the temporal explanation of contested borders between neighbouring states throughout history (for example, in the ex-Soviet Union or in ex-Yugoslavia), or the temporal transfer of cultural border heritage and social practices from one regional area to another (for example, by taking into account colonial history). In this context, the

role of memories for border practices and perceptions (Pfoser 2022) is crucial, but also the geopolitical role of border disputes (Brunet-Jailly 2015), which have to be interpreted according to their historicity (Lane 2015). For the diachronic studies of border regions, this eventually leads to a revalorization of the role of history. Studying temporality at borders therefore clearly calls for border studies to "bring history back in" (O'Dowd 2010).

This special issue contains three articles using a diachronic approach. In a diachronic, comparative study titled "[Soviet Legacies in Russian \(B\)order-Making and \(B\)order-Crossing](#)", Oksana Ermoleava investigates the evolution of Russian border control policies from the early Soviet over the Cold War era to the border regime during the ongoing full scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Drawing from archival sources and ethnographic fieldwork, she argues that Russia's border regime indicates a continuity from past to present border control practices, including enforced control over the population's transborder mobility. This continuity is also visible in bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption that continue to allow some individuals to circumvent border controls, despite advancements in legal and technical infrastructures.

In "[Contested Frontiers: Borders and Border Spaces in the South Caucasus from the Second Half of the 19th Century to the 1920s](#)", Arpine Maniero uses a diachronic approach to investigate the historical evolution of the function of borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan from the 19th to the 20th centuries. Maniero demonstrates how the dynamic and often contentious practice of border demarcation is driven by imperial policies, ethnic rivalries, and economic factors. Historical borders, though at times determined insignificant during the Soviet era, have reemerged as "phantom borders": as points of conflict in the post-Soviet period. This was particularly the case in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020 and the following border negotiations. The author suggests an enduring impact of historical border arrangements on contemporary geopolitical and social landscapes in the region.

In the article "[Outline of a Temporality-Based Approach to Iberian Borderlands' Cultural Heritage in Europe and South America](#)", Pedro Albuquerque and Francisco José García Fernández analyse the tangible and intangible heritage along the Portuguese-Spanish border in the Guadiana River region, as well as in the borderlands of Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina. Using a diachronic approach, the authors show how different actors perceive time and how individual and collective memories shape border dynamics. The article suggests that cultural heritage, such as in the form of the preservation of local languages and memories, can serve as a resource for community building and economic development in marginalized border communities.

## Age and Borders

Temporalities of borders can also be considered from the point of view of those who live, encounter, or cross the border at different phases of their lives. From the perspective of age, there are multiple subjective understandings and perceptions of time while encountering and living with state borders. Time at the border can be employed as a resource during different phases of life but can also represent a constraint. In specific European borderlands, using time as a resource may result, for example, in choosing between one side and the other side of the border for childhood education, whereas retirement emigration may be motivated by the search for better living conditions and a "slowed-down" everyday life at an older age (Cretton 2018). Constraints can arise regarding these border temporalities when states impose, for example, limitations to periods of stay (such as visa regulations) or to the access to social and educational services (for example, school admission procedures). Taking this perspective leads to moving away from the definition of a border as a line to that of a trace in relation to temporality, i.e., a "tidemark" (Green 2018). The notion of trace or tidemark suggests the idea that borders in time are footprints in the everyday life of the citizens rather than time written in geographical space. This approach can also be linked to the concept of border temporalities as "storytelling", where the border lines on maps are no longer phantom borders in landscapes but "ghosts" in the memory of people (de Certeau 1985).

This special issue contains three articles focusing on people crossing borders at a specific moment in their lives. In their article "[Borders, Time, and the Diverse Education and Care Arrangements of Cross-Border Commuting Parents](#)", Sabine Bollig and Selina Behnke analyse the temporal dynamics and border experiences of early childhood education and care for families commuting between Germany and Luxembourg in the Greater Region of SaarLorLux. Drawing from border experiences articulated in qualitative interviews with daily commuting parents across the Germany-Luxembourg border, the study identifies two key time-related practices—rhythmicizing and navigating—performed by commuting parents to manage their children's education and care arrangements. Unravelling three distinct patterns, Bollig and Behnke determine that activities and childhood temporalities are linked with the cross-border experiences parents have made with public daycare services in the Greater Region. In this way, the authors unravel childhood-specific border temporalities.

Kira Kosnick, in her article "[Temporary Lives: Border Temporalities and Retirement Mobilities in a Turkish Tourism Hot Spot](#)", analyses how both state policies and economic forces shape the experiences of German retirement migrants in the Turkish tourism hot spot

Alanya. Kosnick examines how these migrants, despite seeking a carefree retirement, face temporal pressures due to state regulations and a competitive real estate market driven by tourism and profit-seeking capitalists. She argues that the interplay of state and capital-driven temporalities in border regions creates a hierarchical organization of space and time, significantly impacting German retirement migrants.

Elisabeth Boesen examines the experiences of Luxembourgian citizens relocated to Germany and focuses on what she calls their "temporal otherness". In her article "[Border-Crossing and 'Temporal Otherness' in the Greater Region SaarLorLux: Residential Migrants' Experiences of Divergence](#)", she shows why these migrants find value in the slower-paced life on the German side, even though it is perceived as less developed than Luxembourg. She argues that viewing these migrations through the lens of border temporality reveals that migrants appreciate an invented construct of regional unity. The author argues that this aspect is overlooked when border research focuses on national differences.

## New Understandings of Space and Time at the Border

Lastly, our special issue contributes to research about the way the interrelationship between time and space can be understood in new ways at the border. The articles analyse the situations of migrants and refugees, who find themselves 'stuck in time' whilst waiting for an occasion to cross the border or who are placed in waiting time-spaces of 'in-between', for example, in EU hot spots, where their asylum procedures are being checked. Temporality at the border here describes social practices which constitute what Schatzki has referred to as the "time-spaces" of human activities within borderlands or across state borders (Schatzki 2009). The analysis of time-spaces at borders gives insights on the influence of border territories on identities, self-perception, and otherness. Whereas the border has often been defined in border studies as a means to differentiate between "us" and "them", temporality can in this context reinforce this differentiation by introducing a supplementary division line between "now" and "then" (Fabian 1983). However, time-spaces at borders can also refer to the temporality of crossing the border itself, for example, at airports, which may be subject to legal provisions, practices, and procedures of control that may accelerate or reduce the "in-between" situation at state borders. The temporal dimension of border checks consists of the decision-making process on who may or not enter a national territory.

Focusing on the border control regime at a Portuguese airport, Mafalda Carapeto, in her article "[Temporalities in 3D: Speeds, Intersections, and Time Sequentialities at the Portuguese Border](#)", examines how border

agents employ temporality as a mechanism of control to determine the entry of foreign citizens into Portugal. Drawing on 11 months of fieldwork, Carapeto shows how these agents assess past, present, and future aspects of travellers' documents—such as letters of sponsorship, return tickets, and hotel reservations—along with sufficient monetary resources and mobile phone messages. These elements, as well as factors of the travellers' class and nationality, influence their decisions. She demonstrates how the assessment of these documents introduces varying speeds into the decision-making process of the agents—advances, retreats, and hesitations—that create an additional layer of temporality which Carapeto terms micro-temporalities. From the point of view of the border-crossers, these micro-temporalities are experienced as segments of time which vary in length and punctuate the "in-between" time of their waiting to cross the border.

In their article "[Struggling for Time on Lesbos: The Impact of EU and National Legislation and Procedures on Refugees' Temporalities](#)", Luca Daminelli and Marcella Cometti examine the impact of changing European Union and Greek domestic migration control policies on the temporal experiences of refugees on the island of Lesbos, Greece. Combining legal analysis with ethnographic fieldwork, the authors unravel how these policies shape refugees' experiences of time, forcing them into prolonged waits and sudden procedural accelerations and thus creating a legal limbo. The article reveals how these temporal disruptions serve as mechanisms of control, affecting refugees' subjectivities and their economic and social condition.

Carolin Leutloff-Grandits, in her article "[Of Being Stuck or Moving On: Border Temporalities along the EU's External Border in the Western Balkans](#)", analyses the complexity of different temporalities at the external border of the European Union with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. She demonstrates how Croatia's entry into the European Union has established two distinct temporal dimensions at the border, affecting both local residents and migrants crossing the border. The first dimension is a spatio-temporal demarcation, which categorizes societies as either more advanced (European Union) or less developed (the Balkans). The second dimension is a space of (im)mobility that dictates the pace of migration. Borderland inhabitants on both sides of the Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia border, as well as migrants from the Global South, find themselves affected by the EU external border. The locals, similarly to the migrants, encounter difficulties in envisioning their futures and progressing in their environments, which are amplified by migrants' frequent departures and transits throughout the Western Balkan region.

This first special issue dedicated to border temporalities has used four different approaches to examine the

interrelationship between space and time at borders and within border regions from a multi-disciplinary perspective. The different contributions are dedicated to the interrelationship between the past, present, and future and borders, diachronic studies about borders and border regions, age and borders, and new understandings of the interrelationship of time and space at borders. The articles offer first insights into the multi-scalar and complex ways borders and temporalities are interlinked, and are to be read as an encouragement to further develop this promising new avenue of multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research.

## Endnote

- 1 The Centre of Excellence "Borderlabs" is supported by the EU Erasmus+ Program for the period 2022-2025 and functions as an observatory of resilience at European border regions.



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