The border is no more, long live the border.
De-materialization and re-materialization of internal borders in the European Union.

STATE OF THE ART AND AIMS

This project explores processes of de-materialization and re-materialization of land borders within the European Union, with a focus on three key borderscapes in northern Italy. Such processes are related to digital and physical border infrastructures facilitating 'legitimate' mobilities and transnational cooperation while controlling/containing other 'unauthorized' mobilities.

Within Critical Border Studies, borderscapes are defined as 'a way of approaching bordering processes in specific geographical and social contexts, both in borderlands but also wherever a specific border has impacts, is represented, negotiated or displaced' (Brambilla et al. 2015:xv, dell'Agnese & Amilhat Szary 2015, Raeymaekers 2019). Borders are analysed as spaces of contestation, struggle and negotiation (Casaglia 2020, Brambilla 2015, Mezzadra & Neilson 2013, Raeymaekers 2013) that involve a complex array of human and non-human actors including state authorities, commuters, migrants, technological devices and infrastructures (Glouftsios 2018, Schouten 2014, Tazzioli & Walters 2016). A large body of literature emphasizes the relationship between borderscapes' changing (im)material dimensions and the multiplicity of subjects crossing, challenging and reproducing them. The increasing sophistication of border management technologies and practices results in selective procedures of 'filtering' based on border controls that categorize mobile populations into 'kinetic elites' enjoying facilitated mobility versus 'kinetic underclasses' whose mobility is slowed down or blocked (Adey 2006, Sparke 2006). Such filtering is performed at the level of individual bodies targeted by forms of control that define mobilities and immobilities – the right to move, enter, and leave (Adey et al. 2014).

The plan is to study bordering 'from below', focussing on the spatial/political implications of infrastructural de- and re-materialization of borders on the bodies of subjects on-the-move in the selectively fluid Schengen space. A significant gap in Critical Border Studies is the complex role of infrastructures in current de- and re-materializations of borders. Despite recent attention towards migration and arrival infrastructures (Meeus 2019, Leurs 2019), what remains to be explored in detail is how the differentiation between 'legitimate'/desirable and 'illegitimate'/undesirable border flows is enacted through infrastructures that contribute to the de- and re-materialization of borderscapes in Europe. It is thus timely to study such 'geographical formations capable of implementing specific strategies of control and limitation on the mobility of people and things' (Rijke & Minca 2019:972). In a political sense, border infrastructures matter because their integrating function (e.g., trains, buses, airplanes) goes along with a reducing and precluding one, encapsulated in walls, razor wire, and camera surveillance (Amoore 2013, Mountz 2011, Popescu 2014), as well as prominent digital infrastructures (Glouftsios 2021, Pötzsch 2015). All of this produces 'frictions' (Côté-Boucher 2020) in what is often (mis)represented as seamless mobility. Indeed, filtering procedures allow border authorities to sort 'bad' from 'good' circulation (Foucault 2007:18) via the analysis of a vast array of data revealing backgrounds, identities and presumed intentions of individuals crossing borders.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This project has one main question: **how does the process of de-materialization and (largely digital) re-materialization of European borders in the Schengen space categorize and manage mobile subjects?**

We have identified three Italian borderscapes marked by different histories and border practices: Trieste/Slovenia, Brenner/Austria, Ventimiglia/France. These locales in the EU's area of 'free movement' are stark examples of border de-materialization, implemented to facilitate the free circulation of people and goods. No documents are requested from European citizens crossing borders at these points, so there has been a removal of visible control infrastructures such as barriers, fences, and police/customs checkpoints.

We have delineated three sub-questions (SQ):

SQ.1. How have processes of de-/re-materialization emerged in the three case studies?

SQ.2. How is border de-/re-materialization experienced by different 'communities of practice' forged by and forging these shifting borderscapes?

SQ.3. What may be learned from these three Italian cases about borderscapes in the apparent fluidity of the Schengen space?

This project will consider material and immaterial processes of de-/re-bordering as part of the governance of mobility, together with the interplay between the infrastructural dimension and mobile subjects' narratives/experiences. We will focus on the 'hard' re-materialization of control and containment for subjects who are not recognized as legitimate in these newly fluid borderscapes.

The project will pay particular attention to a selection of mobility patterns distinguished by degrees of speed, smoothness, and control. Border digitalization (e.g., biometric identity management) enhances forms of control while reproducing inequalities in terms of who is able to move and cross borders. Recent events – ranging from the reaction to 'refugee crises' to the emergency measures put in place for the COVID-19 pandemic since spring 2020 – have shown up the unstable configuration of contemporary 'Schengen borders' (Casaglia & Coletti 2021, Casaglia et al. 2020). These moments of 'crisis' triggered the re-materialization of bordering processes, at times even partial border 'closure', and a set of practices around differential inclusion (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Such occurrences also revealed the performative dimension of the concept of 'crisis', as exemplified by the 2015 'long summer of migrations' (Kasparek 2016), when a widespread sense of refugee crisis in Europe contributed to the construction of 'border walls' in the Balkans, as well as the rollout of sophisticated infrastructures aimed at controlling 'irregular flows' with technologies including drones and infra-red cameras.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGIES IN RELATION TO THE POSTDOCTORAL POSITION

The open postdoctoral position is intended for achieving the following objective with the appropriate methodology:

OBJECTIVE: To investigate performative reconfigurations of infrastructural border space.

With the increasing integration of the European border space, certain state infrastructures – like customs and migration offices – became obsolete. However, this did not mean that borders disappeared. Borders have become increasingly mobile through the implementation of digital

infrastructures allowing authorities to trace mobilities in advance of and beyond territorial lines. To grasp the complexity of de-bordering processes, we need to consider **how these infrastructures produce Europe's borderscapes**.

This segment is about how digital infrastructures reconfigure strategies of mobility management, often through practices of control that may not be visible but determine who is allowed through Italian crossing points. **We will focus on two types of infrastructures**. First, we will study the collection and processing of biographic, biometric, and transactional data of people on the move. Second, we will attend to what we describe as 'sensory' infrastructures (e.g., cameras, satellite-based mapping interfaces) that target all forms of mobility to make them visible and controllable. Authorities consider both **data and sensory infrastructures** as crucial to addressing presumed security risks associated with increased cross-border mobilities in the wake of the lifting of material barriers between EU Member States and the parallel (in)securitization of migration. Overall, this part of the project will analyse how data and sensory infrastructures transform mobility controls through which contemporary borders are performed.

METHODOLOGY: We distinguish between two types of digital infrastructures.

Type 1 refers to infrastructures aimed at collecting biographical, biometric, and transactional data about individuals. Biographical data is names, dates/places of birth, and other personal information normally found in passports and IDs. Biometric data is extracted through algorithmic analysis of fingerprints, facial images, and DNA profiles. Transactional data is registered when interacting with the transport industry (e.g., buying bus and train tickets) or state authorities (e.g., applications for visas, asylum or residence permits). The latter does not reveal the identity of individuals; rather, it has to do with their background and travel behaviour. Through these three types of data, state authorities establish the identities of individuals crossing borders (mainly via biographical/biometric data), as well as profiling potential behaviours associated with security risks and irregular migration (mainly via transactional data). There are several pan-European databases for these purposes: the Schengen Information System (SIS II), the European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database (Eurodac), the Visa Information System (VIS), and the Entry/Exit System (EES). Others are under development, like the European Criminal Networks Information System (ECRIS-TCN), and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS).

Type 2 encompasses sensory infrastructures that target mobility to make it visible and controllable. We have in mind surveillance planes, drones, satellites, thermal/CCTV cameras, and geographic information systems that are geared towards real-time monitoring of cross-border mobilities. They are typically deployed to 'make sense' of crossing points, allowing authorities to intervene. Such interventions can be related to dismantling criminal networks, as well as legally controversial operations that obstruct migrant journeys.

Our preliminary research establishes how databases and sensory infrastructures operate across the EU (Glouftsios 2018/2021, Glouftsios & Scheel 2021). What we do not know is **the precise ways in which these infrastructures are used locally by police, migration, and asylum authorities that are involved in the management of borders and (un)authorized mobilities at the three sites in question**. We will fill this knowledge gap in relation to:

(1) **Actors**: Who are the public and private figures behind digital infrastructures in Trieste, Brenner, and Ventimiglia? What are their roles, how do they interact, and what challenges do they face?

(2) **Devices**: What technologies are at work in Trieste, Brenner, and Ventimiglia (e.g., biometric registration tools, data analytics, cameras and other sensors, digital interactive maps)? How do they affect their users?

(3) **Practices**: What are the work routines and cultures that define in Trieste, Brenner and Ventimiglia? How do digital infrastructures shape rationalities and strategies?

We will use qualitative methods:

(1) **Document analysis**: We will analyse legislation, feasibility plans, impact assessments, technical-administrative reports, and corporate promotional material relevant to the implementation of digital infrastructures. Sources in the public domain will be complemented with material acquired through Freedom of Information requests.

(2) **Expert interviews**: We will conduct semi-structured interviews with relevant actors (border guards, police, migration/asylum authorities, state officials, implementation working groups, IT experts, and consultants). Our document analysis and literature review will inform an interview guide with questions relevant to the use of digital infrastructures.

(3) **Participant observations**: Observations of mobility and border control processes mediated by digital infrastructures in Trieste, Brenner, and Ventimiglia will refine the picture of frictions and challenges for users.

All empirical material will be **qualitatively coded** to identify themes relevant to actors, devices, and practices. This process will facilitate the production of conceptual maps and visualizations as a way of triangulating findings and systematizing results.

EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION OF THE POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHER

The Postdoctoral Researcher will contribute to the project management and implementation.

Management

Duration: months 1-22

Assistance of the PI in the management of the project and the organisation of scientific events and dissemination activities, as well as contribution in the organisation of Operational Workshops among the local units.

Implementation: Border Infrastructures

Duration: months 6-22

This task is aimed at analysing the complexity of re-bordering processes. This implies: 1) to investigate the deployment of digital infrastructures used to control cross-border mobilities in the selected case studies; 2) to deploy and coordinate three key methods used in such investigation: *documents analysis, expert interviews,* and *fieldwork observations*.

More in detail, the contribution of the Postdoctoral Researcher will regard:

The identification and mapping, for the three case studies, of the private and public actors involved in the implementation of digital infrastructures; the actual devices involved in these infrastructures; and the practices of border control.

Conduction of research, including document analysis, expert interviews, and participant observations. Elaboration and analysis of data.

Dissemination of research results through the participation in conferences and production of scientific articles/book chapters.

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