Glossary / Glossaire / Glossar Border Studies

# Borderscapes

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The 'borderscapes' approach overcomes thinking of borders in terms of territorial orders and reconstructs the (de)stabilization of borders through the complex interplay of their social effects and negotiations.

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The article examines the understanding of 'borderscapes' that is widespread in Border Studies, and lays out the basic features of the approach. To do so, the uses of the emerging term and its implied understandings will first be presented. On this basis, 'borderscapes' is systematized as a relational, diffused, episodic, perspectival, and contested formation that is related to national borders. The article will also show the extent to which 'borderscapes' breaks with the 'traditional' idea of border as a (territorial) binary and will strengthen an alternative concept of border: border is embedded here in a multitude of social processes that can be changed and shaped, relate to one another in a transscalar and contested manner, and, in their complex interplay, produce effects that establish or (de)stabilize national borders. 'Borderscapes' transfers borders into the landscapes of their multiple effects and negotiations, which certainly can take place on 'territorial edges', but do not necessarily have to be located there. The approach thus makes an analytical offer that escapes the "territorial trap" (Agnew, 1994), creates sensitivity for the complexity of borders and also regards them as resources. Despite efforts to outline 'borderscapes' more definitely, the approach cannot be clearly defined. Rather, the principles outlined lay out a theoretical-conceptual framework in which complexity-sensitive Border Studies researchers move and in which room for specific appropriations is left. These principles will then be presented using examples from cultural border studies, moreover the conceptual openness of the approach, which is particularly reflected in method(olog)ical ambiguities, will be discussed.

# Borderscapes

## 1. Introduction

'Borderscapes' as an approach that includes conceptual and methodological aspects represents the further development of the "'bordering turn'" (Cooper, 2020, p. 17), which took place in the course of the renaissance of borders and the resulting research impulses in the 2010s. Despite an ambiguous definition and a certain conceptual openness, 'borderscapes' is widespread in both geopolitical and cultural border studies in such a way that the impression could arise that "speaking about borderscapes is almost a fashion" (dell'Agnese and Amilhat-Szary, 2015, p. 5). This in itself indicates that the approach is widely received. Critical discussions or considerations about its operationalization, however, remain the exception. In addition to this criticism, however, several of the approach's strengths should be emphasized, as they have largely enforced a differentiated conception of borders in border studies. The understanding of borders in 'borderscapes' – which will be stated in advance for didactic reasons – will join the ranks of the "complexity shift" (Wille, 2021) as a young trend in Border Studies. This includes the concerns of Border Studies researchers that borders are no longer to be seen 'only' as effects of 'straightforward' bordering processes (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002) or as unquestioned "lines in the sand" (Parker et al. 2009) but also to examine borders as powerful ensembles of multiple actors, social arenas, (im)materialities, multi-localities, multivalences, or temporalities. This more complex view sees the border as a powerful formation (and one not existing outside of such a formation) and is interested in how it works, as well as implying the 'borderscapes' approach. It understands borders as transscalar formations of elements. The complex interplay of these elements creates borders: "The borderscape is not purely an external effect of the border, but an assemblage in which bordering takes place" (Schimanski, 2015, p. 40).

The idea of formation, which, here, represents the border, is expressed in the numerous paraphrases which attempt to explain 'borderscapes': "panoramas," "contexts" (Scott, 2020a, p. 151), "zone" (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007, p. xxx), "spaces" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 18), "fluid field" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 26), "sites of struggle" (Brambilla and Jones, 2019) and "horizon" (Stojanovic, 2018, p. 147). The descriptions range from static to dynamic understandings, but also from abstract to concrete and largely spatial views. The interpretation spectrum refers to the various interpretations of the approach in border studies, which is itself an "interdisciplinary borderland" (Cooper, 2020, p. 18). This article makes its way into this very borderland to reconstruct the basics of the approach in light of its "'irresistible vagueness'" (Krichker, 2019, p. 2) and "polysemicity" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 20). To do so, the uses of 'borderscapes' starting at the turn of the millennium and the understandings of the term implied with them are examined first. The particularly widespread understanding is represented with "border as a landscape" and linked with 'borderscapes' as an approach of complexity-oriented border studies. To this end, 'borderscapes' will be systematized primarily based on the work of the anthropologist Chiara Brambilla as a relational, diffused, episodic, perspectival, and contested formation that is related to one or more national borders. Finally, possible appropriations of the approach will be presented using examples of Cultural Border Studies and the

conceptual openness of 'borderscapes', which is particularly reflected in method(olog)ical ambiguities, will be discussed.

## 2. Term Use

The term 'borderscapes' was coined by the artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes when they performed their artistic piece *Borderscape 2000: Kitsch, Violence, and Shamanism at the End of the Century* (1999) (dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary, 2005, pp. 4f.). After the turn of the millennium, the term could also be found in academia, even if only sporadically at first: in the essay *Borderscapes, the Influence of National Borders on European Spatial Planning* by Arjan Harbers (2003), in the chapter *Boundaries in the Landscape and in the City* by Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper and Marieke Kuipers (2004), in the lecture *Bollywood's Borderscapes* by Elena dell'Agnese (2005) at a conference of the American Association of Geographers, and in the book *Stories of the 'Boring Border': The Dutch-German Borderscape in People's Minds* by Anke Strüver (2005).
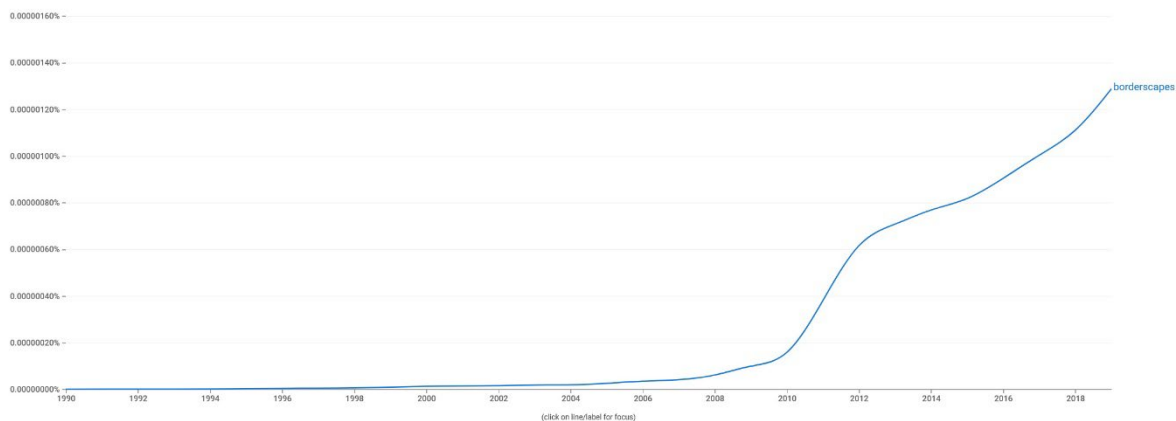


*Figure 1: Frequency of the term 'borderscapes' mentioned by year (1990-2019) in the English text corpus of Google Books; Source: Google Books, https://books.google.com/ngrams (Accessed 7 July 2021)*

After the mid-2000s, 'borderscapes' became increasingly used in academic debate. Decisive factors here were the publication of the book *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge* by the social anthropologist Prem Kumar Rajaram and the geographer Carl Grundy-Warr (2007) as well as a series of conferences within the framework of the International Geographical Union: *Borderscapes: Spaces in Conflicts/Symbolic Places/Networks of Peace* (Trento, 2006), *Borderscapes II: Another Brick in the Wall?* (Trapani, 2009) and *Borderscapes III* (Trieste, 2012). The term became popular in the 2010s, presumably due to the research project *EUBORDERSCAPES – Bordering, Political Landscapes and Social Arenas: Potentials and Challenges of Evolving Border Concepts in a post-Cold War World* (Euborderscapes, 2016). The multidisciplinary project (2012-2016) with 22 partners from 17 countries, funded by the 7th European Research Framework Program, has led to numerous intellectual impulses and scientific publications which have profiled the term as an approach of complexity-oriented Border Studies. These include, among others, the anthology *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making* (Brambilla et al., 2015).

The short overview of the composition of the word consisting of 'border' and 'landscapes' mirrors the word's predominantly plural use, its comparatively new popularity, and its use in various fields of research. This is also linked to different understandings of the term that have emerged in more or less theoretical and conceptual reflections in current Border Studies (in the following also dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary, 2005):

*(1) Landscape at the border:* The article by Harbers (2003) serves as an example for the understanding of 'borderscapes' as a landscape at the border. He understands 'borderscapes' as a landscape that is characterized or influenced by the presence of a national border: "[W]e shall describe the distortions borders bring to the built environment or nature as 'border solidifications', or borderscapes." (Harbers, 2003, p. 143) Accordingly, 'borderscapes' stands for a physical space on or along a national border in which the discontinuities of state sovereignty materialize. This understanding also reflects some articles from political geography, which, in the first half of the 20th century, already addressed the role of the state as a "landscaper".

*(2) Landscape through the border:* This understanding of 'borderscapes' is also about the shaping of physical space in connection with national borders. However, the authors Dolff-Bonekämper and Kuipers (2004) do not ask to what extent the discontinuities of state sovereignty materialize in a landscape at the border, but rather what role the border plays in the process of creating a landscape. Thus, together with Julian Minghi and Dennis Rumley (1991), they cite the spatial development in border regions and the discontinuities that are effective in this process: competencies, political styles, decision-making processes, etc. The authors thus understand 'borderscapes' as a cross-border landscape that arises through the border – that is, through the productive negotiations of the discontinuities implied by the state border.

*(3) The border as a landscape:* This understanding sees the border itself as a continually changing landscape and – like the performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña (Kun, 2000) – is based on the *Scapes of Globalization* by Arjun Appadurai (1996). In the course of the globalization debate of the 1990s, the anthropologist used this concept to describe the world as a transnational formation of flows, exchange processes and overlaps, which, contrary to the notion of a static-binary organized world, represents a hybrid and unstable global landscape. The concept of landscape is used here metaphorically to describe dynamic, transscalar interdependencies that can be mapped spatially, but not in the mosaic of national order. 'Borderscapes' in this sense emancipates itself from space on or along the "territorial margins" and stands itself for a mobile and relational space:

> In line with Appadurai's reflection, the borderscapes concept brings the vitality of borders to our attention, revealing that the border is by no means a static line, but a mobile and relational space. […] Thus, the concept of borderscape enables a productive understanding of the processual, de-territorialised and dispersed nature of borders and their ensuing regimes and ensembles of practices. (Brambilla, 2015, p. 22)

The understandings of the 'borderscapes' term presented refer consistently to a landscape, but with different areas of focus. In the first two understandings of the term, a physical-territorial space is in the foreground as a landscape, whose geographical location on, along, or across a state border is central and which is designed in different ways by an external agent. In the third understanding of the term, the idea of a territorial landscape is replaced by that of an interwoven context, the design of which does not come from any external agent and geographical localization is of secondary importance. The landscape, understood here as multi-local, stands for the border, to which, as a dynamic formation, a certain creative power is ascribed. Correspondingly, the performative meaning of landscape, which aims at a socio-cultural reshaping or shaping, undergoes a specific and sometimes critical accentuation in the understanding of "border as a landscape": "the notion of 'scapes' is part of a political project of 'making' that highlights the ways in which the 'borderscape' affords particular sets of reproductive practices and shapes political subjectivities in a particular manner." (Brambilla, 2015, p. 24) 'Borderscapes' in the sense of "border as a landscape" thus differs in several respects from the preceding understandings of the term. At the same time, "border as a landscape" is considered to be the most widespread understanding of 'borderscapes' in current Border Studies (Krichker, 2019, p. 4), which is why it will be examined in more depth in this article.

## 3. Border as a Landscape

The popularity of the 'borderscapes' approach is undoubtedly due to the research project with almost the same name mentioned above. One of the Border Studies researchers involved made a significant contribution to the fact that 'borderscapes' developed from an emerging term to a widely received approach in complexity-oriented border studies: Chiara Brambilla's article *Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscape Concept* (2015). Although it does not offer an ultimate definition or operationalization of the approach, it does provide a multitude of theoretical perspectives and conceptual considerations on how borders can be thought of in a complex and critical manner and finally examined. In the article, the anthropologist aimed to present "a novel ontological outlook […] or the contemporary situation of globalisation and transnational flows where borders appear, disappear, and reappear with the same but different locations, forms and functions." (Brambilla, 2015, p. 26). To do so, she drew connections to the then-still-young critical border studies (Parker et al. 2009; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012) and attempted to use alternative approaches, which overcome the Western model of thinking of fixed binaries and open up borders as constructions that are unstable in space and time, in order to focus on topics and aspects which border studies had hardly touched on up until that point in time. Brambilla proposed a "processual ontology" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 26) for borders that recognizes, "that reality is evolving and constantly emerges and reemerges showing that being and becoming are not inseparable." (Brambilla, 2015, p. 26)

From this perspective, which emphasizes the socially-made nature and the changeability of borders, bordering practices are seen as continuously reproduced and dynamic performances that are embedded in social processes or articulate themselves through them. The focus on the social arenas of borders owes itself to the concern "to 'humanize' borders" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 27), with which Brambilla aims to bring the collective representations, individual experiences, and effects of borders into view, and make them analyzable: "[...] focusing on how borders are embedded in the practice of the ordinary life and continuously emergent through the performative making and remaking of difference in everyday life." (Brambilla, 2021a, p. 15). In addition, a critical perspective on borders should be taken, which focuses on the negotiation of ethically or legally legitimized bordering practices, which are part of everyday life, as well as bordering practices which result from resistance or subversion (Brambilla, 2015, p. 20). Brambilla understands such negotiation processes in the field of tension between so-called "hegemonic borderscapes" and "counter-hegemonic borderscapes" not simply as social arenas in which borders are articulated in a particularly explicit way. At these "sites of struggle" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 29) suppressed existences and alternative discourses emerge, which the approach aims to make visible. In this context, Brambilla (2021a, p. 14) sees 'borderscapes' "as shifting fields of claims, counter-claims and negotiations among various actors and historically contingent interests and processes."

These explanations serve to present the main features of 'borderscapes'. However, the conception of "border as a landscape" raises further questions, such as the constituents of 'borderscapes', their connections, spatial-territorial references and much more. These and other partial aspects of the approach are discussed below.

**(1) Border as a relational formation:** Regarding the elements that constitute 'borderscapes', there are neither sufficient nor coherent statements available. Indeed, there is a consensus that both material and immaterial elements play a role in 'borderscapes'; however, precisely which characteristics qualify remains undetermined. The statements on the constituents of 'borderscapes' range from "all aspects of the bordering process" (Nyman and Schimanski, 2021, p. 5) to "a broad range of the social processes around the borders" (Krichker, 2019, p. 5) or "the various elements of bordering" (Bürkner, 2017, p. 86) up to concretizations of different degrees of abstraction. These include, for example, passport-regimes, law, political rhetoric, literature, art, agents, ideas, institutions, physical artifacts, discourses, policing, barrier-building, everyday sociocultural practices, etc. (Nyman and Schimanski, 2021; Bürkner, 2017; Laine, 2017; Brambilla, 2015). Which elements are now constitutive for "borders as landscapes" seems to remain a question which needs to be answered empirically. It can be analyzed by examining the extent to which (im)material elements are (made) empirically relevant in and through 'borderscapes'. For this, the (often partly inductively identified, partly deductively set) relationships appear essential, as they indicate who or what seems to be relevant in 'borderscapes' and therefore part of the formation. The role and characteristics of these relations, however, also remain vague if only a general reference is made to 'borderscapes' as "a space [of] complex interactions" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 24), "a [...] space connecting up all aspects of the bordering process" (Nyman and Schimanski, 2021, p. 5) or a type of "meeting point of the various elements of bordering" (Bürkner, 2017, p. 86).

More detailed statements on the extent to which the constituents of 'borderscapes' can relate to each other can be found in Scott (2017, p. 16) and Laine (2017, p. 14), who recognize an inclusive or complementary relationship when the "border as a landscape" brings together political visions and processes as well as everyday practices and representations. Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007, p. xxvi) make another specification of the relationships, which regard tensions and conflicts as a characteristic of 'borderscapes': "The borderscape is recognizable not in a physical location but tangentially in struggles."

**(2) Border as a diffused formation:** The question of the localization of 'borderscapes' and their spatial-territorial references is reflected in the socially-made nature and multiplicity. To answer this question, the idea of social arenas is used, in which borders occur: "the border becomes [...] something camouflaged in a language and performance of culture, class, gender, and race [...]. Such camouflage reproduces the border in the multiple localities and spatialities of state and society" (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007, p. x). The aforementioned arenas – in addition to many others – represent the multiple and spatially dispersed social processes that bear the signature of borders. 'Borderscapes' or the formation of their arenas can indeed "occur" on or along a national border, but their localization is, in principle, revealed through the social effects or articulations of national borders, which, however, cannot be grasped by national orders. This is also referred to by Schimanski (2015, p. 36), who ascribes 'borderscapes' "an inherent resistance to state demarcation" and cites alternative order categories for the localization of 'border as a landscape': "[T]he borderscape is not just a question of what happens on the border or in the immediate borderlands, but also of what happens at any spatial distance from it, at any scale, on any level, in any dimension." 'Borderscapes'

are therefore not necessarily or even rarely found on the "territorial margins"; nor can they simply be mapped in the national or other spatial categories that are brought to them. Their localization remains an empirical undertaking that follows the social effects of one or more national borders "into a multiplicity of fields and locations" (Rosello and Wolfe, 2017, p. 7) and thereby can determine a more or less extensive spatial diffusion of the formation examined.

**(3) Border as an episodic formation:** 'Borderscapes' are highly vital (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007, p. X), mobile (Brambilla, 2015, p. 22) as well as continuously reproduced (Brambilla, 2015, p. 26) and thus transitory (Bürkner, 2017, p. 86) formations. Their fleeting character is specified here as episodic, in two respects: both in their spatial diffusion and in their temporality, "borders as landscapes" are to be understood as episodic, as they are related to the constantly changing social, cultural, political, and spatial relationships. This suggests the assumption that 'borderscapes' can only be "captured" empirically as snapshots; their ongoing re-formations, however, open up diachronic perspectives, which in turn help to understand the development of "borders as landscapes" in space and time. This is how Brambilla (2015, p. 27) argues in a criticism of widespread ahistorical considerations: "[T]he borderscapes concept enables us to understand that the time-space of borders is inherently unstable and infused with movement and change. Furthermore, the focus on borderscapes avoids the ahistorical bias, which besets much of the discourse on borders and globalisation." 'Borderscapes' thus represent constantly changing space-time relationships, across which borders occur and which produce multiple spaces and temporalities in episodes.

**(4) Border as a perspectival formation:** Depending on the perspective taken, "borders as landscapes" manifest differently and develop different meanings. That means 'borderscapes' are also a question of perspective: "The border is a 'perspectival' construction [...] as a set of relations that have never been given, but which vary in accordance with the point of view adopted in interpreting them." Brambilla (2015, p. 22) refers here to the scape concept from Appadurai (1996, p. 33), who explains that scapes are "not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors." Brambilla (2015, p. 25) describes the fundamental situatedness of 'borderscapes' with the image of a kaleidoscope. The metaphor is intended to show how the numerous constituents and complex relationships of the formation can be viewed or kept in view, how variable their re-formations can be imagined in space and time, and how many perspectives and, thus, analytical access points result in "borders as landscapes." The last aspect in particular is affiliated with Brambilla's concern (2015, p. 27), "to 'humanise' borders," since the kaleidoscopic perspective does indeed enable an analysis of borders with the intent of "taking into account not only the 'big stories' of the nation-state construction, but also the 'small stories' that come from experiencing the border in day-to-day life [...] also considering their visible and hidden interactions." (Brambilla, 2015, p. 25) In this respect, viewing 'borderscapes' as a perspectival formation also represents a procedure that opens up the multiple constellations with their respective multivalences of the border (Wille, 2021, p. 112) and thus also makes suppressed existences visible.

**(5) Border as a contested formation:** The critical perspective on borders introduced above, which is already reflected in viewing 'borderscapes' as a perspectival formation, is accentuated by Brambilla (2021a, p. 14) through the privileged focus on "borders' conflicting multiplicity". This addresses the dynamic and conflictual interplay of the constituents of 'borderscapes', which characterizes borders as contested formations in the sense of "site[s] of struggle" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 29). The focus on the intersection of "hegemonic borderscapes" and "counter-hegemonic borderscapes" is due to a double concern: On the one hand, techniques of marginalization and invisibility are to be exposed, and, on the other hand, through it an understanding of borders as "engine[s] of social organisation and change" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 26) are strengthened:

> [It] means giving visibility back to stories of people on the move, of people who live in the borderlands, of 'people who make opportunities, not violence, at the edges of the state' [...]. It means capturing the possibility of alternative border futures, through which people can effectively change the 'terms of recognition' within which they are generally trapped, opening up new political spaces of subjectivation and agency that disrupt the hold that borders [...] have over people's lives and move towards alternative forms of political arrangements, beyond the contours of present political categorisations. (Brambilla, 2021a, p. 16)

Viewing borders as a contested formation thus not only makes marginalized existences or invisible discourses visible, it also understands borders as spaces of possibility and thus as resources for "alternative border futures" (Brambilla, 2021a, p. 16), which (can) express themselves in alternative orders, subjectivizations, and empowerments.

This explanation of 'borderscapes' must be classified. The main features and partial aspects of the approach are based primarily on the work of Brambilla, who presented elaborate theoretical-conceptual considerations on the "border as a landscape." Although these were and still are widely received in Border Studies, it is by no means an approach that is shared and consistently practiced in the same manner, that equally regards borders as relational, diffused, episodic, perspectival, and contested formations. Rather, different appropriations of 'borderscapes' can be observed, which are more or less inscribed in the above-mentioned main features as well as partial aspects and which focus on specific characteristics.

# 4. Appropriations

The main features and partial aspects of the approach presented here are to be viewed as a theoretical-conceptual framework in which complexity-sensitive Border Studies researchers operate and which leaves scope for specific appropriations regarding specific areas of interest or practical research aspects. In this context, Krichker (2019, p. 1) states: "Emerging 'borderscape' studies deal with a variety of divergent topics with their own distinct interpretation of the concept." Two such modes of interpretation or appropriation from the field of cultural border studies are presented in an exemplary manner below from a conceptual perspective.

In his essay *Border Aesthetics and Cultural Distancing in the Norwegian-Russian Borderscape*, the literary scholar Johan Schimanski (2015) examines the role of art and literature in (de)stabilizing borders. In doing so, he uses the 'borderscapes' approach and looks to the example of the Norwegian-Russian border. He makes a consistent distinction between the "landscape at the border" and the "border as a landscape," which, in his example, partially coincide empirically. Schimanski's understanding of 'borderscapes' is based on the idea of a complex, diffused network that is held together by (contested) rhetorical, symbolic, and discursive strategies and that reinforces and subverts territorial logics of order. 'Borderscapes' is thus understood as "an ambivalent space of […] power and resistance" (Schimanski, 2015, p. 37) that includes all elements that are involved in (de)stabilization of borders. In order to define these in more detail, the author first explains (cultural-)historical developments in the Norwegian-Russian border region and the role of their border on a global and national level. He also addresses the "technoscape of the border" (Schimanski, 2015, p. 40), which manifests itself locally via signs, checkpoints, fences, etc., but also via the globally standardized 'filter and sorting techniques' at the border, in the consulates and embassies. The "mediascape of the border" (Schimanski, 2015, p. 40) is also presented, which includes maps, travel guides, stories, exhibitions, websites, television, or newspaper reports on the Norwegian-Russian border region, as well as media from scientific fieldwork onsite or artistic pieces that address the territorial principle of order and/or were created in the border region. Schimanski formulates the ensemble of these constituents and their mutual references as 'borderscapes', whereby the selection of the thematized constituents is not discussed.

With his research question in mind, the author goes into detail on the role of art and literature in 'borderscapes': artistic works should not be understood as isolated recordings that depict or represent the border; rather, they are relationally embedded in cultural and social contexts of meaning and are active in negotiating boundaries and orders (Schimanski, 2015, p. 40f.). Through this performative moment, which is particularly visible when borders are challenged, art and literature are made just as relevant as border infrastructures or political discourses in 'borderscapes': "The concept of borderscape implies that they [aesthetic works] participate in the same field of play as [...] a border fence or a border commission." (Schimanski, 2015, p. 41) In the empirical part of the article, Schimanski uses performances, installations, exhibitions, and novels to reconstruct the negotiations that have taken place on the Norwegian-Russian border. In doing so, he makes the idea of the complex network productive and shows artistic references to historical events, local border symbols, and relevant actors, as well as the aesthetic strategies practiced to challenge and to renegotiate the border. Schimanski understands such strategies as performative acts in the sense of 'borderscaping', which not only questions hegemonic discourses, but above all brings to light multiple perspectives on or from the Norwegian-Russian border and thus increases their visibility.

Chiara Brambilla (2021b) also deals with questions of in/visibility in her article *In/visibilities beyond the spectacularisation: young people, subjectivity and revolutionary border imaginations in the Mediterranean borderscape*. According to the concept of "border spectacle" (De Genova, 2012), Brambilla problematizes the circulating narratives and images of migration on the Mediterranean borders, which primarily construct migrants as a threat, essentialize their supposed illegality and legitimize violence against them. The media spectacularization of the Mediterranean borders makes use of simplifying techniques that not only reduce the complexity of the border-migration nexus, but also obscure the perspective of the migrants. Brambilla

wants to counter such "politics of in/visibility" (Brambilla, 2021b, p. 84) with a differentiated picture of 'Mediterranean borderscapes,' which is initially understood here as a construction of media spectacularization – or, in the words of De Genova (2012, p. 492): as a discursive formation "of both languages and images, of rhetoric, text and subtext, accusation and insinuation, as well as the visual grammar that upholds and enhances iconicity." Brambilla (2021b) creates the differentiated picture of 'Mediterranean borderscapes' arises for through a complexification, which, on the one hand, includes the perspective of migrants and/or those who 'inhabit' the borderscapes and, on the other hand, opens up spaces of possibility for subjectivizations and empowerments. Brambilla understands this process and the resulting effects of re-politicization or de-spectacularization as a "political and performative method" (Brambilla, 2021b, p. 85), which she calls 'borderscaping.' 'Borderscaping' is meant to reveal how the (spectacularized) Mediterranean borders operate in everyday life, thus making migrants visible and empowering them to shape borders, for which Brambilla treats the research context as a perspectival formation:

> I aimed to investigate how the rhetoric and policies of borders impact, conflict and exist in a dynamic relationship with everyday life, as well as how this rhetoric and policies are experienced, lived and interpreted by those who inhabit the Italian/Tunisian borderscape. This highlights the urgency of advancing a perspective that gives voice to a multiplicity of individual and group stances dealing with the Mediterranean neighbourhood as they are embedded in the realms of identities, perceptions, beliefs and emotions, whilst also examining practices and experiences of dealing with Euro/African Mediterranean interactions, both political and territorial, as well as symbolic and cultural. (Brambilla, 2021b, p. 89)

As per the quote, Brambilla examines the Italian-Tunisian 'borderscapes', which represent not only a relational formation of powerful images and narratives. 'Borderscapes' is now understood more comprehensively as a contested landscape of (im)material discourses and practices that refer to African-European relations and their (dis)continuities. For the empirical determination, Brambilla works with young people who live in Mazara del Vallo (Italy) – including those whose families come from Italy and those whose parents immigrated from Tunisia (primarily from Mahdia) two or three generations ago. Using an elaborate combination of qualitative methods aimed at interlinking narrative and visualization, Brambilla records the perceptions, experiences, practices, etc. of young people on the Italian-Tunisian border. She regards these as crystallization points of "counter-hegemonic borderscapes" or as performative resistance to the oversimplified media spectacularization of the 'Mediterranean borderscapes':

> Young people sketch a counter-image of the Italian/Tunisian borderscape through a resistance that is enacted […] through imagining, experiencing, and performing in the Mediterranean neighbourhood.; […] young people's imaginaries and experiences challenge the tactical, pre-emptive invisibilisation that pervades hegemonic media narratives and political discourses of the spectacle. (Brambilla, 2021b, p. 94, 98)

The appropriations of the 'borderscapes' approach presented primarily take into account the cultural and symbolic dimensions of border (de)stabilization. In doing so, they create a concept of 'borderscapes' with different areas of focus – but with a shared basic framework – and introduce the concept of 'borderscaping'. Schimanski and Brambilla (as well as other border scholars) use the concept to differentiate between the object of investigation "border as a landscape" and the activity of "landscaping." However, both appropriation examples work with different understandings of 'borderscaping', as will be explained below.

## 5. Polysemicity

As indicated above, the attractiveness of 'borderscapes' stems from a certain "theoretical and methodological vagueness" (Krichker, 2019, p. 1), which allows border studies researchers to use different interpretations or appropriations. The criticism in this context that the approach is "[p]erhaps too open" (van Houtum, 2021, p. 38) is fundamentally reflected in the question of whether this serves as an object of investigation or a method(ology). This vagueness is not only evident in the diffuse use of the terms 'borderscapes' and 'borderscaping'; 'borderscape' is also variably referred to as a "concept," "approach" or "method." The term "approach" chosen in this article is to be understood as inclusive and comprises 'borderscapes' both as an object of investigation and as a method(ology).

As an object of investigation, 'borderscapes' is based on the systematization outlined above as a relational, diffused, episodic, perspectival, and contested formation related to national borders. In this sense,

'borderscapes' is to be understood as an analytical object, which – before or while it is being examined using certain methods – is (continuously) being redefined. Here, however, the question arises as to which (im)material elements constitute 'borderscapes' – or, in other words: who or what (does not) count as 'borderscapes' and is accordingly (not) taken into account in the analysis. The few statements on this question hardly provide any clues, although how they are handled can counteract a potential (and partly observable) over-generalization of 'border.' In order to avoid the latter, which is also referred to as "borderism" (Gerst, 2020, p. 149), it should be clarified which (im)material elements qualify as constituents of "borderscapes" or which border studies researchers see as such. To do so, the criterion "borderness" (Green, 2012), for example, can be applied to ask the extent to which (im)material elements are involved "to the way borders are both generated by, and/or help to generate, the classification system that distinguishes (or fails to distinguish) people, places and things in one way rather than another" (Green, 2012, p. 580). The 'borderscapes' to be considered can thus be questioned as to whether the (im)material elements that potentially constitute them are (made) relevant in the establishment or (de)stabilization of orders or categorizations, through which borders manifest. This methodological questioning, which tries to reconstruct a certain 'borderness' and through which it tries to specify the object of investigation, 'borderscapes', corresponds to the concern of retracing the more or less obvious and complex modes of how borders come into effect in social processes. This approach, however, rules out rash assessments by Border Studies researchers who may overlook 'borderness' or bring impermissible 'borderness' to the object of investigation. As explained above, 'borderness' as an identification feature of 'borderscapes' should rather be treated as an empirical question that is oriented toward the relevance of the border and is to be answered by the "inhabitants of "borderscapes" or from the observed practices or discourses examined.

When 'borderscapes' is turned into an activity, Border Studies researchers in turn pursue different method(ological) concerns, which is why 'borderscaping', on closer examination, aims at different aspects of complexity-oriented border studies:

**(1) 'Borderscaping' as a method of object construction:** 'Borderscaping' in this sense is initially to be understood as a "way of thinking about the border" (Schimanski, 2015, p. 35) with the aim of arriving at a complex conception of borders. This "way of thinking," which, in light of a certain research question, serves to determine who or what constitutes 'borderscapes' in what way, is described by Brambilla (2015, p. 22) as a "multi-sited approach": "[A] multi-sited approach not only combining different places where 'borderscapes' could be observed and experienced [...] but also different socio-cultural, political, economic as well as legal and historical settings." The goal here is to follow the border in its social and spatial diffusion into the social arenas in which it occurs and where it is contested. This procedure, also known as "seeing like a border" (Rumford, 2012, p. 895), reveals the relevant actors, discourses, practices, etc. in their mutual referential contexts, making 'borderscapes' identifiable as an object of investigation. However, 'borderscapes' can never be constructed as carefully delineated and conclusively determined objects of investigation. Rather, it is always a cutout (temporarily presented as a situated constellation) from the multiple and complex temporal and spatial ramifications of the border, which – as a formation embedded in the social – are continuously re-forming themselves.

**(2) 'Borderscaping' as a method of empiricism:** This understanding of 'borderscaping' focuses on empirically observable action and thus on the dynamics of or in 'borderscapes'. 'Borderscaping' here refers to the performative process of (re)shaping the "border as a landscape." As with Schimanski (2015, p. 43), "landscaping" is understood here as a process in which 'hegemonic borderscapes' are challenged or reshaped by resistant practices. 'Borderscaping' as a strategy of re-formation – reconstructed on empirical material – is therefore primarily to be found in the struggle for borders, which at the same time opens up spaces of possibility.

**(3) 'Borderscaping' as a method of active border studies:** This understanding allows the borders' spaces of possibility to unfold "[by] moving from a rendering of the border as a space of crisis to [...] a space of political creativity, as a space [...]" [of] politics of possibilities to come" (Brambilla, 2021a, p. 15). 'Borderscaping'" as a technique of (re)shaping or even intervention is to be placed between research as critical knowledge production and 'borderscapes' as bordered realities of life. As shown by Brambilla (2021b, p. 85), the aim is to understand research itself as a "political and performative method" which allows insights into the complexity and contested nature of 'borderscapes', with the aim of making the invisible visible and/or to turn suppressed existences into border shapers. This engaged concern, which at the same time turns border scholars into "landscapers," is inspired by the "Border as Method" approach (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013), which is equally about knowledge of the (bordered) world and how it is shaped. "It is above all a question of politics, about the kinds of social worlds and subjectivities produced at the border and the ways that thought and knowledge can intervene in these processes of production. To put this differently, we can say

that method for us is as much about acting on the world as it is about knowing it" (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013, p. 17).

The polysemicity of the 'borderscapes' approach was systematized here using analytical distinctions and thus opened up for interdisciplinary discussions, which is intended to initiate further theoretical-conceptual developments.

# 6. Conclusion

This article has examined the most widespread understanding of 'borderscapes' in Border Studies and has shown the basic features of the somewhat vague and variably interpreted approach. In doing so, 'borderscapes' was systematized as a relational, diffused, episodic, perspectival, and contested formation, and possible appropriations were presented. The approach localizes the border in a multitude of social processes that can be changed and shaped, relate to one another in a transscalar and contested manner, and, in their complex interplay, produce effects that establish or (de)stabilize borders. 'Borderscapes' thus transfers borders into the diffused landscapes of their multiple effects and negotiations, which take place on "territorial margins" but are conceptually emancipated from them. The approach thus makes an analytical offer that escapes the "territorial trap" (Agnew, 1994), creates sensitivity for the complexity of borders, and regards them as resources. After all, it is also one of the benefits of 'borderscapes' to conceive of the actors, practices, discourses etc. that are effective in border (de)stabilization as a relational formation, with which experiences, representations, narratives, corporealities, and much more are brought into a common, complex context. The relationality that characterizes this context connects the symbolic with the material dimension and closes the so-called "metaphorical-material border gap" (Brambilla, 2021b, p. 86). Furthermore, the reference contexts make it possible to complexify 'borderscapes' via the (critical) analysis and thus to draw a differentiated picture of the border as well as to develop the borders' spaces of possibility.

In addition to these benefits, problems and the polysemicity of the approach were also mentioned that make interdisciplinary exchange within Border Studies more difficult. Regarding 'borderscapes' as an object of investigation, the question that has not been sufficiently clarified is what qualifies the constituents to be part of the powerful formation and consequently to become the subject of the analysis. For this, conceptual and, above all, social-theoretical considerations are lacking. These considerations overcome scalar thinking and take into account the relationship between material and immaterial or animate and inanimate constituents in their complex interplay. The proposal made to orient the construction of 'borderscapes' via the relevant-making or relevant-becoming of the border on empiricism can work on this desideratum and at the same time refers to the potential of practicing the approach as a method(ology): "Rather than as a concrete empirical category, the concept of 'borderscapes' is better used as a way of approaching bordering processes [...] wherever a specific border has impacts, is represented, negotiated or displaced." (Laine, 2017, p. 13) This perspective, which tries to interweave the question of the object of investigation and the method(ology), ties in with the understanding of 'borderscaping' as a method of object construction and engaged border research.

In addition to critical knowledge production, the approach primarily aims to adequately consider and understand the complexity of borders. 'Borderscapes' is undoubtedly a suitable instrument for this: "[The] borderscapes approach [...] represents a highly promising tool for 're-assembling' border complexity." (Scott, 2020b, p. 10); or: "[T]he borderscape notion offers tools to enhance our understanding of complex bordering, ordering and othering processes." (Brambilla, 2021a, p. 15) However, it can be observed in research practice and the conceptual debate about 'borderscapes' that the (achieved) conclusions about the complexity of borders often fall short. Many academic articles focus entirely on capturing as many constituents of 'borderscapes' as possible and then examining them more or less in isolation from each other. The numerous reference contexts are neglected, which not only represent the interplay of the 'borderscapes' constituents, but also make the border a complex object. After all, the emergent effects of the establishment or (de)stabilization of borders which emanate from 'borderscapes' are not due to the constituents of the relational formation but rather to their complex interplay, which has a performative effect. The philosopher and complexity researcher Paul Cillier (2016, p. 142) makes this central characteristic of 'borderscapes' clear when he explains complex systems: "Complex systems display behavior that results from the interaction between components and not from characteristics inherent to the components themselves. This is sometimes called emergence." This understanding of complexity, on which the 'bordertextures' approach is based (Wille et al. forthcoming), focuses on the reciprocal reference contexts, which initially raise questions about how 'borderscapes' function and thus allow formulations

based on the performative logics of border (de)stabilizations. Against this background, attention is drawn to the confusion of complexity with multiplicity, which is not uncommon in (and outside of) 'borderscapes' research. The multiplicity of the border, with which the multitude of relevant actors, practices, and discourses in 'borderscapes' (or elsewhere the multitude of dimensions of the border) is usually addressed, does not (yet) make it possible to completely grasp or even to understand the complexity of the border. Thus, it is important to turn to the processes between the relevant actors, practices, discourses (or dimensions), which in their interaction become effective as border (de)stabilizations and can be accessed through their mutual referential contexts.

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