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SHAPING AND INTEGRATION OF SMALL DIFFERENCES: ETHNOGRAPHIC INSPECTIONS IN A EUROPEAN BORDER REGION

This article deals with a special situation which has largely been ignored by ethnological research up to now. With the processes of European integration and delimitation, not only have historically problematic regions increasingly incurred a new dynamic but also border regions with a long tradition of peaceful coexistence and cross-border cooperation, challenging regions to work on their similarities as well as their internal differences. How this is experienced and contended in the various domains of politics and everyday life and at the same time how belonging is treated or rather situationally tested were the issues addressed by a research project of the Ludwig-Uhland-Institute. This article will discuss the principles of approach to field research in a unproblematic border region as well as some of the findings from the field research carried out in the Bodensee (Lake Constance) region (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) in 2006.

Key words: regionality; border regions; europeanization; ethnography

Border regions have always been very dynamic culturally and are even more so at the beginning of the twenty first century. Today they are molded by an interplay of the internal and external influences of Europeanization and globalization. These recent transnational dynamics do not only open borders and bring spaces closer together, they also form the outlines and images of regions – they challenge regional politics, planning committees and inhabitants to work on the image of their region, to work on border crossing differences and to work on identities.

In the past, the main focus of ethnographic investigations on regionality was on border regions which were burdened with conflicts, where the conception of ethnic, religious, and cultural difference has been shaped. But

in contrast to that, we know only very little about how the new – harmonic and nearly conflict free – regions manage their integration and identity building processes.

Due to this, our department (Ludwig-Uhland-Institute, University of Tübingen) conducted a project with 25 graduate students of Empirical Cultural Studies (European Ethnology) in the *Bodensee* (Lake Constance) region. It is geographically divided by national borders (Austria, Switzerland, and Germany), provides an excellent example of these transnational dynamics and has acted collectively as a single region in various contexts and to differing extents over the past few decades.

The paper will present some of the results of the project carried out in different fields, such as politics, cross border commuting, environment, tourism, consumption, arts, and education. And it will mainly discuss both the meaning of small differences in identity processes and ethnographic approaches to regionality today which is seen as a complex network of intertwining conceptions and orientations that can be drawn upon in different situations and that is not consistent but worked on day-by-day through media, traffic and everyday communication.

Unity in Diversity?

The big topic of this project was the "region". The question was already formulated as presented in the working title: "*Einheit in der Vielfalt? Rhetorik und Praxis grenzüberschreitender Regionen*" (Unity in Diversity? Rhetoric and Practice of Transnational Regions). It is not about research in the region (as a thought-out system of cultural spaces), but rather it is about investigating the conditions and frequency of "regionality" in the Bodensee area, which is divided by national borders but yet is increasingly seen as a unified region. In the beginning of dealing with the set of problems this presents, obvious paradoxes were observed: transnational affluent regions are distinguished by a high concentration of cultural practices in which the coherence of cultural spaces of the region can be made experientiable, but, at the same time, the differences between the parts of the region are highlighted.

This shows among other things that in the Bodensee area (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein) the rhetorical legitimation of the transnational region occurs – despite the small scale structures – through an alleged historical "unity in diversity" and with that ensures the applicability of European regional and cultural policies. However, recent empirical investigations contradict this by showing that interregional identity contains more differences than similarities (cf. Berndt 2005; Denz 2002). The project goes from here (cf. Jeggle 1991; Jöhler 2004) and proposes the theory that in this way contradicting images do not come about by chance, but by the differentiated spatial figurations reflected by late modern European societies.

Therefore, the attention was directed towards the simultaneity of experiences of difference and coherence in current daily routines in which the endeavor ethnographed the situational practice in the border region – on the basis of the various domains such as politics and labor, leisure and tourism or culture and education (cf. Tschofen 2006). In regard to methods, this project lent itself well to the possibilities of academic research and teaching activities. The research groups collectively spent an intensive week of field research in two places in the Bodensee region (on the German and Austrian shores) and developed smaller working groups for the individual fields from there, which resulted in methods to fit the needs of the individual topics, ranging from participant observation and qualitative interviews of various scopes to autoethnographic methods to relate to specific experiences (for example a cycling tour). In the following months, the students often returned in small working groups to the field – mainly to enhance interviews with experts as well as with laymen, and to gain a better understanding of the events supporting the region through participant observation. Analyzing materials required a topic orientated combination of methods that ranged from interview interpretation to semiotics and symbol analysis.

Regionality: Region as Practice

The concept of region that has been taken into consideration utilizes the insights of new anthropological spatial and urban research (Schroer 2006). In recent years – in the context of a spatial turn and not least against the background of new political and territorial dynamics – it has indicated with vehemence that the spatial dimension of the social world is hardly static nor unalterable (cf. Döring, ed. 2008; Bachmann-Medick 2006). From such a perspective, even regions can no longer be understood as a given or an idle reality. They are to be regarded more as historically constructed social spaces that often exhibit blurred, overlapping and evolving outlines – especially in recent years. Despite the historical depth of some European regions, they prove to be largely a product (and by-product) of modern state building processes. A region is also a spatial concept of the modern age (Köstlin 2005), whose imaginary facet and cultural filling always show the relationship to and dependence on the nation as the central, culturally justified social concept of the modern age.

As far as it concerns the present day, there is no doubt that regionality is primarily a variation of global socialization processes – also and especially where new regions invoke old systems of cultural spaces and make their characteristics a subject matter of identity management. Just as in the state and nation building processes of the nineteenth century, the detour over regional – or nostalgic connotation – served national integration; current tendencies of regionalization can be understood as an instrument and

accompaniment of European integration (cf. Johler 2002) as well as the related territorialization process as a complement of delimitation.

The reference to the constructedness of regions is important to me. However, on the other hand, the emphasis cannot just be reduced to the view of "just being constructed". Since social constructions are not only references to the culture forming potential in history and society (Maase 1998), they are also efficacious social systems. To put it another way, regions "happen" in everyday life and change in and through the practice. Particularly because we dare not present them as a homogeneous and closed construction, but always in relation to other spaces; they are closely linked with human knowledge and actions: a region is a "structure" and a "process" at the same time – spatial cultural practices construct them, but the resulting systems also structure the social practice in interdependence.

Dissolution of boundaries and integration: Border areas in a state of flux

In regard to the Bodensee area – which has already been touched upon above – this project is not just dealing with a singular region, but primarily a transnational border region. The anthropological handling of regions here goes in hand with the handling of borders and therefore consists of a wide field of research that has been experiencing an upswing in recent years (Donnan & Haller 2000; cf. Hengartner & Moser, ed. 2006). Therefore, similarly to above regarding region/regionality interdisciplinarily, a tendency towards a social constructivist concept of borders, a concept focusing on borders as a phenomenon of social practice, can be observed.

On the one hand, such connections have been traced from a historical perspective for modern state building and the epoch of nation-states in the past years (François, Seifarth & Struck, ed. 2007) and on the other hand from an anthropological perspective especially for present day borders with a high potential for conflict and the burdens of history (Blask & Kaschuba, ed. 2003; Kockel 1999; Eskelinen, Liikanan & Oksa 1999). Primarily, they have offered us insights to the relationships that subjects and citizens have with their nation-state and how competing loyalties and multiple identities co-exist in daily routine of those who cross or live on borders (Haller & Donnan 2000:8). What is the case then in an area with open and at first glance completely unproblematic borders in which there is a long tradition of making reference to a shared identity within the cultural space? How is the European formula of *unity in diversity* locally communicated and experienced in which the practices of difference and coherence simultaneously combine with processes of deterritorialization and region building in a Europe of – transnational – regions? (cf. Hölcker 2004).

Border area Bodensee: The normality of difference

Particularly, the apparent "normality" of the practiced relationship was an argument for the Bodensee as a paradigmatic area of research. The Bodensee exhibits both a large conspicuity within the bordering federal states and countries and a high status as a cultural landscape in European memory. However, it is neither sensational in the sense of a currently contested landscape nor on the grounds of its particular dynamics of delimitation and demarcation. That, together with access to select domains of everyday life, enables the investigation of regional transformation processes which appear to be a largely conflict free zone. At the same time, the varying definitions of the Bodensee area could already be the first indication of the flexibility and contextual regional demarcation and therefore also the practice of regionality. So the area is given other outlines depending on whether it is being depicted in historical-political, historical-economical or geographical (natural landscape) congruencies. And even today, the definitions of organized regionality do not even coincide. The area has flexible borders that are dependent on the type of initiatives which might sometimes require a large and other times a small defined territory around the lake: the political cooperation of the Bodensee region has different dimensions than that of environmental protection or cultural cooperation.

The main topics of this project go beyond just the historical aspect of border and region research. Mainly of interest is how a region as a single cultural space in various domains not only is constructed but also how it is made practicable and shapeable in day-to-day living. And this in a region whose inner and outer borders emerge beyond just relational (cf. Bausinger 1996). For, it is not just about borders which are "much different but also not" (Schilling 1986:349), but also about borders which outline a transnational region that only painstakingly stands out from its surrounding areas. In other words, as inevitable as borders and marginalities are, it has been clearly shown in the context presented here that the aspects of borders as an expression of perceived differences appear only as a temporary concept whose reach depends on the situation and gains its meaning only in concrete everyday actions.

Theoretical concepts: Transregionality as habitus?

Regionality at borders, or to be more precise, the regionality of transnational areas has found itself increasingly in the spotlight of anthropological research in recent years. With support from the concepts of interculturalism and transculturality, attention to the transformation of such "regions in transnational areas" has been argued (Berg, Linde-Laursen & Löfgren, ed. 2000) and with transregionality the term has also been brought into the discussion

that indeed auspiciously focuses on the relations but has remained rather shapeless up to now. Among other things, that may be due to the fact that it plays a role in social science research alongside the concept of transnational spaces, which has been introduced for the extended question of the intercultural and migration research; however a predominantly larger dimension for regions has been reserved. Nevertheless, if one carefully (and not universally) makes use of this term, then one has to do it wittingly with a somewhat different emphasis. It tries to signify that transnational regionality amounts to more than encounters of sub-regions, it pertains to spaces with diverging outlines and shifting affiliations that complexly intertwine in everyday life and are also diversely connotated in various fields of experience and action.

What does the everyday life in a transnational region consist of? Is there a coherent characteristic of the Bodensee area – avoiding for now such a question with the problematic term of identity, especially in the singular? To look into this question, it is helpful to look at a field with similar questions. That is the reasoning behind a short introduction of the concepts and terms of urban research, or to be precise urban anthropology, which like regional research has turned its focus from anthropology in (the city) to anthropology of (the city) in the past two decades and – to follow Ulf Hannerz – with that has given up the concentration of the *locus* city in favor of a consideration of the *focus* urbanity (Hannerz 1980). Something similar has occurred, although less clearly conceptually discussed, in research in the humanities, particularly in regional ethnography. Here, in turning away from essentializing ideas, communicative and praxeological models were given priority, regions were understood as systems that "happen" and efforts were made to systematize the interdependence of material environment on the one side and experience and actions on the other – or in any case were understood as a "thick description". It especially involved the consideration of the regional area itself as an articulation and action of definite areas.

In borrowing from the concept of "urban imaginary" (Linder 1999; 2005), the project operated time and again with the term "regional imaginary" (cf. Frykmann 2002) because it helped especially to recall the historical dimensions of the conceptions of the Bodensee area in the sense of a regional memory and also at the same time to understand the contemporary sketches of regionality as dealings with older representations and attributions. Rolf Lindner's concept of "urban habitus" "habitus of the city" (Lindner 2003) seems even better, because that brings observations made in the field together with theoretical dispositions: "however we understand 'Habitus' [...], reference to this concept is also associated with the fact that our everyday actions are never without preconditions. It is always partially biographical and historically developed. And our way to act is directed and channeled as something given by virtue of tastes, declinations, and preferences – to take it short: by virtue of

certain 'dispositions'. The habitus-term only becomes applicable as a matter of fact when cities (for our purposes: regions) are also "individuals with their own biography (history), their own socialization and their own models of lifestyles" (Lindner & Moser 2006:23). What is really fascinating about this suggestion of a – rather broad and loosely formulated – habitus-term in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu's is the perspective to be able to integrate a large spectrum of practices in diverging fields with it.

The enticing talk of "habitus of a region" makes it possible – without giving up the ethnographical requirement of a certain holism – to establish connections between knowledge and practice, to understand the region as a knowledge space and at the same time a sphere of action (cf. Koch & Warneken, ed. 2007). In-depth research in select fields would be in accordance with the possibilities of systematization, in accordance with the possibilities to understand the rules of everyday actions in the context of inexplicit knowledge of space and culture. For – these were revealed by the inspections in different fields of lived regionality – we are not only dealing with apparent concepts, but also with unarticulated experiences and imaginations gained through complex textures. Implicit systems of knowledge that arise in the routines and activities which are taken for granted confirm regional action. Answers to such questions require an ethnography of objects and places with which people interact: from the landscape as constituted, and constituted themselves, spheres of action via infrastructures and tourist sites to the fields of the administered region and the sites of the sensual experiencing of habitual dispositions.

Ethnographical inspections

The basis of this research project is the small empirical investigations in the Bodensee region. The resulting publication, website¹ and poster presentation from the three semester examination of the Bodensee area are divided into three sections: *Grenz-Region*, *Natur-Raum* und *See-Bilder* (Border-Region, Nature-Area and Lake-Images). These sections consist of small studies of various fields such as politics, border traffic, environmental projection, tourism, consumption, art and education.

To give some insight to our practical work, I would like to present two examples, one an investigation of the *Regionenmacher* (actors involved in political regionalism) and the other an investigation of the common sites of remembrance of school children.

¹ The homepage is available both in German and in English: <http://www.grenzraumsee.eu>

Case-study I: "Regionenmacher": A survey of transnational institutions in the Bodensee region

The history of transnational cooperation on the Bodensee can be traced back to the middle of the nineteenth century. However, the Second World War brought the previously existing cooperation to a halt. Then in the 1950s, it was revived to make a collective effort to reduce the pollution of the lake.

This transnational cooperation has moved well beyond just dealing with lake pollution to the construction of a regional platform. The question then is how is the Bodensee constructed as a region—which is divided among four countries—and, above all, who are the driving forces behind this construction? When looking into this question, one always comes across four institutions: the Interreg Program of the EU for cross-border cooperation, the *Internationale Bodenseekonferenz* (IBK), the *Bodenseerat* and the *Bodensee-Stiftung*.

The goal of the Interreg Program is to reduce the potential disadvantages that periphery border regions face by stimulating transnational cooperation. This is accomplished by funding various cross-border projects which help to strengthen the regional economy and to establish formal networks. The IBK also receives funding from Interreg to help implement its numerous cross-border projects, contributing significantly to the construction of the Bodensee region. The Bodenseerat, a forum of business and political actors, deals with environmental, traffic and urban and regional planning problems. It is linked with the IBK, to some extent, by drafting various proposals for potential projects. The Bodenseerat sees itself as a representative of the people and as complementary to the IBK. In contrast to the others, the Bodensee-Stiftung is a non-governmental organization for environmental protection which is mainly active as a motivator, presenter, coordinator and advisor to help establish partnerships for sustainable commercial and industrial development.

To achieve their goals, these individual institutions are dependent on the networks among themselves and have made networking part of their self-conception and activities. With personal networks proving to be particularly important, it is ultimately the *Regionenmacher* – the individual actors – who help implement projects and construct the region. Precisely this collective problem solving and the inclusion of actors from various fields make an important contribution to the sustainable development of the Bodensee region. One problem that this research could not ignore is the competing loyalties that the political actors have to contend with in the praxis. On the one side, they are being judged on achieving the common (European) goal of the region, and on the other side, they also have to represent the interests of their national bodies. This occasionally leads the professions to a grueling conflict of interests that makes transnational cooperation a painstaking process to moderate.

Case-study II: Sites of memory from the perspective of school children

Without a shared history common to everybody within the region, it is difficult for a region to construct a sense of having its own unique identity since shared histories are important building blocks for a regional identity regardless of the national borders.

For some years, the shared cultural and historical roots of the Bodensee region have been evoked more and more often to emphasize commonness within the border region. Unquestionably, there are a number of shared historical events that the region as such can look upon, for example the Bishopric of Constance. However, the fact whether school children growing up in the region are also acquainted nowadays with the knowledge of such historical places of relevance provides an indication to a common cultural memory of the Bodensee region.

"Mental maps" from school children between the ages of 8 and 16 from the countries bordering the Bodensee show which sites of remembrance they are acquainted with and which appear important to them. The results turned out to be rather varied, which could be attributed to the prior knowledge of the respondents. The curriculum does not require the teaching of the cultural heritage of the Bodensee region.

The school children are a bit more familiar with their direct surroundings due to school fieldtrips or family trips than to the more distant historic sites, though almost all of them, regardless of which shore they live on, recalled the Pfahlbauten (prehistoric lake dwellings) in Unteruhldingen, the Council of Constance from 1414 to 1418 and Friedrichshafen for the Zeppelin airship company. Bregenz was marked by school children from all three countries as a place of historical importance, but only those from Bregenz mentioned the historical context—the Roman history of the city. Therefore there is no lack of common sites of remembrance. Nevertheless, the images that the children have of the area are formed very differently and incongruently and do not contribute to a strong sense of having their own regional Bodensee identity.

Concluding remarks

Ethnographical snapshots – especially those taken on trips to definite places and through definite areas – tend to be passed over by the developments in the everyday life of the examined region. As this project was being designed, it first aimed to ethnograph the application of the Bodensee region to be included in the UNESCO's World Heritage List of Cultural Landscapes. Nothing came of it – which is a reoccurring theme in our volume. Or another

example: Within the Interreg Program, there is no longer discourse about a common identity for the Bodensee region (like there was at the beginning of the project), and as a substitute for the retracted application to host the Internationalen Gartenbauausstellung (IGA) 2017 (International Garden Exhibition in 2017), an alliance of cities and also an initiative "Genetically modified free (food) Bodensee region" was started – with all the usual national and other disparities such as the longings to overcome them in a European-transnational area. In a nutshell, the inspected border region at Lake Constance (*GrenzRaumSee*) is on the move; it is not a finished structure in which regionality happens, but it happens itself.

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OBLIK I INTEGRACIJA MALIH RAZLIČITOSTI: ETNOGRAFSKA PROPITIVANJA U EUROPSKOM POGRANIČNOM PODRUČJU

SAŽETAK

Imućna pogranična područja, pa tako i ona koja nastaju u sadašnjem procesu europeizacije i u međusobnom natjecanju, pokazuju visoku koncentraciju kulturnih praksi, pri čemu kohezija kulturnih regija postaje opipljivom, no istodobno problem počinju predstavljati razlike između dijelova pojedinih regija. To je osobito jasno na području Bodenskog jezera (Njemačka, Austrija, Švicarska i Lihtenštajn), čija je retorička legitimacija kao transnacionalne regije, usprkos strukturama na nižoj razini, izvedena iz navodno povijesnog "jedinstva u različitosti" te bi stoga morala osigurati usklađivanje s europskim regionalnim i kulturnim politikama. Tomu nasuprot, recentni društveno-znanstveni kvantitativni uzorci međuregijskog identiteta otkrivaju više razlika no sličnosti.

Članak predstavlja rezultate transnacionalnog projekta koji se bavi iskustvima granica i prostora, pripadanja i razlika između regija. Stoga je izabrani pristup usmjeren prema simultanim iskustvima razlika i kohezije u suvremenom svakidašnjem životu te je prikaz pokušaja etnografske obrade u pograničnom području. Granice su fleksibilne – prema zaključcima terenskog istraživanja na poslijediplomskom studiju Empirijskih kulturalnih studija (Institut Ludwig-Uhland, Sveučilište u Tübingenu) – očito manje u smislu povijesnog procesa (od razgraničenja ili demarkacije), no više u smislu suvremenog svakidašnjeg života i u smjenjivanju varijabilnih praksi: politike, medija, gospodarstva i slobodnog vremena.

Ključne riječi: regionalizam; pogranična područja; europeizacija; etnografija