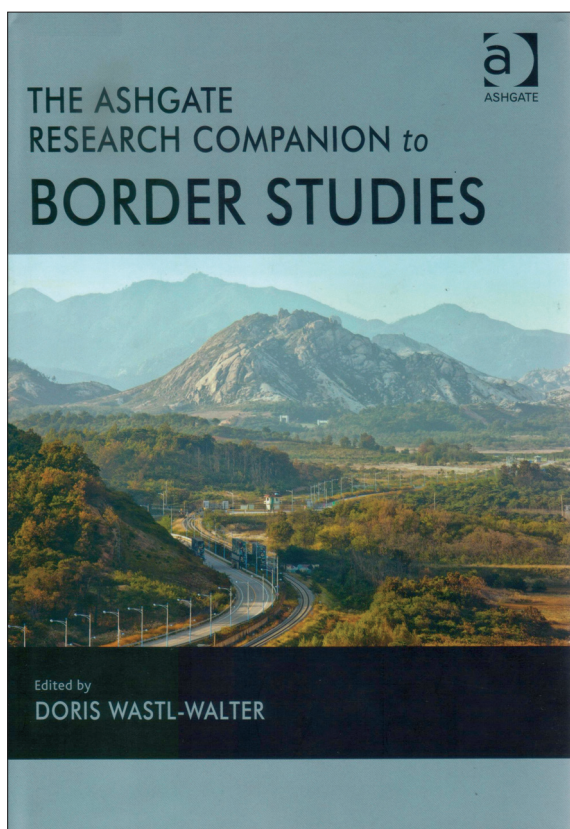


Wastl-Walter, D. (ed.): The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies. Farnham–Burlington, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2011. 705 p.

The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies is a Bible for border studies, an encyclopedia which is a real milestone in social and political geography! These are the first thoughts coming to the reviewer's mind when looking at the fantastic variety of the studies connecting to the main topic of the thick book. The wide range of authors (40 altogether) representing 21 countries of 6 continents guarantee a sophisticated and very detailed content of the volume. Therefore, not surprisingly, this book has aroused great interest in the academic sphere and it can extend our knowledge on the complexity of problems connecting to border regions all over the world. That achievement is the result of a hard and well-coordinated editorial work of Professor Doris WASTL-WALTER, University of Bern, Switzerland.



The book consists of 8 major parts and contains 32 chapters. The first part of the book (*Theorizing borders: conceptual aspects of border studies*) sets the theoretical framework of the topic providing an overview of the exciting and multidisciplinary field of border studies. The reader can get various approaches on the discipline and the phenomenon of border. Reading the first part makes us realize that it is very difficult to give a real “border” definition. (Is it a word, a belief or a simple mask?) The authors of that chapter also deal with the problems of the historical borders remained in the collective memory; the negative consequences of the political and social division represented by the former borders among peoples in the neighbouring countries and, last but not least, with the concept of the so-called ‘intersectionality’ which makes easier to understand the main differences between borderland areas as a methodological tool.

Part two (*Geopolitics: state, nation and power relations*) starts with a really interesting study in which the author (J. W. SCOTT) demonstrates how the collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 transformed the country borders in Central Europe. The further 4 chapters of that part of the book are case studies analyzing the situations along the most disputed borderlands of the world (e.g. the Turkish–Greek borderline in the heart of Cyprus; the post soviet boundaries reflecting new power relations between the newly independent Baltic States and Russia; the problems of the Arctic and the Antarctic border debates and finally the special situation along the borders between Thailand and Myanmar).

Initiating the synopsis of the third part (*Border enforcement in the 21st century*), the editor draws the readers' attention to the fact that a lot of border sections of the developed countries have been reinforced since 9/11/2001 and the free permeability of the international borders are suspended from time to time. So the question of security and homeland protection does have actuality and it may contribute to the militarization of the borders, especially in case of the United States. That tendency encourages e.g. the regime of North Korea and several further (autocratic regimes) in Latin America to maintain and enforce the recent form of governing. The authors of that part of the book demonstrate the detailed results of the investigations made on militarized border sections in various forms.

The chapters of part four (*Borders and territorial identities: the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion*) focuses on the minorities living in border regions. The questions of the territorial boundaries are explained through three special examples (the Basque Country inside Spain, the Province of Trentino–Alto Adige in North Italy and the Slovakian–Hungarian border region in South Slovakia) in a remarkable study (J. D. MARKUSSE). In the author's opinion, the internal territorial boundaries proved to be essential elements of minority rights and autonomy. In case of the Hungarian–Slovakian border region, the territorial incongruence between the common Euroregions and the homeland of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia is a major obstacle in weakening political tensions.

The content of the chapters in the fifth part of the book (*The role of borders in a seemingly borderless world*) concentrates on the consequences of cross-border economic regimes among the different social groups in border regions. Case studies of that section describe the prosperous European, Asian and US-Mexican border regions playing increasing role in the global economy. The German–Dutch border region, the Greater Pearl River Delta in South China (especially the neighbourhood of Hong Kong including Shenzhen) and Singapore are mentioned and analyzed in details.

Part six with its short title (*Crossing borders*) draws attention to international and domestic migrations always involving crossing borders all over the world. Readers can study three exciting chapters. The first one is about the everyday practices of border crossing along the North Korean state borders, the second one shows the characteristics of migration of Asian women and the third one demonstrates the confused border realities in Western Sahara. Last chapter is illustrated with two attractive maps of the Western Sahara region which is divided into two parts. The larger territory is held by the Moroccan government, the smaller one belongs to the Polisario Front and it is controlled by several nomad tribes by whom the whole region is considered to be borderless. (On the second map, it is difficult to recognize the main tribal travelling areas because of the missing legend.)

Three European studies are collected in the seventh part of the book (*Creating neighbourhoods*). The first chapter gives an overview on the different forms of interactions and co-operations along the Western and Eastern borders of Finland explaining their historical background. The most exciting segment of that chapter when the author (H. ESKELINEN) analyses the changes of the Finnish-Russian borderlands. The second study starts with

providing an outlook on general features of neighbourhood relationships in the Carpatho-Pannonian region. The authors (K. Kocsis and M. M. VÁRADY) emphasize the differences between the borderlands maintaining good relationships (Austrian–Hungarian) and the problematic ones (Slovakian–Hungarian, Romanian–Hungarian). The last mentioned relationships have been burdened with serious historical and ethnical conflicts for almost 100 years. It would be urgent to solve those long living problems to promote mutual relations in the fields of minority policy, cross border cultural and institutional connections and local spatial interactions. The third chapter focuses on the Lower Danube Euroregion covering borderlands of three countries (Romania, Ukraine and Moldova). Its conclusion is that the institutionalization of the Lower Danube Euroregion across the borders means an attempt to integrate the national borderlands into a supranational space.

The final part of the book is about environmental issues (*Nature and environment*). The authors of that section try to explain why it is important to maintain natural areas along the borders and to extend transboundary nature conservation areas (South African examples). They also reveals why it is necessary to delimit the maritime boundaries on the continental shelves.

The book starts with the lists of figures, maps and tables and contains the short scientific CV of the contributors. The chapters are followed by a detailed name and place index. (It's a pity for us that the name of Burgenland is missing from that list...)

Summing up the content of that encyclopedical work, I found the eight parts of the book highly informative and inspiring. I strongly recommend the book for all those academics and politicians of the governmental institutions who are interested in border studies and would like to know more about the complexity of that topic.

TIBOR TINER