Borders Under the Microscope: Methodologies in Border Studies

Early-Career Researchers in Border Studies (ECRBS) Conference · Université Grenoble Alpes · June 9–10, 2027

Call for Papers

Borders define the world we live in, from the macro level of continents and states to the micro level of community and self-identity (Sevastianov et al. 2015). Borders are an attempt to make sense of the world around us through complex political, social, economic, and environmental structures. Like maps, each border is made for a certain purpose, and what it includes is based on what is necessary to direct its users (McGlinchey et al. 2017). As globalization had reshaped every facet of day-to-day life, "it is probably not an exaggeration to argue that boundaries are in the epicenter of erosion of the modernistic world social and political order, and formation of the post-Modern order" (Sevastianov et al. 2015, 6).

Border Studies has evolved rapidly since its inaugural appearance in academia through Julian Minghi's 1963 article "Boundary Studies in Political Geography" (Fellner 2024). The field has moved steadily toward methodological interdisciplinarity and cross-case comparison: from the case studies of minority groups led by sociologists - blurring methodologic boundaries with anthropologists - in the 1960s, through the comparative turn of the 1990s, which guided research toward border theorization and cross-disciplinary perspectives, to the analysis of border territories (border towns, twin cities, cross-border regions) that have been grappling with antagonistic and yet simultaneous debordering and rebordering phenomena (Wilson and Donnan 2012; Herzog and Sohn 2019; Hamez 2013). More recently, digital methodologies such as GIS-based approaches have added to this methodological pluralism.

This rich landscape of methods does not simply produce different findings; it generates different questions, different objects of study, and different understandings of what a border is in the first place. As scholars have repeatedly pointed out, this pluralism also raises persistent challenges. Tony Payan (2014) described a "methodological problem of border theorizing" rooted in an excessive focus on single cases; Amelina et al. (2012) framed the critique of methodological nationalism as a questioning of the nation as a natural unit of analysis; Anssi Paasi (2005) emphasized how the "territorial trap" seeps into daily life through tangible and ideological means; and Aparna et al. (2020) drew attention to the ethics of everyday fieldwork practices — a "cacophony of academic backstages" in which methods are never settled.

In response, innovative methodologies and approaches have emerged that are reshaping border theorization. As such, the critical approach to borders has encouraged researchers to move away from the nation state's perspective and to prefer a "bottom-up approach" focused on individuals and local stakeholders, while at the same time envisioning the border no longer as a simple line, but as a multitude of processes (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012; Laine and Casaglia 2016). "Border as method" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) also offers an epistemic perspective that sharpens our perception of acts of inclusion and exclusion while attending to the heterogeneity of borders (Fellner and Kanesu 2022). The reflexive turn has prompted researchers to interrogate their own positionality, while approaches such as "borderities" (Amilhat-Szary and Giraut 2015) introduce new objects of study — numeric borders, emotions, and lived experience — and reshape methodological practice itself. These developments show that Border Studies is not solely concerned with macro-level analyses of international relations, but actively investigates the micro level as well, questioning the biases inherent in epistemic frameworks and research objects.

Purpose

This conference invites doctoral students and early-career researchers to put the methodologies of Border Studies under the microscope. We welcome contributions that examine, apply, critique, or combine methodological approaches to borders and border regions — from ethnography and discourse analysis, GIS and quantitative borderland mapping, praxeology and "border as method," to visual and aesthetic approaches, and the reflexive ethics of fieldwork with vulnerable populations (Wilson and Donnan 2012). We are particularly interested in how methodological choices shape not only findings, but the very questions researchers ask and the ways borders are understood.

Thematic Focus

We invite submissions addressing, but not limited to, the following thematic streams:

1. **Cultural and Aesthetic Methodologies** — visual, artistic, and narrative approaches to borders and border crossings
2. **Social and Political Methodologies** — border texturing, discourse analysis, and the study of border communities and power
3. **Digital and Technological Methodologies** — GIS, digital mapping, and computational approaches to borderlands
4. **Ecological and Hard Science Methodologies** — environmental, biological, and geophysical perspectives on borders
5. **Economic and Legal Methodologies** — cross-border economies, law, and governance analyzed through quantitative or doctrinal methods
6. **Ethical and Decolonial Methodologies** — positionality, reflexivity, and the politics of knowledge production in border research

Important Dates and Information

Conference Date	June 9–10, 2027
Venue	Université Grenoble Alpes, Grenoble, France (building and address to be announced)
Abstract Submission Opens	November 16, 2026
Abstract Submission Deadline	January 31, 2027
Notification of Decision	February 2027

Submission Guidelines

We invite the submission of abstracts. All submissions should include a research question, the methodology, and first (preliminary) results.

- **Abstracts:** 200–300 words
- **Language:** English
- **Short biography** including your thesis title, discipline, and research focus (for internal purposes): max. 200 words

Next steps:

- Submit your abstract by email: ECRBS@mailfence.com
- After submission, you will receive a confirmation email
- You will be informed of the status of your submission in January 2027

Scientific Committee

- Alexis Gumy, Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research
- Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary, Université Grenoble Alpes
- Astrid Fellner, Universität des Saarlandes, UniGR-Center for Border Studies
- Birte Nienaber, University of Luxembourg, UniGR-Center for Border Studies
- Birte Wassenberg, IEP de Strasbourg
- Christian Wille, University of Luxembourg, UniGR-Center for Border Studies
- Gregory Hamez, Université de Lorraine, UniGR-Center for Border Studies
- Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, University of Victoria
- Ulla Connor, Universität des Saarlandes, UniGR-Center for Border Studies
- Victor Konrad, Carleton University

About the Organizers

The Early-Career Researchers in Border Studies (ECRBS) is an emerging international consortium dedicated to amplifying the voices of doctoral students and early-career researchers in Border Studies. We provide a supportive space for emerging scholars to showcase their projects, exchange ideas, and connect with peers who understand the unique challenges of doctoral research in border studies.

Organizing Committee:

- Hanna Julia Johnston (Université Grenoble Alpes)
- Pierre-Alexandre Beylier (Université Grenoble Alpes)
- Sidonie Moreau (Université Grenoble Alpes)
- Etienne Perain (Université de Lorraine)
- Niklas Schulz (Université de Lorraine)
- Jerome Jakob (Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research)

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions regarding the submission process: ECRBS@mailfence.com

Closing Statement

Take this opportunity to become part of an engaged academic community and contribute to the discussion on the fascinating topic of methodologies in Border Studies. We look forward to receiving your ideas and research findings!

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