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## Abstract

*This paper is programmatic: it defines the concept of “phantom borders” and describes its heuristic potential. The proposed approach positions itself between structuralist methodologies that postulate stable social and cultural regional structures and deconstructive viewpoints that reject the former, while focusing on the discursive dimension of regions. The paper takes this tension as its point of departure. Viewed from a situational perspective, phantom borders are neither to be understood as immutable structures nor as purely discursive constructions, but rather as an outcome of the interaction between three interwoven levels, which are simultaneously: 1) imagined in mental maps and discourses, 2) experienced and perceived by the respective actors, and 3) shaped by everyday practices and continuously updated and implemented. Phantom borders are context sensitive. We argue that the topic of phantom borders is not only relevant for research on eastern Europe, but also for research in “new area studies” in general.*

"A creative metaphor," writes linguist and cultural theorist Peter Finke, "resembles an altered viewpoint on a complex landscape that you can never completely survey, but which, from all appearances, can be seen better, more completely, and with less distortion, from the perspective of the new viewpoint."<sup>1</sup> This paper proposes the concept of phantom borders as such a creative metaphor in order to give a new impetus to regional research, especially research on Eastern Europe. Our reflections were stimulated by the contemplation of maps that depict current election results, demographic data, or the routes of railway lines, and the striking similarities between regional peculiarities and long abolished border demarcations. Like phantoms, old territorial subdivisions seem to influence the current societies in East Central and Southeastern Europe. With the metaphor of “phantom borders”, we intend to approach the question about the historical conditionality of regional differences and idiosyncrasies from a new perspective.

The interest in the permanence of territorial systems is certainly not unique to the historiography on Eastern Europe. Throughout the world, state disintegration and unification processes have always caused people with different experiences to find themselves in new

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1 Peter Finke, "Misteln, Wälder und Frösche: Über Metaphern in der Wissenschaft," *Metaphorik.de* (2003/04): 55.

contexts, whereas their everyday behavior has been influenced over extended periods of time by the political, economic, legal, and cultural practices of the old context. East Central and Southeastern Europe, however, are regions where relatively recent new demarcation processes have often, and especially forcefully, shaped the political and social life.

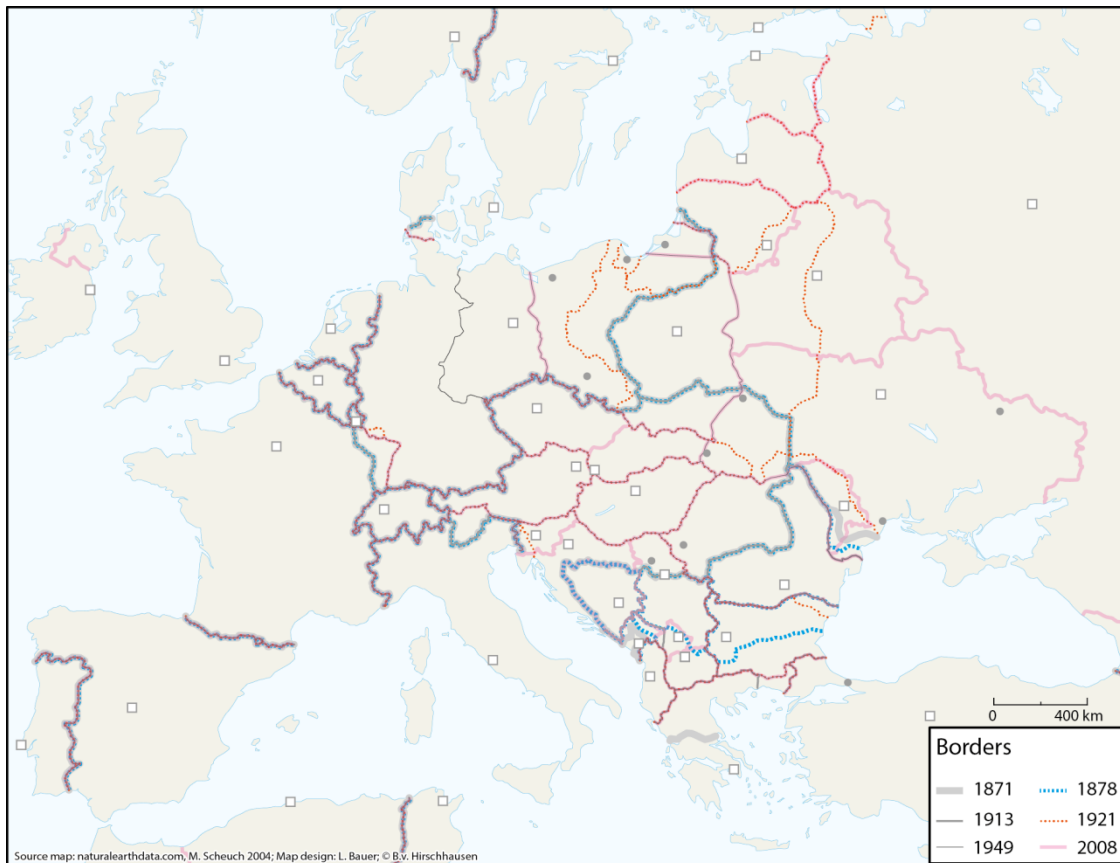


Figure 1: Palimpsest of boundaries in East Central Europe

Figure 1 shows a map of East Central Europe, indicating that people and regions in this area have been repeatedly affected by altered state borders since the late 18th century. The political map up to the present day seems to have been more flexible in this region than in Western Europe. This proved especially true once again at the watershed of 1989/91. Thus, in Eastern Europe, new political boundaries emerged from former state or regional borders that had since been abolished, especially following the Second World War. Nowhere else have so many new/old independent states been established in recent decades as in Central and Southeastern Europe: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo. The joint project "Phantom Borders in Eastern Europe", established in 2010, developed out of a mutual interest in the transformation processes in Central and Eastern Europe. In particular, the competence network of historians, geographers, and cultural scientists brings together research institutions in Germany and Central and Southeastern Europe<sup>2</sup> and had set itself the

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin, the Chair of South-East European History at the Humboldt-University in Berlin, the Centre for Modern Oriental Studies in Berlin and the Chair of East European History at the Martin Luther University in Halle-Wittenberg, several other research institutions have participated in the project in Germany (European University Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder, Siegen University, Centre for the History and Culture of East Central Europe (GWZO), Freie Universität Berlin, Center for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin); in Central and Southeastern Europe (Silesian Institute in Opole, University of Zagreb, University of Iași); and in other European countries (CERCEC/Paris, CETOBAC/Paris, University of Basel, Switzerland).

goal of reflecting on spaces and actors during this time period in a new way. Since then, research has been consistently carried out within the team in order to arrive at a joint understanding of the phantom borders metaphor. We deliberately chose an interdisciplinary and inductive research approach based on case studies because it permits us to scrutinize and test propositions associated with the phantom-borders concept using concrete empirical examples.<sup>3</sup> Researchers from the project have utilized the jointly developed concept of phantom borders situationally on local terrain and hence contributed significantly to its development.

### **Approaches: Concept and Heuristic Metaphor**

By phantom borders we understand earlier, mostly political demarcations or territorial divisions that structure space despite their previous institutional abolishment. In many cases, historical spaces or their fragmentation (for example, the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman Empire; the division of Germany, the partitions of Poland) continue to have an effect or even occasionally reemerge. This preliminary working definition allows us to examine concrete and recent examples of the appearance of historical phantom spaces. Despite spatial restructuring, they continue to shape social practices. Such residual phenomena are found, for example, in architecture and rural settlement patterns, and they can also be displayed in statistics or maps on voting behavior or other social practices. On the basis of these examples we will then construct inductively a more ambitious theoretical concept, that we will put forward in the last section of this paper.

The map of the presidential elections in Poland in 2015 is one example, as shown in Figure 2. This map of the second round of voting in the Polish presidential election of 2015, shows strong regional differences in the election results in eastern and western Poland, where the effects can be seen of both the border demarcations in the aftermath of First World War and the boundaries of the partition period from the end of the 18th century to 1918.<sup>4</sup>

However, our interest lies less with the borders themselves than the spaces that have been created by socialization processes within the former territories. Borders can disappear over a short time period without any leaving traces. Border controls, fences, walls, and border posts with barriers can accordingly be abolished with a single political decision, or they can lose their original meaning. At the same time, we notice when looking at the structures and institutions that have been created by political actors that these do not by any means change within short spans of time. The morphology of the infrastructure networks or the land administration put into effect by a specific agricultural policy, as well as legal cultures and traditional norms, have created territorial structures and thereby produced spaces whose impact can extend well beyond the existence of a state.

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<sup>3</sup> In the meantime the members of the research network have published first results in the series "Phantomgrenzen im östlichen Europa", see in particular Béatrice von Hirschhausen, Hannes Grandits, Claudia Kraft, Dietmar Müller, Thomas Serrier, *Phantomgrenzen - Räume und Akteure in der Zeit neu denken* (Göttingen, 2015); Rita Aldenhoff-Hübinger, Catherine Gousseff and Thomas Serrier (ed.), *Europa vertical. Zur Ost-West-Gliederung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2016); Michael G. Esch, Béatrice von Hirschhausen, *Wahrnehmen, Erfahren, Gestalten. Phantomgrenzen und soziale Raumproduktion* (Göttingen, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the election results in Poland, see the article by Tomasz Zarycki, "The electoral geography of Poland: Between stable spatial structures and their changing interpretations," *Erdkunde – Archive for scientific geography* 69 (2015) 2, ed. Sabine von Löwis: 125–137.

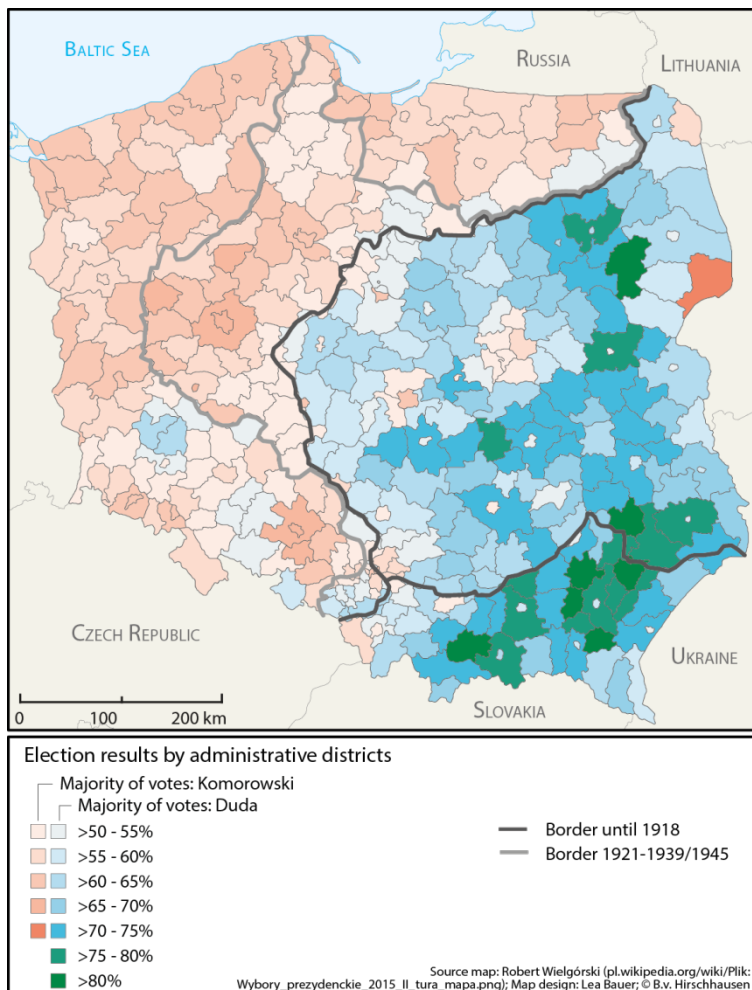


Figure 2: Electoral Map for the second round in the 2015 Polish presidential election

The term phantom borders is thus metaphorical: Just as so-called phantom pains are felt in the amputated part of a human body, phantom borders leave tangible traces of now defunct political entities and their external borders – sometimes fleetingly, sometimes over an extended period of time. The term phantom borders can be used as a heuristic tool to facilitate reflection on regional differences, which goes beyond the traditional narratives of regional history. In this way, we want to open up new perspectives on the construction and reproduction processes of regional differences. Our work is distinguished from historiography that attributes specific characteristics to a region, determines their borders to be "natural" and, consequently, contributes to a reification of regions as fixed cultural spaces. A study that foregrounds phantom borders and phantom spaces positions itself against linear perspectives that are solely focussed on the supposed region in question. In the study of phantom borders and phantom spaces, the primary question is how and why varied social, historical, and imagined heritages mutually influence each other and can combine to create something new, which, furthermore, persists over a more or less extended period of time. We underscore the ephemeral and non-deterministic nature of the examined regions – their "phantom-like" nature.

It is important to emphasize at this point that the phantom border term is not intended to rationalize imperial nostalgia through scholarly means or, for that matter, to justify irredentist goals. The concept of phantom borders should not be misunderstood as an attempt to (re)construct social or historical causalities in order to impart certain mental maps a physical or social basis. Rather, the study of phantom borders aims to arrive at a situational

understanding of how the characteristics of a region establish and reproduce themselves, the circumstances under which they survive specific historical periods, and why they disappear. In focusing on phantom borders and spaces it will be possible to present in detail the intrinsic value of historic areas, without however essentializing them or reifying their physical borders. Therefore, the concern is not with the description of allegedly immutable spaces. Our point of inception is instead the recognition that ideas of space are always relational, both in their delineatory character vis-à-vis other spaces as well as their own particular time period. We thus put a spotlight on the social and historical processes which are shaping space.

### The Scientific Challenge

In historiography, the perception of historically determined regional differences has been examined for many years from the perspective of the structuralist paradigm. Here, the primary interest is to trace in the *longue durée* the historical development of social, cultural, or economic structures that are considered specific to a region. The most important touchstone for this approach is the French *Annales* school of historical criticism. Fernand Braudel's book on the Mediterranean is considered a seminal work.<sup>5</sup> In it, he endeavors to write a "deep" history (*histoire profonde*) inspired by the social sciences. He stresses the importance of a number of structural factors, including: "geographical facts [...]; then cultural facts; ethnic facts; social-structure facts; economic facts, and, finally, political facts."<sup>6</sup> From this perspective, the regions come into existence as the result of a *longue durée* of structures that ensure their permanence.<sup>7</sup> These structures can be made tangible by writing a *géohistoire* for the specific region, which imparts a spatial dimension to the historical perspective.<sup>8</sup>

Many classic works on the historical regions of Eastern Europe belong to this theoretical framework. The work of the Polish-American medieval and modern historian Oskar Halecki is paradigmatic. He has traced up to the present the impact of the historic dividing line of the East-West schism between the Western Church of East-Central Europe and the Eastern Church of Eastern Europe. Also noteworthy is the work of the Hungarian medievalist Jenő Szűcs on the distinction between Western Europe, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe. As Fernand Braudel writes in the introduction to Szűcs' book, it shows how "societal structures [lie] behind the historical events that have a decisive impact over an extended period of time."<sup>9</sup>

This structuralist approach to explaining the emergence and continuation of regional entities has been questioned in recent years by two different camps. On the one hand, microhistorical approaches have denied the deterministic effect of structures and instead stressed the actors' scope for action and their ability to act. On the other hand, poststructuralist approaches, drawing on postcolonial studies, have criticized the Western European centered perspective of many classic works and taken issue with attempts to divide Europe into clearly defined regions. Both points of view will be elaborated in more detail below. This will make it possible to propose a way forward for area studies that seems to us more constructive and methodologically reflective.

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5 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (New York, 1972).

6 Idem., *Les ambitions de l'histoire*, ed. Roselyne de Ayala and Paule Braudel (Paris, 1997), 58.

7 Idem., "Histoire et Sciences Sociales: La longue durée," *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 13 (1958) 4: 725–753.

8 Matthias Middell, "Der Spatial Turn und das Interesse an der Globalisierung in der Geschichtswissenschaft," in *Spatial Turn. Das Raumparadigma in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften*, ed. Jörg Döring and Tristan Thielman (Bielefeld, 2008), 103–123.

9 Jenő Szűcs, *Die drei historischen Regionen Europas* (Frankfurt a. M., 1990); Oskar Halecki, *The limits and divisions of European history* (London / New York, 1950).

### *Critique of Determinism: Space-Time Constellations without Actors*

To begin with, we will highlight the structuralist approach and its critique from a microhistorical perspective. Braudel asserts that the actors are impacted by the existing (geographical) structures and, as a consequence, are limited in their ability to act. At the same time, he rejects a purely deterministic view and instead seeks to identify a tradeoff in the field of tension between physical space and social existence.<sup>10</sup> But how can this balancing act between structure and action be productively dealt with in research practice? How can the continuing influence of structural factors be explained and conceptualized without resorting to (more or less hidden) deterministic explanations? Finally, how can such phenomena be described without essentializing them? The pitfalls of such a line of questioning will be demonstrated below on the basis of two examples.

A work that is frequently cited in connection with the persistence of a historical heritage is Robert D. Putnam's "Making Democracy Work – Civic Traditions in Modern Italy" from 1994.<sup>11</sup> The author compares the administrative practices and the institutional capacity of regional administrations in Northern and Southern Italy, which were reorganized in the 1970s. Putnam paints the picture of a divided Italy. The north is represented as a region with efficient bureaucracies and active civic communities, whose social relationships are based on trust, reciprocity, and the equal treatment of citizens. By contrast, the south of the country is purportedly a region with weak civil societies, where good relations with key players in the bureaucratic system are of special importance and clientelism is widespread. Putnam then establishes a connection between the map of civiness of the current local communities and the map of the political regimes in the Middle Ages to explain the underlying cause for these differences. The upshot of his analysis is that there is historical evidence for a linear connection between the political geography of Italy in the 14th century and that of the active civil societies in the 1970s and 1980s. He establishes a causality from a presumed homology – a kind of evolutionarily determined correspondence between the two political configurations. It thus appears as though one can recognize the phantom of the phenomenon represented by the map from the 14th century in the map of the structures of the civil societies from the end of the 20th century.<sup>12</sup>

Emmanuel Todd follows a similar line of reasoning in his work "L'invention de l'Europe."<sup>13</sup> Like Putnam, Todd uses maps and spatial representations to construct a homology between anthropological, seminal "*ur*-structures" and the political and social developments in Western Europe. He derives the latent ideological predispositions of societies from different agricultural systems, religious conditions and, most of all, family structures. Todd subsequently sees the disparate developmental paths of European regions rooted in areas as diverse as the spread of Protestantism, literacy in modernity, secularization, birth control from the 18th century, industrialization, and the emergence of labor movements in 19th century. In Todd's theory, especially family models have provided a stable, invisible and intrinsic structure, which over the centuries has determined the relationship of humans to authority, equality, religion, politics and, not least, their basic socioeconomic attitudes.

The works of Robert Putnam and Emmanuel Todd are exemplary in their explanation of the continuance of regional differences. They rely on an essentialization of certain factors – family structures in Todd; political structures from the 14th century in Putnam – as the seminal moment, or *ur*-moment, of difference. These structures are conceived as autonomous

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10 See Braudel, *Les ambitions de l'histoire*, 84–86.

11 Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Nanetti, *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy* (Princeton/Chichester, 1994).

12 See Putnam et al., *Making democracy work*, 133.

13 Emmanuel Todd, *L'invention de l'Europe* (Paris, 1990).

components that arise at a particular time in history and exert influence from that point forward. The impact of the respective *ur*-moment in history, to which Putnam and Todd attribute the different regional developments, seems to suggest that these formative *ur*-structures are neither significantly affected by historical events and caesurae nor by the decisions of actors. Understandably, Putnam's and Todd's works have both triggered fierce criticism.<sup>14</sup> They are presented here as examples of consistently fleshed out theoretical approaches which give primacy to structures and thus marginalize the role of the actors. Such viewpoints have been increasingly called into question by a range of disciplines since the 1980s. A series of important debates ensued such as the dispute between *Alltagsgeschichte* and social history in Germany,<sup>15</sup> or the controversies that were ignited in Italy by *microstoria*<sup>16</sup> or in France by the *tournant critique* of the Annales school.<sup>17</sup> A similar development can be observed in historical demography.<sup>18</sup> All these debates were driven by the search for a new paradigm that puts the actors at the center, contextualizes their actions, and offers explanations that address the sequence and the internal dynamics of the actions themselves. Hence, the respective situational logic is placed in the foreground and more attention is paid to the agency of the subjects.<sup>19</sup>

The interest for historical agency rose also in the field of area studies, albeit with a certain time lag that becomes understandable when one takes into account the structuralist imprint that had been inherent in this discipline since its formation. But scholars embraced the challenge to remain areas specialist and at the same time to combine their regional expertise with innovative research perspectives. Especially since the year 2000 they creatively had adapted the spatial turn to their methodological repertoire, not least in order to continue the scientification of Eastern European area studies. This body of research elucidates how the integration of spatiality into historical research can inform a historiography that is sensitive to the local agency without forgetting the persistence of mental maps. Studies focusing on subnational spatial units as regions or cities proved to be particularly productive.<sup>20</sup>

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- 14 For a critique of Robert Putnam, see Margaret Levi, "Social and Unsocial Capital: A Review Essay of Robert Putnam's Making Democracy Work," *Politics & Society* 24 (1996) 1: 45–55; Sidney Tarrow, "Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time: A Critical Reflection on Robert Putnam's Making Democracy Work," *The American Political Science Review* 90 (1996) 2: 389–397; Hervé Rayner, "Le point de vue aérien de Robert Putnam. À propos de Making Democracy Work," *Politix* 11 (1998) 42: 179–204. For a critique of Emmanuel Todd, see Maria Todorova, *Balkan Family Structure and the European Pattern: Demographic Developments in Ottoman Bulgaria* (Budapest, 2006): 160–161.
- 15 Alf Lüdtke, *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt a. M./New York, 1989); Winfried Schulze, ed., *Sozialgeschichte, Alltagsgeschichte, Mikro-Historie: Eine Diskussion* (Göttingen, 1994).
- 16 Carlo Ginzburg, "Microstoria, due o tre cose che so di lei," *Quaderni Storici* 86 (1994): 511–539; Jacques Revel, *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris, 1996).
- 17 Collectif, "Histoire et sciences sociales. Un tournant critique?," *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 43 (1988) 2: 291–293; Bernard Lepetit, ed., *Les Formes de l'expérience: Une autre histoire sociale* (Paris, 1995); Idem., "L'histoire prend-elle les acteurs au sérieux," *EspaceTemps* (1995) 59–61: 112–122.
- 18 Pier Paolo Viazzo and Katherine A. Lynch, "Anthropology, Family History, and the Concept of Strategy," *International Review of Social History* 47 (2002): 423–452; Theo Engelen and Arthur P. Wolf, *Marriage and the Family in Eurasia: Perspectives on the Hajnal Hypothesis* (Amsterdam, 2005); Sebastian Klüsener and Mikołaj Szoltysek and Joshua R. Goldstein, "Towards an integrated understanding of demographic change and its spatio-temporal dimensions: concepts, data needs, and example case studies," *Die Erde* 143 (2012) 1–2: 75–105.
- 19 Étienne François, *Die unsichtbare Grenze: Protestanten und Katholiken in Augsburg 1648-1806* (Sigmaringen, 1991); John W. Cole and Eric R. Wolf, *The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley* (New York, 1974); Christophe Duhamelle, *La Frontière au village: Une identité catholique allemande au temps des lumières* (Paris, 2010); Christophe Duhamelle, "Raum, Grenzerfahrung und konfessionelle Identität im Heiligen Römischen Reich im Barockzeitalter," in *Die Erschließung des Raumes. Konstruktion, Imagination und Darstellung von Räumen und Grenzen im Barockzeitalter*, ed. Karin Friedrich (Wiesbaden, 2014), 23–45.
- 20 For approaches that focus on the historical impact of locality or regionality see for instance Philipp Ther, Holm Sundhaussen eds. *Regionale Bewegungen und Regionalismen in europäischen Zwischenräumen seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Marburg/L., 2003), Beth Mitchneck, "Geography Matters: Discerning the Importance of Local Context", in *Slavic Review* 63 (2005) 3: 491–516, Christophe Duhamelle, Andreas Kossert, Bernhard Struck eds. *Grenzzräume. Ein europäischer Vergleich vom 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/M., New York, 2007), Susan Smith-Peter, *Imagining*



Interestingly enough also studies that are concerned with a “classical” subject in Eastern European studies, namely nationalism, increasingly have taken into account the relevance of spatial constructions for processes of nationalization in its different appearances.<sup>21</sup> Last but not least recent historiography has reflected about the practices (both cognitive as infrastructural) to “master” space in an original way.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Space-Power-Knowledge Constellations: The Post-Structuralist Criticism*

A second form of critique of the seemingly long-term persistence of historical regions or cultural areas pertains to research in which spatial concepts are discursively produced and considered as part of a specific order of knowledge. Following postcolonial studies, representatives of this post-structuralist approach criticize the constructed nature of the knowledge of specific regions and expose its role in the self-legitimation of the West. Since the 1990s, several studies have identified how Europe utilizes the "other" from its eastern and south peripheries in order to describe itself as "civilization."<sup>23</sup> The respective position of Eastern Europe, East-Central Europe, and Southeastern Europe remains ambiguous, however, as these are to some extent semi-peripheries, i.e. regions that – though marginalized and limited – can be counted as belonging to the (Western) European/North Atlantic center or very strongly defined in relation to this center. This relationality is highly important for the localization of regions in space and time: Eastern Europe is not essentially different, but can (and must) assimilate to enjoy the badge of Europeanness. As a result, the topos of backwardness is formalized for the description of the semi-periphery.

The scientific disciplines that view themselves as "general" reduce the "peripheries" to "matters of empirical research that fleshes out a theoretical skeleton which is substantially 'Europe.'"<sup>24</sup> This highlights, on the one hand, the precarious relationship of area studies to the respective "primary" disciplines. On the other hand, this viewpoint implies that the peripheries can only be thought of in a mode "homogenizing transition narratives" that have to emulate a predefined ideal from the center.<sup>25</sup> In this critical perspective, Eastern Europe is entirely comparable to the "actual" regions under investigation in postcolonial studies, for it, too, is contemplated in its dependency to a hegemonic Europe. This dependency is also

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*Russian Regions: Civil Society and Subnational Identity in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). And also cities attracted the attention of researchers as sites of historical agency, just to name a few of them: Felix Ackermann, *Palimpsest Grodno. Nationalisierung, Nivellierung und Sowjetisierung einer mitteleuropäischen Stadt* (Wiesbaden 2010), Gregor Thum, *How Breslau became Wrocław During the Century of Expulsions* (Princeton University Press, 2011), Christoph Mick, *Lemberg - Lwów - L'viv, 1914 - 1947: Violence and Ethnicity in a Contested City* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Jeremy King, *Jeremy, Budweisers into Czechs and Germans. A local history of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton, 2002), Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: activists on the language frontier of imperial Austria* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), Marius Turda, Paul Weindling, Paul eds., *Blood and Homeland: eugenics and racial nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940* (Budapest, 2007), Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: national indifference and the battle for children in the Bohemian lands 1900-1948* (Ithaca, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Steven Seegel, *Mapping Europe's Borderlands: Russian cartography in the age of empire*, (Chicago, Ill., 2012), Friederike Kond-Kovács, *Written Here, Published There: How Underground Literature Crossed the Iron Curtain* (New York, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), Alexander Badenoch, Andreas Fickers, Christian Henrich-Franke eds., *Airy curtains in the European ether. Broadcasting and the Cold War* (Baden-Baden, 2013), Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, *Russlands Fahrt in die Moderne: Mobilität und sozialer Raum im Eisenbahnzeitalter* (Stuttgart 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The map of civilization on the mind of the enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford, 1997); Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the other: The »East« in European identity formation* (Manchester, 1999); see also Karl Kaser and Dagmar Gramshammer-Hohl and Robert Pichler, ed., *Europa und die Grenzen im Kopf*, vol. 11 of *Wieser Enzyklopädie des europäischen Ostens* (Klagenfurt, 2003); Ezequiel Adamovsky, "Euro-Orientalism and the Making of the Concept of Eastern Europe in France, 1810-1880," *The Journal of Modern History* 77 (2005) 3: 591-628; Gunther Gebhard and Oliver Geisler and Steffen Schröter, ed., *Das Prinzip "Osten": Geschichte und Gegenwart eines symbolischen Raums* (Bielefeld, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Idem, 32.

reflected in the temporalizing of the relevant descriptive and analytical concepts, as, for instance, in the terms "backwardness," "transformation," and "return to Europe." Eastern European actors have been and continue to be repeatedly confronted with this absorption by means of allegedly "universal" developmental paths. Along with this teleological perspective, there is a risk of essentializing Eastern Europe and insisting on its fundamental cultural "otherness".

Regarding Southeastern Europe and the Balkans, the German historian Holm Sundhaussen and the Bulgarian-American historian Maria Todorova therefore discussed whether supporting regional research on spatial concepts can be justified.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, the debate could not be resolved: Although no historical regions are in fact stable across time and space, the success of such spatial constructs has, at least in part, an empirical basis. It is useful here to refer back to postcolonial studies. After all, the "post" in postcolonial does not imply a mere temporal "later", but rather always directs the scholarly focus to the continued operation of the old in the new.<sup>27</sup> We thus understand postcolonial studies not only as an instrumentarium for deconstructing the discursive constitution of spaces, but also as a means of illuminating the interconnectedness of spatial and temporal concepts.

Besides that we had to be aware of the fact that although historians or geographers might successfully deconstruct the conception of nations or regions, the historical and current actors themselves still refer in their everyday practices to seemingly homogenous social collectivities or spaces. Thus we have to take into account mental maps that are powerful, not only at the level of discourse but also when it comes to everyday practices.

In the sections that follow, we would like to situate our concept of phantom borders within the relevant epistemological theoretical debates. We then respond to the aporia that results from the seeming incompatibility of space- and structure-related but also discourse-historical approaches with a research perspective that takes up these approaches anew and creatively combines them.

### **On the Innovative Potential of the Phantom-Borders Concept: Beyond Determinism and Deconstructionism**

With the concept of phantom borders in Eastern Europe, we want to extend the discussions on the ongoing impact of history in space with a proposal that is both actor-centered and constructivist in nature. Accordingly, constructivist perspectives are coupled with an actor- or process-related viewpoint. At the same time, we by no means want to dismiss the historical potency of spatial references. If it is true that historical regions constituted by an array of factors have been able to endure epochal watersheds – not as a constant essence, but as a social practice and thus even as a useful heuristical research perspective – then such phenomena of persistence must themselves be addressed. Below, we will describe in more detail how we propose to understand the concept of phantom borders in this context.

In our research approach, we view with skepticism spatially construed determinisms à la Putnam or Todd, which perpetuate spaces or regional borders by means of selected intrinsic

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26 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*; Holm Sundhaussen, "Europa balcanica: Der Balkan als historischer Raum Europas," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 25 (1999) 4: 626–653; Maria Todorova, "Der Balkan als Analysekategorie: Grenzen, Raum, Zeit," *idem.* 28 (2002) 3: 470–492; Holm Sundhaussen, "Der Balkan: Ein Plädoyer für Differenz," *idem.* 29 (2003) 4: 608–624.

27 David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Towards a Global Postcolonial Critique," in *Postcolonialism: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair (New Brunswick, 2005), 514–538; Alison Stenning and Kathrin Hörschelmann, "History, Geography and Difference in the Post-socialist World: Or, Do We Still Need Post-Socialism?," *Antipode* 40 (2008) 2: 312–335; Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, "Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2009) 1: 6–31.

social factors. At the same time, we argue against retreating to a deconstructivist postulate that views any analytical commitment (not least one regarding a region and its borders) as ultimately only being produced through language and discourse. In our view, the concept of phantom borders is located outside of these interpretative approaches, which remain highly influential in academic circles, both explicitly and implicitly. The concept not only makes it possible to place "processes of persistence" at the center of analysis, but it finally seems to be able to explain the "re-emergence" of (phantom) borders or their transformation, as well as the persistence of historical (or new) spatial concepts and practices. The phantom-borders concept is thus intimately connected to a systematic view of the social processuality of spatiality (and its boundaries).

We assume that ideas of regional differences are manifest at various levels, interrelated, and able to mutually reinforce or weaken each other. We always understand phantom borders and spaces as simultaneously imagined (e.g. produced and passed on discursively), experienced (e.g. perceived as experience and updated in practice by the actors and scientific observers) and designed (e.g. by territorialization processes). Thus, the interaction between spatial imagination, spatial experience, and spatial design is fundamental to the phantom-borders concept.

The three levels of the phantom-borders concept are based on the triad of space proposed by Henri Lefebvre in his 1974 published work "La production de l'espace."<sup>28</sup> Lefebvre comprehends space as a unity that is produced by lived space (*espace vécu*), perceived space (*espace perçu*), and conceived space (*espace conçu*).

- *Espace vécu* is defined as "lived space mediated by images and symbols."<sup>29</sup> It is the focus of the research of ethnologists, anthropologists, and psychoanalysts. That's what he calls "space of representations", and what we call the « the imagination of space ».

- *Espace perçu*, e.g. perceived space, refers to spatial practice.<sup>30</sup> Like all other social practices, spatial practice is "lived" before it is conceived and theorized.<sup>31</sup> Lefebvre ascribes to the actors and groups of actors both "a certain competence as well as a particular performance."<sup>32</sup> They are competent in their praxis of space, which is available to them as a "totality" and which they inhabit and design in a variety of ways. This means that the actors are performative by means of their action to the extent that they actively (co)produce space. It corresponds to what we call "spatial experience", made up of physical, social, and behavioral structures; it is incorporated in formal and informal institutions, in conscious and unconscious practices.

- For Lefebvre, the third aspect of the production of space is conceived space (*espace conçu*). It is "the space of the scientists, the interior designers, the urbanists, the technocrats, who "slice it up" and "put it together" again."<sup>33</sup> Conceived space can also be described as territorialities that are shaped by power and knowledge. It corresponds partially to what we call the "design" or the "shaping of space".

However, we do not make the distinction that H. Lefebvre introduces between the different social classes and their various registers of action; we do not separate a lived space by the dominated, and a conceived space by the dominant people. For us, all the levels of society « imagine » and « design » or « shape » the space.

In the following, these interwoven levels of spatiality of the phantom-borders concept will be discussed in detail. By way of example, we will center on the period of upheaval following

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28 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1994).

29 Idem., 39.

30 Idem., 38.

31 Idem., 34.

32 Idem., 33.

33 Idem., 38.

1989. For contemporary East Central and Southeastern Europe, this was the most recent period of structuring spatiality and its (in many cases new) borders and is thus especially relevant.

### *The Imagination of Space*

As already discussed, symbolic borders contribute to the mental construction processes of geographical imaginations, such as elaborated by Derek Gregory.<sup>34</sup> Symbolic borders create and "dramatize"<sup>35</sup> the distance and difference between what they define and what they exclude. Maria Todorova, for instance, shows how historical boundaries of the Ottoman Empire since the 19th century have served to delimit and characterize the so-called "Balkan" region. After the segmentation of the Balkans into nation states, the former boundary lines defined a space of "Ottoman heritage" which persisted in the representations of the West as a stigma. They became "rigid and unalterable civilizational fault lines."<sup>36</sup> It is possible to cite numerous examples in which a long obsolete political boundary is represented in the dominant discourse as a civilizing frontier. Frequently, phantom borders are closely linked to the interests of the powerful. This also applies to ideas about Europe: Throughout history, borders have been repeatedly exploited to separate civilization from barbarism, modernity from backwardness, wealth from poverty. But geographical imaginations are not to be defined as just a product of the ruling (knowledge) elites and their competence, as for instance the Eastern or Southeastern European peripheries. They also refer to the ability of regional actors to establish a European spatial arrangement from below.

Drawing on Gregory's concept of geographical imaginations, we aim to pluralize the mental maps and to integrate into the analysis the social, cultural, and regional diversity within the societies under consideration. In such diversity, phantom borders appear when difference is simultaneously communicated spatially and historically – that is, when one's counterpart seems to be an "other" because his or her residence formerly belonged to another state-administrative entity. Therefore we pay particular attention to the network of the phantom borders which run through and structure the representations of space, and to the way in which they delineate the various collective ideas and, if applicable, practices.

National master narratives have systematically drawn from the always present vast repertoire of past borders to construct identity, legitimize or invalidate new boundary lines, or to posit superiority. Likewise, communities such as regional, linguistic or religious minorities, can use images and symbols of phantom borders to locate themselves in space, and to give their experience, situation, practices, or recognition claims meaning and congruity. These "familiar" phantom borders are easily taken for granted in their connection to a naturally appearing spatiality and historicity, and this obviousness can be fed by manifold narratives. They thus make it possible to locate identities to the extent that they structure the space by means of seemingly self-evident boundaries. In other words: They are not only imposed discursively, but also (re)produced in practices "from below."

Here, our definition of imagined space differs from the discursive perspective of postcolonial studies. Phantom borders are not exclusively political or intellectual contrivances, deliberately created for ideological purposes to serve identity or hegemonic constructs. The concept of phantom borders obtains its specific heuristic character when it is also considered in linguistic practice and in terms of its implicit uses by local actors. Narratives of regional and local

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34 Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

35 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), 55.

36 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*; Idem., *Balkan als Analysekatgorie*.

particularity are anchored in representations, in which language or stereotypes are passed on (often without reflection). On the example of the continued existence of the inner-German border in the social practices in the reunified Federal Republic of Germany, Antje Schlottmann has convincingly shown how much the social conditioning of the division is reflected in language and reproduced by it.<sup>37</sup> The linguistic use of spatial concepts for referring to "here" and "over there" is sufficient for lending substance to two region-based social realities – the West and the East – which are differently perceived and practiced. This geographical conception permeates the everyday language outside of any discursive intention and helps to create a geographical reality that is experienced as self-evident. From this perspective, the geographical imaginations appear intertwined with collective and individual experiences, and the phantom borders are inscribed into the density of practices without ideological charge. Unlike studies on mental mapping, which primarily focus on the analysis of hegemonic discourses, we understand the production and reproduction of geographical imaginations as a full social and societal process which can occur in their own specific ways at different levels. It is important to emphasize that such phantom borders are changeable. In the geographical imaginations, phantom borders behave in the same way as supposedly "natural" borders that have been fixed by traditional geography to organize the world. Hans-Dietrich Schultz<sup>38</sup> provides a particularly enlightening analysis in this context, observing that borders function "as a spatial dumping ground [räumliche Sinndeponie] of meaning for social processes." They exist in the space of communication. A decisive political upheaval that casts doubt on the given social order and alters the communication spaces can be enough to cause them to disappear from geographical conceptions and the social memory or, conversely, to prompt them to come into existence and impart meaning to lived experience.

The example of the post-socialist period illustrates this: Until the fall of the Iron Curtain, the socialist countries of the European "East" were very closely aligned for decades in a variety of ways, including politically, economically, militarily and culturally, and were often imagined both internally and externally to be a (socialist-systemic) unity. In retrospect, however, the spectacular dynamics set into motion after 1989 in the wake of the political upheaval put these notions of a shared socialist identity of the societies of East Central and Southeastern Europe severely into question. It is striking that in the design and justification of the new spatial positionings, the idea of a "return" to a reality before the socialist takeover played an important role in almost all the countries. For the Czechoslovak context, Vaclav Havel coined the notion of a "return to Europe," which also had passionate advocates in various elaborations in most other former socialist countries. Here, the harkening back to a "fairer" or even (nationally) "freer" situation in the past mostly became part of the incipient historicist sense-making process aimed at (re)creating an old/new order after the end of socialism.

The slogan of a wishful and necessary "return to Europe" of what Milan Kundera in his famous article of 1984 once had described as a "kidnapped" part of the West, that means "Central Europe", became a characteristic, if scientifically undoubtedly problematic, hallmark of the beginning of the 1990s, after the Iron Curtain had fallen. Considering what it could possibly imply at a regional level, no regions show better the link between the truly contemporary purposes of spatial imagination on one hand, and the given repertoire defined by historical experiences on the other, than the western and northern parts of postwar Poland and the Czech lands. Here the nearness to one of the major countries of Western Europe, Germany,

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37 Antje Schlottmann, *RaumSprache: Ost-West-Differenzen in der Berichterstattung zur deutschen Einheit: Eine sozialgeographische Theorie* (Stuttgart, 2005).

38 Hans-Dietrich Schultz, "'Natürliche Grenzen' als politisches Programm," in vol. 1 of *Grenzenlose Gesellschaft?*, ed. Claudia Honegger and Stefan Hradil and Franz Traxler (Opladen, 1999), 328–343.

largely contributed to a new spatial design that decidedly stressed out the transnational heritage at a regional scale in a period characterized by an increased tourism and the development of cultural and economic exchanges. The “open regionalism” that was advocated by the historian Robert Traba and the writer Kazimierz Brakoniecki, the founders of the Cultural Association Borussia in Olsztyn in the former Eastern Prussia in 1990, became a highly addressed category. Be it in Gdańsk, Szczecin, Wrocław or Gorzów Wielkopolski, cultural initiatives taken either by the officials or other local actors highlighted the reciprocal links between a spatial imagination, fed with history, and the material (re)shaping of regional and local identities through new cultural infrastructures dedicated to special chapters of history. Never would the “weight” of the past completely determine the “choices” of the pasts, to quote the French sociologist Marie-Claire Lavabre<sup>39</sup>. The new and partly dramatically discussed museum landscape that arose in Gdańsk since 1990 – from the tiny GGGG gallery (Gdańska Galeria Güntera Grassa) recalling the life and literary work of the most famous son of the “Free City of Danzig”, born in 1927, to the more recent and ambitious Museum of WWII gives only one good example of a profound transformation.

All these spaces thus cannot be seen as “uniform” or “naturally” oriented towards a particular destination, a general aspect that can be seen in any of the studied societies. The debates over historical spaces were part of a political competition in which imagination played an important role in the supposed link to the West, between regional identities and the capitals, but also between different regions.

The respective versions had advocates and opponents, and though “discursive hardenings” could be observed in the public discourse regarding certain historical spatial relationships, they nevertheless must be examined in all their variety.<sup>40</sup>

The recourse to pre-socialist space was partially associated with ideas about the expansion of the state or the nation, which was considered legitimate. Thus it became popular again in Hungary to refer back to the “historical Kingdom of Hungary” and the borders of Hungary before the “catastrophe of Trianon” i.e. before the peace treaties after the First World War.<sup>41</sup> The recourse to pre-socialist governmental spaces, which anyone was now free to do in a democratizing public, inflamed controversies – partly in relation to the spatial design of the states.

In the course of the new/old demarcations in democratizing societies of Central and Southeastern Europe post-1989, regional differences and economic developmental disparities were also topics of political polemics and public discussions. Historical or cultural reasons were often cited as justifications for the regional differences. Such a conflict can be observed in the early 1990s in the case of Slovakia, for instance. Here, the deteriorating economic situation of Slovak regions within the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (ČSFR), renamed in 1990 from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR), was vociferously lamented by large parts of the Slovak elite.<sup>42</sup> But in many other countries as well internal borders, which were often former political boundaries, were the subject of demarcation discourses.

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<sup>39</sup> Marie-Claire Lavabre, *Le fil rouge. Sociologie de la mémoire communiste* (Paris, 1994), 31.

<sup>40</sup> On the different discourses and their emotionalization, see e.g. Maruška Svašek, *Postsocialism: Politics and Emotions in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York/Oxford, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Wolfgang Aschauer, “Ceci n'est pas la Hongrie - Grenzen in Realität und Imagination am Beispiel Ungarns,” (paper presented at the symposium of the scientific committee of the Southeast Europe Association on the topic “Südosteuropa und die alten/neuen Grenzen. Ein analytischer Blick zurück im Jahr 25 nach der Wende,” Berlin, February 28, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Gil Eyal, *The Origins of Postcommunist Elites: From Prague Spring to the Breakup of Czechoslovakia* (Minneapolis/London, 2003).

### *Spatial Experience*

Rather than limiting our remarks to discursively produced or imagined space, in the following we also want to reflect more systematically and in greater detail on the aspects of continuity and change in the (historic) "experience" of space.

Following Reinhart Koselleck, we understand the level of experience as simultaneously individual and intersubjective. At the level of the individual, the concern is with a past which has been made present and mobilized in action – with learned and conscious knowledge, but also conventions that have passed into everyday practices. On the inter-subjective level, experience is stored in both formal and informal control systems, which are established and gradually change over time across multiple generations. This experience can be deliberately visualized and the subject of an official commemorative politics, but also enters unconsciously into a habitus, routine, and social morphology. In the words of Reinhart Koselleck, "Experience is present past, whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered. Within experience a rational reworking is included, together with unconscious modes of conduct which do not have to be present in awareness. There is also an element of alien experience contained and preserved in experience, conveyed by generations or institutions."<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, experience is not inherently stable or a constant fact, but is repeatedly re-measured and re-defined. Different experiences can overlap and influence each other. What is more: New hopes, disappointments, or expectations shape the experiences of actors retroactively. The temporal structure of experience thus always also includes a reverse-acting expectancy. The changing memory of the socialist experience is a good example of this: While in the early 1990s, during the transformation from a planned to a market economy, it was marked by recollections of scarcity and queues, over the last twenty years this same memory has been profoundly altered by the later experience of unemployment. Now, it is often the memory of security and occupational predictability which predominates for many of the "losers" of the post-socialist transformation.<sup>44</sup> This example illustrates how social experiences and everyday spatial relationships impact each other: They can be "meaningfully" reproduced over time and be subject to imperceptible change, but also transformed within a very short period of time following historic upheavals.

Old/new "experiences" thus can also affect intra-societal meanings of spaces and borders – and can also undergo change in certain points in time, when for instance the fading of established meanings goes hand in hand with a "remembrance" of spatial experiences or configurations that had been relevant further in the past. The "Macedonian" dynamics in the transition after the end of socialism shall help to illustrate this.

The so-called "Macedonian question" has a longer history reaching back to the Ottoman Empire, to which the respective areas and localities belonged for more than a half millennium. As an object of irredentist claims of several nation states that came into being in the course of the 19th century, it also played a role in Great Power competition at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century (also one of the most important front-lines of World War I went through these territories). What was called Macedonia became territorially divided in

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43 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004), 259.

44 Chris Hann and "Property Relations" Group, *The Postsocialist Agrarian Question: Property Relations and the Rural Question* (Münster, 2003); Hannes Siegrist and Dietmar Müller, ed., *Property in East Central Europe: Notions, Institutions and Practices of Landownership in the Twentieth Century* (New York / Oxford, 2015); Ulf Brunnbauer and Stefan Troebst, ed., *Zwischen Amnesie und Nostalgie: Die Erinnerung an den Kommunismus in Südosteuropa* (Wien / Köln / Weimar, 2007); Chris Hann, *Not the Horse We Wanted: Postsocialism, Neoliberalism and Eurasia* (Münster, 2006); Mitja Velikonja, *Titostalgija: študija nostalgije po Josipu Brozu* (Ljubljana, 2008).

1912/13 and then again in 1918. New borders were drawn and regions were allocated to Serbia/Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece and partly to the newly established Albanian state.

Towards the end of WW II within the emerging socialist Yugoslav state a "Socialist Republic of Macedonia" was established. The decades of Yugoslav socialism, which became increasingly peculiar in the course of the development of "self-management socialism", shaped the societal experiences of several generations in this first separate modern Macedonian "statehood" realized within Yugoslavia. This variant of socialism differed pronouncedly from the one in the adjacent regions in neighboring socialist Albania and Bulgaria. Compared with the Hoxhaist system in Albania (which was initially oriented toward the USSR, then communist China, and finally took on a posture of self-imposed isolation) or Bulgarian socialism (which was heavily tilted toward the Soviet Union), the features of this Yugoslav variant of socialism were unique. There were also stark contrasts with its southern neighbor Greece, which eventually established a Western oriented and anti-communist social system after the WWII and the Greek Civil War from 1946-1949.

All of this shaped the societal as well as the spatial routines of the inhabitants inside of Yugoslav Macedonia firmly. The reestablished borders soon appeared permanent, as the Cold War order materialized and was regarded as definitive. And the experience of a specific, local variant of a Macedonian-Yugoslav social development made the experience of a Macedonian self-management order a characteristic feature of social life, and the existing border increasingly meaningful to neighboring states and regions.<sup>45</sup>

In the beginning of the 1990s both should enter into an unforeseen and dramatic change. Yugoslav self-management socialism collapsed (as did the socialist orders in Albania and Bulgaria). At the same time the Cold War order disintegrated more and more. With regard to the "Former Yugoslav Republic Macedonia" (which became an independent state under this name in the course of the war-torn dissolution of Yugoslavia) it's formerly self-evident borders lost their significance. In this turbulent period of upheaval, instead of the earlier "differing" political systems and social experiences, there was a common, cross-border experience of a more-or-less pronounced collapse of the state-corporatist controlled economy and a massive de-industrialization in the "post-socialist" settings of Yugoslavia/Macedonia, Bulgaria and Albania. The post-socialist transformation became a dominant experience for large sections of the societies that went beyond all previous borders. The introduction of capitalist economy also "harmonized" the post-socialist lands with those in Greece, where socialism was never introduced and the market-economy has shaped its post-WWII-history.<sup>46</sup>

The earlier significance of different societal and regime experiences so relevant during socialism faded rapidly. Under such circumstances, references to "original", "natural" or "imagined" social as well as spatial settings of the pre-socialist or even Ottoman past gained new importance. They also entered discourses regarding the "legitimacy" of existing borders. This could soon be an aspect on a more regional/local scale as, for instance, the Macedonian-Albanian area around Lake Ohrid shows. This border territory was extremely separated during socialism but got a new meaning as a "traditional historical region" when the border controls were loosening (and temporarily also totally collapsed) in the course of the 1990s. New

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45 Paul Shoup, *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question* (New York/London, 1968); Irena Stefoska, "Nation, Education and Historiographic Narratives: The Case of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia (1944-1990)," in *The Ambiguous Nation: Case Studies from Southeastern Europe in the 20th Century*, ed. Ulf Brunnbauer and Hannes Grandits (München, 2013), 195-229.

46 Keith S. Brown, "Political Realities and Cultural Specificities in Contemporary Macedonian Jokes," *Western Folklore* 54 (1995) 3: 197-211; Loring M. Danforth, *The Macedonian conflict: ethnic nationalism in a trans-national world* (Princeton, 1995); Jane Cowan, *Macedonia: The Politics of Identity and Difference* (London, 2000); Žarko Trajanovski, "'National' Flags in the Republic of Macedonia," in *Ambiguous Nation*, ed. Brunnbauer and Grandits, 449-477.



references to the past would also become an important aspect on a wider “national” level. Aspirations of some nationalists in Macedonia (and partly in Bulgaria) and the widespread fear of (in particular many politicians) in Greece about the “return” of an “undivided Macedonia” of the past entered regional politics starting in the 1990s and have not really disappeared until today.<sup>47</sup>

### *Shaping of Space*

Phantom borders are not only imagined and experienced, but are also active themselves in shaping space. Following urban sociologist Martina Löw’s relational understanding of space, we view space as a “relational ordering of social goods and people.”<sup>48</sup> Löw refers to two dimensions in the constitution of space. Firstly, she emphasizes the processual or behavioral dimension. Secondly, with the concept of order she points out that space structures action. From this perspective, too, phantom borders are not to be understood as stable realities, which precede social processes. On the contrary, as developing and changeable phenomena, phantom borders play an active part in the construction of social processes. Phantom borders are constantly updated, reinterpreted, recreated, or dissolved. They are constructed and shaped by the actions of the actors and their imaginations, while simultaneously having a structuring effect on them. They are thus at once an active and passive part of the relationally perceived space.<sup>49</sup>

With this third dimension of the phantom borders concept, we want to highlight the specific production of space that occurs on a different analytical level, and how this interrelates with the production of meaning and the practices of the actors. Therefore, it is useful to consider the property and production structures of arable land in regions like Transylvania, Vojvodina and others that previously to 1918 had been part of the Habsburg Empire. As a means of creating a more just and reliable taxation of land in the course of the 19th century the Habsburg administration undertook the vast endeavor of geodetically measuring all land and registering all parcels in a cadaster and land register. This was done concomitantly with abolishing feudal relations of bondage. On the one hand, the cadastral operations in many cases only fixed the traditional use of particular parcels, which often can be traced back several hundred years and remained steady due to the physical structure of the soil. On the other hand, reordering space from arable land under feudal conditions to parcels in individual ownership sparked processes of economic, social and political upward mobility for the peasants. When after World War I, the post-Habsburg nation states decided to discontinue these institutions some of the professionals (geodesists, cadaster and land register officials, public notaries) and peasants longed for the Habsburg *Rechtsstaat* and its ability to secure from interferences. This case study on the Habsburg system of land ownership and its afterlife in post-Habsburg nation states illustrates nicely how the three spatial dimensions can be combined in a way that allows a better understanding of historical continuities and ruptures. Human agency had shaped and reordered space, and now space attached with certain

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47 Robert Pichler, “Makedonische Albaner im Spannungsfeld von Nationsbildung und islamischer Erneuerung,” in *Islam und Muslime in (Südost)Europa im Kontext von Transformation und EU-Erweiterung*, ed. Christian Voß and Jordanka Telbizova-Sack (München, 2010), 195–222.

48 Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (Frankfurt a. M., 2001), 224.

49 Martina Löw’s relational conception of space builds on the dualistic conception of structure in Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge, 1984). A similar concept is also found in French geography, see Augustin Berque, “Paysage-empreinte, paysage-matrice: éléments de problématique pour une géographie culturelle,” *Espace géographique* 13 (1984) 1: 33–34 ; and Lefebvre, *The production of Space*, 37.

expectations for legal security, economic progress and political autonomy was shaping human agency.<sup>50</sup>

The same dynamic can be observed after 1989. Now, a cultural and sometimes political regionalism was focusing on specific regions allegedly being more “central European” than others due to their Habsburg legacies. Some values evoked as proofs are centered on a specific economic culture, like honesty in business, industriousness, punctuality etc. So, the perception and the claim that a sub-region like Transylvania is belonging to a meso-region like Central Europe is shaped to some degree by a particular property culture, at the same time this perception shapes what citizens legitimately expect from the state. It is not by coincidence that Klaus Iohannis, the former mayor of the Transylvanian city of Sibiu, ran a successful campaign for Romanian presidency in 2014 on a carefully crafted post-Habsburg agenda encompassing the mentioned values in the slogan “Romania – a country of things well done”. On a more immediate level, the presence or absence of reliable data concerning land ownership considerably influenced the process of de-collectivization in Romania and other countries in the region.<sup>51</sup> In Transylvania, a Habsburg document was considered the best proof for ownership, so many families who had treasured these documents during communist times could easily get back exactly the parcel they were dispossessed of through collectivization. In Moldavia and Wallachia, with no such documents available, retrocession took longer, was diluted, and the best lands were retroceded, but privatized into the hands of former collectives’ manager and converted into capitalist enterprises. This process led to a re-emergence of the conditions of the interwar period: Agricultural businesses with large parcels, on the one hand, and small plots held by small farmers, on the other. Spatial arrangements thus again played a role that had been suppressed during the period of the communist regime. In the post-socialist period, moreover, they had a direct impact on the actors’ scopes of action.<sup>52</sup> Conceptualizing space as a fundamentally dynamic process, finally, points at the interconnectedness of space and time – one of the most pervasive problems in historiography, and the humanities in general. Human agency shapes space over time and loads it with meaning in a way that space itself shapes the perception of both the past and the conceivable future.

### **Phantom space as actualization of the past *and* of the imagined future**

The three analytical levels of phantom borders, which we have described successively for purposes of illustration, must be linked together in the analysis. The (historical) “experience” of space carries particular weight, because it constitutes a contingent element in the historical process, which goes beyond discursive framing and the shaping of space. On the one hand, it is spatially and historically conditioned; on the other, it is situated in geographical imaginations by the actors and, consequently, variously interpreted and updated. The phenomena that are described at the three levels may therefore change over time. Internalized and spatially reproduced routines, experiences, and endowments of meaning can be reconstituted in conditions of social upheaval in a very short period of time. New phantom borders and spaces can consequently appear, while others disappear.

At this point of our argument, we can define the concept of phantom borders, or phantom spaces: they design the performative capacity of previously existing historical territories to

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<sup>50</sup> Dietmar Müller, “Eigentum verwalten in Rumänien. Advokaten, Geodäten und Notare (1830–1940),” in *Professionen, Eigentum und Staat. Europäische Entwicklungen im Vergleich (19. und 20. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Dietmar Müller, Hannes Siegrist (Göttingen, 2014), 75-132.

<sup>51</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare. Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania* (Ithaca/London, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> Béatrice v. Hirschhausen, *Les nouvelles campagnes Roumaines: Paradoxes d’un «retour» paysan* (Paris, 1997); Violette Rey, ed., *Les nouvelles campagnes de l’Europe centre orientale* (Paris, 1996).

shape both the experience and the imagination of a social group, and – consequently – to perform regional patterns in a specific domain. This capacity is not permanent, but it is historically situated. Phantom borders and phantom spaces can appear, and disappear in certain historical and geopolitical circumstances. This capacity is not universal: it can concern certain aspects of social life, but not others.

The perspective opened up by the concept of “phantom borders/phantom space” contrasts with the existing research on the geocultural “longue durée.” The latter mainly focuses on the historical legacy and cumulative and systemic processes that keep the actors on historical paths predetermined by long established social relations, structures, and institutions.<sup>53</sup> This literature insists on the historical causation of long-term processes;<sup>54</sup> by focusing on historical “path dependence,” it effectively marginalizes the actors by ignoring their agency. In this context, the concept of “phantom spaces” offers an alternative perspective, which entails three main aspects.

First, the concept of “phantom borders/phantom space” focuses on the experience of the actors, and not on the regions. In fact, it considers regional differences to be a product of the everyday behavior of people. The institutional, social, and structural heritage is not considered to be exogenous, but rather a product “from below” and is thus to be viewed from the specific perspective of the actors and, for instance, in terms of their embeddedness in daily life and social memory. Past periods do not constitute a continuum or “causal chain,” as described by Paul Pierson.<sup>55</sup> Instead, the past is permanently updated by local actors in a selective way and represents a set of more-or-less referenced resources. At any point in time, and depending on their momentary perception, these local actors can make use of and reproduce the heritage of the past, or they ignore or even disqualify it.

Second, our approach opens up an interpretation of cultural spaces, which entertain new visions of the future, and of joint beliefs. The actors update their resources, of course relying on the past, but also with respect to the horizon of future expectations. They create their own world, which takes shape between a certain experience that is “full of past reality”<sup>56</sup> and an expectation of an imagined future.

Third, our analysis of phantom spaces indicates that visions of the future are not only endogenous, that is to a certain degree naturally emerging from the historic path dependencies, as experienced by local communities and their shared past. These local visions of the future are also governed by mental maps drawn up at higher levels of power. Hegemonic knowledge defines, among other things, “center” and “periphery,” “modern” and “archaic” regions and thus prescribes geographies of the future to the local societies that they, in turn, more or less willingly internalize. The local populations thus identify potential developmental spaces and define their future horizons within the borders implicitly defined by the mental maps. These mental maps, and their implied narratives of the past and visions of the future, can be even more “efficient” because they are considered to be natural and self-

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<sup>53</sup> Among the works on path dependency we may refer to Paul Pierson, “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics,” *The American Political Science Review* 94 (2000) 2: 251–267; Ian Greener, “The Potential of Path Dependence in Political Studies,” *Politics* 25 (2005) 1: 62–72; Keith Darden and Anna Gzymala-Busse, “The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism, and the Communist Collapse,” *World Politics* 59 (2006): 83–113; Sascha O. Becker et al., “The Empire is dead, long live the empire! Long-run persistence of trust and corruption in the Bureaucracy,” *The Economic Journal* 126 (2016) 590: 1–35, accessed October 10, 2016, DOI: 10.1111/econj.12220; Leonid Peisakhin, “Cultural Legacies: Persistence and Transmission,” in *The Political Economy of Governance Institutions, Political Performance and Elections*, ed. Norman Schofield and Gonzalo Caballero (New York / Berlin, 2015), 21–39.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time. History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton / Oxford, 2004), 79–102.

<sup>55</sup> Idem., 79.

<sup>56</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 255–275.

evident by the local actors. Indeed, over the previous decades the mental maps may have even resisted historiographers' attempts to deconstruct them scientifically.

### **Outlook: A Contribution to the Discussion on Area Studies**

Our focus on phantom borders in Eastern Europe has its origin not least in a concern about the present and future of area studies.<sup>57</sup> Since 1989, cultural and social scientific research on Eastern Europe has faced a twofold challenge. The end of the bloc's isolation and the ever increasing impact of globalization on the topics and methods of cultural and social sciences had lasting effects on the self-understanding of regional research on the eastern part of Europe. The status of the latter was fundamentally questioned, especially in the years after 1989. At the same time, regional research on Eastern Europe has maintained a strong foothold, above all in the former "frontline states" of the Cold War. Moreover, it has considerable potential to support the redefinition of the position of cultural and social sciences above and beyond any national narrowing or Eurocentrism.<sup>58</sup> In contrast to "general history" (which was arguably just as affected by the two outlined developments), regional research has undergone self-critical analysis.

It is worth mentioning the intradisciplinary controversy about East European Studies that took place in the late 1990s in German-speaking countries, especially in the journal "Osteuropa." Remarkably, thought-provoking discussions of spaces and borders were already put forward at that time regarding the criticism of a regional science that makes use of an unreflective concept of space. In response to Jörg Baberowski's diagnosis that the assertion of a distinct geographical area implies no "scientifically defensible separation of scientific subjects,"<sup>59</sup> representatives of non-Russian and non-Soviet related subdisciplines specifically pointed out the importance of spatial organization and the historical variability of spatial allocations, which raise relevant overarching historiographical issues. Mathias Niendorf, for instance, has stressed in reference to the territories of Poland and Lithuania and their diverse inner-regional divisions that East European Studies should be more "than a summation of national historiographies."<sup>60</sup> Stefan Troebst has linked the analytical categories of space and time in observing that "the map of Eastern Europe and Europe as a whole still resembles a palimpsest, that is, a medieval parchment manuscript, whose original text has been removed and replaced by another."<sup>61</sup> The critical examination of the specific region of Eastern Europe has supposedly given rise to a new perspective that addresses a general concern with area studies. Specifically, the latter should not be merely a testing ground for theories of "general" disciplines. Instead, area studies needs to be able to formulate its own research-guiding

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57 *On the origin of area studies in the context of the Cold War*, see David L. Szanton, ed., *The Politics of Knowledge. Area Studies and the Disciplines* (Berkeley, 2004); David Engerman, *Know your enemy: The rise and fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford, 2009). Recent research historicizes the close linkage between *area studies* and non-scientific interests as part of a scholarly history of the Cold War: Mark Solovey and Hamilton Cravens, ed., *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature* (Basingstoke, 2012); Paul Erickson and Lorraine Daston, ed., *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality* (Chicago, 2013).

58 See the essays in the journal "Osteuropa" entitled: "Zeit im Spiegel: Das Jahrhundert der Osteuropaforschung," *Osteuropa* 63 (2013) 2-3, esp. Stefan Troebst, "Sonderweg zur Geschichtsregion: Die Teildisziplin osteuropäische Geschichte," *idem*: 55–80.

59 Jörg Baberowski, "Das Ende der Osteuropäischen Geschichte: Bemerkungen zur Lage einer geschichtswissenschaftlichen Disziplin," in *Wohin steuert die Osteuropaforschung: Eine Diskussion*, ed. Stefan Kreuzberger et al. (Colonge, 2000), 42.

60 Mathias Niendorf, "Mehr als eine Addition von Nationalhistoriographien. Chancen der Osteuropäischen Geschichte als Regionalwissenschaft," in *idem.*, 101–106.

61 Stefan Troebst, "Ende oder Wende? Historische Osteuropaforschung in Deutschland: Vier Anmerkungen zu Jörg Baberowski," in *idem.*, 63.

hypotheses, which, in turn, have an innovative impact on the research practices in the cultural and social sciences.<sup>62</sup>

Along with the disappearance of the systemic opposition post-1989, the increasing relevance of non-European regions in the cultural and social sciences has been another challenge. It was also certainly a new opportunity for regional studies on Eastern Europe to promote itself. The knowledge that area studies produce is all the more valuable given the increasing recognition that globalization cannot be described as an extension of "European" or "Western" paradigms to the world at large, but is rather a history of exchange and interdependency. If we are to take this view of entanglement seriously, then it is no longer appropriate for regional studies to have a "subservient function" in merely confirming or refuting "general" theories on the basis of illustrative material.<sup>63</sup> It may seem trivial to point out that the so-called general disciplines in fact develop their theories in reference to "tangible" regional objects, or that area studies are unquestionably involved in theory formation. For Eastern European Studies, this means that there are at once threats and opportunities. On the one hand, the studied regions are still looked at through the prism of the Cold War or the prism of "backwardness" vis-à-vis a loosely defined European "center." On the other hand, "Eastern Europe" demands to be addressed as a region in terms of its exchanges and interactions to "Europe" and, of course, to the "world." As a consequence, this further contributes to the deconstruction of a quasi-universal point of view. And, last but not least, study of Eastern Europe tests the second major interpretational framework that has shaped and shapes the view on historical regions. To what extent was Eastern Europe a region formed by asymmetrical power relations? A region where colonial and imperial structures were historically significant? A region that was organized by diverse forms of micro and internal colonialism? And, finally, a region where the linkages of knowledge and power relations were particularly central due to its proximity and belonging to Europe? Given the relevance of these issues for a reflected situating of area studies and contemporary global history, new approaches to the region need to be exploited that help position Eastern Europe Studies within a dynamically evolving field of research. We hope that the concept of phantom borders will make a contribution to this effort.

Translated from German to English by Christopher W. Reid, PhD

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62 This was the criticism that was already made in the early 1990s about East European Studies: Stefan Kreuzberger et al, "Osteuropaforschung im Umbruch: Motive, Hintergründe und Verlauf einer Fachdebatte in Deutschland," in *idem.*, 15.

63 Birgit Schäbler, "Das Studium der Weltregionen (Area Studies) zwischen Fachdisziplinen und der Öffnung zum Globalen: Eine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Annäherung," in *Area Studies und die Welt. Weltregionen und die neue Globalgeschichte*, ed. Idem. (Vienna, 2007), 11–44.