

Preface

We are all cultural hybrids, says German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch. Let this motto be the starting point for the current volume of "Studia Sociologica" devoted to the cultural Borderlands. The diversity of our authors' cultural backgrounds, the multiplicity of the disciplines they represent and the research questions they ask are excellent illustrations of the new world vision that lies at the heart of Welsch's statement. Our world has become so complex that a traditional concept of culture is no longer sufficient to understand it. We can no longer perceive cultures as hermetically sheltered spheres or isolated islands that correspond in an exact way to peoples' territorial areas. What we have instead are interconnected and entangled cultural networks, a diffusion of meanings between others and us, smooth, hybrid identity and the freedom to choose it. A freedom so advanced that it is even allowing us to abandon our own culture, the culture in which we grew up.

The project of transculturality proposed by the followers of this optics has been, since the mid 1990s, an alternative voice in the unresolved dispute between globalism and multiculturalism. It is not only a kind of "fashion" in academic circles across different disciplines, but an intellectually influential – and also "trans"-disciplinary – phenomenon. Transculturality has become a theoretical response to the practical problems such as intolerance to otherness, intercultural communication problems or the painful effects of various ethnocentrism. It results in a revision of such key concepts as "tradition", "otherness" or "canon". It also proposes yet another vision of the future as a post-national reality.

In this sense, there are almost no areas which remain that could not be considered in terms of Borderland. Borderland is therefore any culturally condensed space where discourses multiply and where borderlines cross an individual life so often that they become more and more relative. Thus, Borderland is also a person, each and every one of us.

Physical demarcation lines and real borderlands multiplied by the 20th century history make this picture even more complex. Examples are not far to seek: after the Soviet Union's collapse, the former republics' new frontiers, once absorbed by the Russian and Communist empire, start to emerge. On the narrowed territory of these young independent countries, the process of globalization, the reconstruction of national tradition and the influence of neighbouring civilizations interfere while the remains of forced Sovietization can be observed. The frontier of the enlarged

European Union makes Poland a country “at the end of the ecumene”, where, as maintained by popular opinion, the Eastern *Barbaricum* begins, while Ukraine, which according to the Polish dream is to be a friendly borderland of the *Barbaricum*, is being torn by two decentralizing civilization forces. The forced displacements and migrations of people in the 20th century created numerous “enclaves” of national minorities. This reveals a tragic side of transculturation, of being a hybrid against one’s will – an exile on the Borderland.

Thus, we will treat Borderland, the central theme of the volume, very broadly. In the most general terms, we will speak about the Frontier Countries that lie at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, East and West etc. In a narrower meaning, we will take a closer look at the border area in the strict sense: it will serve as a research laboratory where not only processes of cultural diffusion, but also other phenomena typical for the border areas are clearly visible. At the micro-level Borderland will be the space of an individual life, the life of people who exist in the surroundings of other cultures.

We hope that the proposed “mixture” of topics, languages and cultures will be of interest not only to specialists, but also to all those who are not indifferent to the processes taking place within contemporary society.

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