

BOOK REVIEW SECTION

Andersen, D.J. and Prokkola, E.-K. (eds.): Borderlands Resilience: Transitions, Adaptation and Resistance at Borders. Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2021. 210 p.

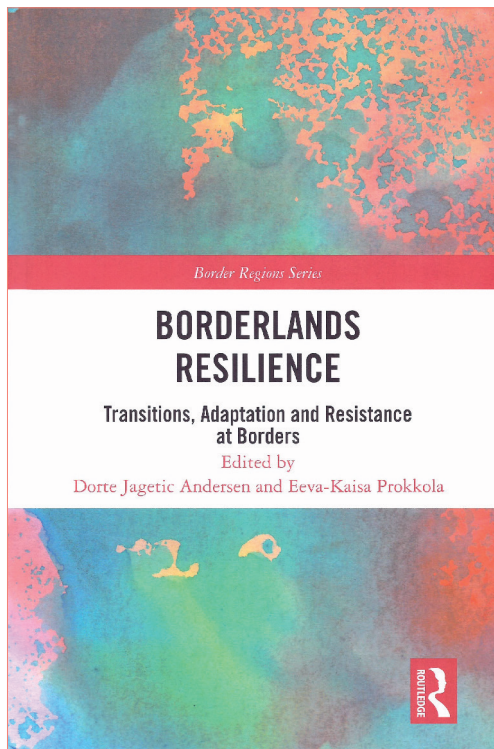
Among the distinctive features of borderlands is their high vulnerability to changes in international relations (both interstate and cross-border), along with various external shocks and geopolitical tensions. The recent past has provided a range of evidence in support of this. Border regions were particularly affected during the economic crisis in 2008. Western sanctions in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine's eastern regions in 2014 further sealed the EU's eastern external border. The migration crisis of 2015 and the series of terrorist attacks in Western Europe from 2015 to 2017 brought about the partial reintroduction of internal EU border controls. Brexit and the issue of reintroducing customs borders became another challenge. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in

the almost universal reintroduction of border controls and travel restrictions. Currently, Europe is experiencing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis related to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which has resulted in the opening of the EU's external borders to almost 6 million Ukrainian refugees, as well as in further restrictions on citizens and businesses from Russia and Belarus. These events have caused borders and borderlands in Europe – where the naive, utopian vision of a borderless world seemed to be closest to becoming a reality – to undergo profound changes away from a policy of open borders.

From the center's perspective, strengthened border securitization is seen as a remedy ensuring state security vis-à-vis emerging external threats. However, the dynamic re-bordering processes, with the construction of border walls and fences in its extreme form, constitute additional challenges for border regions and the people who live there. In the body of literature, it is generally expected that borderlands “are less able to respond positively to shocks and to undergo transformative processes” (PASCARIU, G.C., KOURTIT, K. and TIGANASU, R. 2020, p. 750). However, it is the border communities, facing constant instability and uncertainty, that must cope with external disturbances in their daily life.

This is what makes the book edited by Dorte Jagetic ANDERSEN and Eeva-Kaisa PROKKOLA particularly topical and relevant. Its objective is to examine “how different groups of people whose lives are always-already entangled with borders and border crossings maintain well-being and adaptive capacities in the face of border transitions, including reinforced securitization as well as new openings” (p. 2). The volume offers a broad, conceptually and empirically nuanced study of how different societies experience, adapt, and resist border reconfigurations and the related uncertainties. Following WANDJI, G. (2019), the collection adopts a broad understanding of resilience, and by treating it within the highly complex context of borders and borderlands, a new, innovative conceptualization is developed over the subsequent portions of the book.

The volume consists of ten chapters that bring together case studies of different borders and borderlands. Empirical chapters are preceded by an introduction (Chapter 1) and followed by an epilogue (Chapter 12), the body being divided into three sections. Thus, borderlands resilience has been presented and discussed in differing contexts, and this



clarifies the overall argument, makes it more readable, and highlights the main issues.

In the introductory chapter (*Introduction: Embedding borderlands resilience*) ANDERSEN and PROKKOLA conceptualize the notion of *borderlands resilience*, referring to the varied definitions of resilience across disciplines and the different meanings of the term ‘borderland.’ Taking the concept of *social resilience* as a starting point for further consideration directs the editors to explore the adaptive strategies, changes, and resistance of social groups to various stresses, what they have termed ‘*peoples resilience*.’ The editors recognize the uniqueness and diversity of borderlands and the human communities that inhabit them and therefore take a situational approach that analyzes “resilience processes in their historical, political and cultural contexts” (p. 4). Finally, they debate the role played by identities and identity-formation processes in borderlands resilience, by considering the self-identification of people as an important asset and resource that facilitate dealing with geopolitical changes. The introduction provides an appropriate point of reference for the presentation of the individual case studies, adequately defining the thematic, theoretical, and conceptual framework for further studies.

Part I provides theoretical and empirical insights into borderlands resilience by examining what roles borders play in resilience in ‘exceptional circumstances’ like the implications of the Crimean Crisis, the influx of migrants, Brexit, and the COVID-19-related border closures.

In Chapter 2, Eeva-Kaisa PROKKOLA continues the discussion initiated in the *Introduction* on the complexity of the relationship between national borders and processes of resilience. She analyzes the imaginary risks in the context of alternative processes of de-bordering and re-bordering and the differentiated nature of boundaries on the hard-soft continuum. In doing so the chapter highlights the role of the top-down politics of resilience in relation to ambivalent approaches to border management and security perceptions. The chapter then shifts the focus to three recent resilience processes in three different border policy contexts: the EU neighborhood policy, the response to the immobility shock at the Finnish-Russian border in the aftermath of the Crimean Crisis in 2014, and the disruption at the Finnish-Swedish border in Tornio Valley as a consequence of the influx of asylum-seekers and during the COVID-19 pandemics. These cases have been used to illustrate and prove that borderlands resilience is highly context-dependent.

Chapter 3 by Katharina KOCH approaches resilience from the perspective of mobility by examining the impact of Brexit on Irish/Northern Irish university cross-border cooperation. This study points to the various joint efforts, policies, and negotiations undertaken, ones resulting in the development of contingency plans and mitigation strategies for various

post-Brexit scenarios – and creating new perspectives for cooperation in a transforming cross-border environment. In this way, the chapter highlights “the relational aspect of resilience, meaning that borderland resilience does not only stem from a bounded region or territory but can also be fostered through cross-border institutional interactions” (p. 47).

In Chapter 4, María LOIS, Heriberto CAIRO and Mariano GARCÍA DE LAS HERAS explore borderlands resilience in relation to the borders at different scales, comparing the imaginations and practices about borders used by the central state and communities in borderlands in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors suggest that, while from the perspective of the state, the border is widely used as a tool applicable to the control of the insecurity generated from outside, the borderlanders imagine and practice the border as ‘enabling’ through “constant negotiation of the meaning of borders for everyday life, related to memories and experience in the borderland” (p. 65). This indicates the possible existence of different border-related resiliencies at different scales, which may sometimes be contradictory.

The next part (Part II) entitled ‘*Tracing space: Social relations and movement as resilience*’ broadens our understanding of resilience by focusing on the consequences of border transitions from the perspective of different communities living in the borderlands. The following three chapters trace how these groups adapt to ongoing change and renew themselves or resist in often ordinary, mundane situations. Chapter 5, authored by Sara SVENSSON and Péter BALOGH, gives a relatively broad overview of the social resilience practices of three cross-border communities in Hungarian borderlands in response to border closure practices. First, it describes the process of including the ‘other side’ in what is considered local by using the example of cross-border food producers and customers, for here food becomes a link between people in territories spanning borders. Second, the chapter addresses cross-border commuting that secures livelihoods in thriving agglomerations and neglected peripheries. Thirdly, the chapter discusses the activities of the action group MigSzol, which has resisted the practice of closed borders by providing humanitarian assistance to refugees. This example suggests that borderlands resilience may be “understood differently depending on ideological orientation” (p. 85). The first and third cases are of utmost importance as they cover two understudied and, thus, particularly interesting topics. All these considerations have been presented against the background of an excellently outlined socio-economic context, often characteristic for other Central and Eastern European countries as well.

In Chapter 6, Olga HANNONEN analyzes Russian cross-border second-home mobilities to Finland under changing mobility regulations since 2013. The author examines the capacity for adaptation to the changes using an analytical tool based on the open-closed con-

tinuum in which the open end gives space for resilient solutions, whereas a closed-end does not offer such possibility. In light of the presented findings, changes in visa regime, mobility restrictions, bank policies, and new regulations on property purchases in Finland forced Russian second-home owners to develop various personalized solutions to meet the changed circumstances. It demonstrates how situational and contextual the resilient practices of borderlanders are.

The final chapter in Part II (Chapter 7 by Md Azmeary FERDOUSH) provides the only insight into borderlands resilience from outside Europe in the book. It outlines the history of a transnational movement of a group of stateless residents of the former border enclaves of Bangladesh and India. Through seeking to exchange enclaves between the two states, the movement became an *act of refusal* that can be located in the analysis of the resilience of border populations. The chapter proves that even stateless border populations who are not granted citizenship rights can act to change a disadvantaged status quo.

The last part of the volume (Part III), consisting of four chapters, further explores issues of borderlands resilience through identity formation and cultural representations in historically developing border and diaspora communities. In Chapter 8, Steen Bo FRANSEN discusses borderlands resilience from the border region perspective. Using the case of Schleswig, the author scrutinizes the historical process of transformation of a land-in-between into the national borderland of Denmark and Germany. The chapter suggests that borderlands resilience remains strongly linked to historical memory and the desire to preserve identity, which includes also countering the influence of another national ideology.

Chapter 9 by Juha RIDANPÄÄ contributes to the studies on borderlands resilience by discussing language resilience as manifested in a bottom-up approach in which decision-making concerning the revitalization of endangered languages is given to local groups. Drawing on the example of the Meänkieli language, an endangered minority language from the Swedish-Finnish borderland, the author argues that resilience refers to “recognizing and accepting the irreversible development of language loss and still being able to live with it” (p. 148).

The following chapter (Chapter 10) by Christian LAMOUR and Paul BLANCHEMANCHE offers inspiring insights into the cultural dimension of spatial resilience across state borders through investigation of the evolving use of space by diasporas. The authors explore the role of the Italian Villerupt film festival in the resilience of a translocality of the Italian community within a changing cross-border metropolitan environment. The chapter underscores the role of ritualized practices in space, allowing for a better understanding of the importance of culture and identity in resilience.

The book’s final chapter, authored by Dorte Jagetic ANDERSEN, investigates the everyday life of people living in Istria facing the constant redrawing of borders through geopolitical decisions. This context leads the inhabitants of the peninsula not to see new border closures as problematic, but as a challenge that should be overcome. Indeed, in the case of Istrians, boundary changes translate into everyday practices, becoming a manifestation of differentiation in space.

The collective volume ends with an erudite Epilogue written by JUSSI LAINE. In his text, the author confronts the widespread visions of risks, dangers, and threats to which border securitization seems to be the only appropriate response. The chapter demystifies the unreliability of such practices, suggesting that they are not a solution, but rather a typical source of additional problems. At the same time, it exposes the illusory perception of challenges to borderland communities as something purely external, pointing out that resilience refers to both domestic and international concerns. He concludes his contribution by arguing that “border communities tend to be resilient essentially in terms of adaptation as a form of continuity rather than change,” while a resilient world “necessitates the transcending of boundaries and the binaries of which they are markers” (p. 188).

The book *Borderlands Resilience: Transitions, Adaptation and Resistance at Borders* is an excellent contribution to the study of resilience proving that this concept holds great potential in relation to borders and borderlands. It is the first study of this kind to offer such a coherent and comprehensive overview of the diverse contexts of borderlands resilience. The conceptual framework has allowed the editors and contributing authors to go beyond simple schemes as the volume covers not only resilience towards external threats but also internal stressors and resilience vis-à-vis both ‘fast stress events’ and slow crises. The individual chapters reveal the different faces of borderlands resilience, but still follow the uniform theoretical framework outlined in the introduction. The book of course has some minor weaknesses. I appreciate the authors’ ambition to recognize the political and social “components of resilience, easily overlooked in a field dominated by economic approaches” (SVENSSON, S. and BALOGH, P. 2021, p. 74), although the volume unfortunately goes on to largely neglect the economic dimension. Also, there is some European bias in the empirical studies. However, the chosen cases focus on somewhat less frequently studied, sometimes peripheral borderlands that require more research attention, and this should be considered a significant advantage.

In conclusion, this volume is by all means highly recommended. The book encourages the reader to rethink the concept of resilience in light of the complex social processes that characterize borderlands and it provides an opening for a discussion of the

various forms of these processes. I am convinced that this timely, valuable, necessary, and fascinating work will become a source of inspiration for numerous researchers dealing with issues of borders and borderlands.

ANDRZEJ JAKUBOWSKI¹

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¹ Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Institute of Social and Economic Geography and Spatial Management, Lublin, Poland.
E-mail: andrzej.jakubowski@umcs.pl