

EEGA Workshop RA 1 – Event Report

1.-2.12.2022 More-than-Human Borderlands and Mobilities in Central and Eastern Europe

This workshop, which was organised by Larissa Fleischmann, Kristine Beurskens, Bettina Bruns and Jonathan Everts for EEGA's research area 1 "Mobilities and migration regimes in Eastern Europe under the global condition", took place at the premises of the University of Leipzig at Strohsackpassage in the very city centre of Leipzig. Over the course of two consecutive days, twenty participants from Germany and several Eastern European countries and beyond came together to explore potentials for a more-than-human perspective on borderlands and mobilities. By doing so, this workshop aimed to contribute to posthumanist and more-than-human approaches, which have experienced a rise to prominence across the social sciences throughout the past years, by (a) exploring the relevance of these perspectives for mobility and border studies, paying particular attention to the more-than-human assemblages that come together in mobilities and bordering processes and (b) to strengthen these emerging debates in exchange with researchers across Central and Eastern Europe.

In the course of five different thematic sessions, workshop participants discussed human relations with viruses, animals, objects and technologies through different empirical case studies looking at borders and mobilities. Our starting point was a shared concern that a sole focus on humans and their mobilities cannot explain the profound bordering processes that have gained momentum in Central and Eastern Europe in the past years. The advent of African swine fever has led to a proliferation of fences that target potential border crossers of a nonhuman kind: wild boars acting as vectors of the pig virus, which is currently depicted as the most threatening global animal disease. The COVID-19 pandemic has been met with massive restrictions on mobilities and set in motion profound (re)bordering processes across Central and Eastern Europe.

The workshop thus gathered scholars working on topic such as African Swine Fever, tourism, the chicken industry, fruit trade or the Covid-19 pandemic, in regional contexts such as Bosnia, Hungary, Slovenia or Germany – all being united by a joint interest in how borders as well as mobilities might be conceptualized as more-than-human compositions spanning a multitude of human and nonhuman elements. Over the course of twelve talks, workshop participants explored different examples of how borders filter, channel, or block (non)human mobilities in Central and Eastern Europe. A topic that was also discussed were the 'unruly' border crossings of different kinds of beings and matters – such as chicken, apricots, wildlife, viruses, or invasive plant species – and how they co-constitute, challenge or subvert practices and infrastructures of border control.

The first two thematic sessions "More-than-Human Borders I" and "More-than-Human Borders II", taking place on the first of December, gathered five presenters. First, Miha Kozorog from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, delivered a talk on fencing in the context of human-wildlife conflicts along the Slovenian-Hungarian border. In the second talk, Asel Murzakulova from the University of Central Asia – who

could unfortunately not join the workshop in person but participated online – presented insights into her research project on the apricot cultivation and trade in the Kyrgyz-Tajik borderlands. In another presentation, historian Anna Kolářová from the Charles University Prague, Czech Republic, presented her dissertation project on tourism and the formation of border(s) in the region of Šumava and Bayerischer Wald 1870–1950. Fourthly, Danko Simić from the University of Graz, Austria, gave empirical insights into his project that looks at chicken commodities in South-eastern Europe and considers how Europeanization is performed in this context. Last but not least, Eva Mihalovics from Durham University, UK, delivered a presentation on onto-epistemic borderlands in Central Eastern Europe, by presenting insights into her ethnographic research project in rural Hungary.

The third thematic session, which also took place on December 1, focussed more specifically on more-than-human mobilities. In a first presentation, Michael Wollrath from the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany, looked at how invasive species might be transformed into economic resources by scrutinizing examples from Germany and Indonesia. In a second presentation, György Varga from the ELTE Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, Hungary, investigated how pet dogs appear and move with their owners in public spaces. In the third presentation, Mirela Tase from the Aleksander Moisiu University, Albania, talked on the effects of perceptions of travel risk and travel behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic. On the second workshop day, the participants discussed more-than-human borderlands and mobilities in the context of African swine fever in two thematic sessions. First was a presentation by Andrzej Jarynowski from the Free University Berlin, Germany, on border-related ASF mitigation strategies in Poland. In the second one, Larissa Fleischmann from the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg – who was also one of the organisers of the workshop – presented empirical insights from her research project on veterinary fencing in the Eastern German borderlands. Third was a presentation by Laura Matt from the University of Bayreuth, Germany, which looked at the establishing, maintaining and contesting of boundaries in the context of African Swine Fever in Brandenburg. Last but not least, Jordan Oelke from the Technical University Dresden, Germany, presented empirical insights into his research on the boundary drawing of boars as pests and virus carriers in Germany.

The organisers would like to thank the participants for the enriching discussions over the two workshop days in Leipzig. They are looking forward to continue the conversations in future collaborations and are currently working towards the publication of a joint special issue in an open access Geography journal.

Some photographic impressions of the workshop can be found on the following pages.







