



# IDENT2 Strategies of Regionalisation: Constructing Identity Across Borders

research project



IPSE

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Wille, Christian / Reckinger, Rachel / Kmec, Sonja / Hesse, Markus (eds.), 2014: *Räume und Identitäten in Grenzregionen. Politiken – Medien – Subjekte*. Bielefeld: transcript (395 p.).

Wille, Christian / Reckinger, Rachel / Kmec, Sonja / Hesse, Markus (eds.), 2016: *Spaces and Identities in Border Regions. Politics – Media – Subjects*. Bielefeld: transcript (383 p.)

## Summary of the Main Research Results

The common publication explores spaces and identities in border regions, with the assumption that spaces and identities are brought about by social practices.

This **constructivist and contingency-oriented theoretical framework** starts out by considering **borders or differences** not as fixed and unquestioned positings, but rather as results of contingent practices, through which spaces and identities not only materialize but which these also contribute in shaping. Here, we particularly regard the institution of borders as differentiations or regulations by the self or by other agencies with respect to the exterior, the crossing of borders as an affirmative or subversive action with transformative potential, as well the expansion of borders as an 'in-between' of manifold relations and overlaps. Pertaining to **spatial constructions**, the focus is on institutional and media-based semanticizations and performative techniques of attribution and representation, as well as on everyday geographies as topological structures and symbolic spatializations on the subject level. Similarly, **identity constructions** are investigated as identifications *with* and identifications *of*, with particular attention on processes of attribution through specific institutions and, on the other hand, on everyday-cultural processes of appropriation. These perspectives of investigation – one looking at the attributed and the other at the appropriated spaces and identities – are not considered separately but rather as connected, in order to reveal empirical intersections of different levels of the social (and their constructedness), as well as their interlinkings in cross-border contexts.

Three empirical research areas are embedded in this theoretical framework. They comprise (1) a power-critical perspective on spaces and identities that addresses particularly **policies and normalizations** that become effective and are negotiated in construction processes; (2) a media-oriented perspective on spaces and identities that sees **media** as constructors and projection surfaces and even as spaces (of negotiation) and (3) a subject-centered perspective that investigates the production of space and identity constructions in the course of **everyday-cultural practices**.

The four case studies presented in the **chapter on institutional practices (1)** combine heterogeneous subjects of research under the perspective of Foucault's discussion of a specific power logic which achieves its impact and its extensive validity primarily through a variable combination of the various power logics of sovereignty, discipline and governmentality. The interrelationship of these power logics appears as a tendentially historical sequence of technologies of power proceeding from the 'extrinsic' pole (sovereignty) to the 'intrinsic' pole (governmentality) – while these three logics still constantly intertwine with one another. The case studies concentrate on historically and topically very different social practices, which nonetheless have in common the construction of a political space. The successive shift of technologies of power proves a rewarding perspective for clarifying, in terms of power politics, the problem of transition of a limited national space into cross-border spaces. In contrast to constructions of national identity, such transnational spatial constructions and models for everyday life in cross-border contexts presuppose flexible, complex governmental governance which demands from all actors a high degree of self-regulating forms of conduct.

The **chapter on media-related practices (2)** defines media spatially, as zones of contact, i.e. as areas in which boundaries and differentiations are negotiated. On the assumption that spatial structures are both precondition and result of social practices, the focus is directed to interstices, understood as areas that cannot readily be attributed to delineated and clearly defined spaces. The common feature of the seven case studies in this chapter is that they establish connections between spatial structures on different levels. Media's possibility of a (projective) re-description of reality allows an analysis of how far boundaries on different levels tend to subvert or confirm each other (or both at the same time!). On the whole, we can see that media can indeed enable 'passages' to be opened up between different descriptive levels: different figurations of border are placed in parallel to and at the same time contrasted with each other. The levels mediated with each other have a spatial structure in the sense that they make it possible to set boundaries, cross borders and initiate movements in various directions – whether conceived in a concrete or in an abstract sense.

The investigations in the **chapter on everyday-cultural practices (3)** centre on subjectifications, i.e. the question of how norms and significations are actually lived in everyday-cultural practices in border regions. Of particular interest here is, on the one hand, the relationship of subjectifications and subjectivations – or the shifts and creative forms of appropriation they reveal – and the relationship of spaces and identities in cross-border contexts, on the other. The amalgamation of subjectification and subjectivation processes carried out in the eight case studies has revealed subject constitutions – and thus empirical moments of identity work – that are largely characterized by ambivalent and unpredictable logics of combination. This confirms the creative-processual character of social practices as well as the identity constructions they contain and points to articulations of the 'in-between' which characterize both territorial and categorial border areas. This research perspective – translated to the analytical categories of subjectivation and subjectification – does not only tie in with the approaches of current cultural studies but is a precondition for adequately accessing subjects in the context of the border.