Talking Borders. From Local Expertise to Global Exchange - Citizen Science Experiment

(in the context of the Association for Borderlands Studies 2nd World Conference (10th to 14th July, 2018) - Border-Making and its Consequences: Interpreting Evidence from the "post-Colonial" and "post-Imperial" 20th Century): [www.abs2018world.com](http://www.abs2018world.com)

 Information on the set-up and execution of the experiment: [https://web.archive.org/web/20181121090817/https://www.univie.ac.at/talkingborders/](https://web.archive.org/web/20181121090817/https:/www.univie.ac.at/talkingborders/)

The interview was recorded on 10.07.2018 at the University of Vienna with Dictaphone 36. The original audio recording has been archived at the University of Vienna, please contact [Phaidra](https://phaidra.univie.ac.at/): https://phaidra.univie.ac.at/

Filename of the recording: 036\_Gift\_GamingScorpion

Profile of the interview participants: Border Scholar (BS): an academic researcher & Citizen Scientist (CS): a university student

During the experiment each participant was assigned a random user name to make sure that the discussion was conducted pseudonymously.

The real names of the interview participants are known, please contact the principal investigator for more information: [Machteld.venken@univie.ac.at](mailto:Machteld.venken@univie.ac.at) (www.machteldvenken.com)

The transcription was produced using Wreally’s transcription software (https://transcribe.wreally.com/)

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The transcript was finalised 29.11.208

This research was financed by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) within its Top Citizen Science initiative. Grant number TCS 028 was titled ‘Talking Borders. From Local Expertise to Global Expertise` and ran from 01.04.2018 until 31.12.2018. The Principal Investigator was Priv.-Doz. Dr. habil. Machteld Venken. The core team consisted of Sabine Hartmann (digital humanities specialist and web designer), Manuel Neubauer and Enno Lindemann (research assistance), Stefanie März (digital café) and Mark Trafford (transcriptions and proofreading).

Wreally’s transcription software, given a conversation between two native speakers in a relatively quiet environment, is able to produce 90% accurate transcriptions of what was said. However, these discussions often took place between two non-native speakers in a noisy environment where often the Dictaphone wasn’t placed close enough to record clearly the conversation. The results were frequently incomprehensible. Thus, it was necessary to listen closely to the recordings in order to correct and shape the transcript that it be readable. The discussions between citizen scientists proved particularly challenging. The amount of background noise, the wildly varying levels of English, and indeed the lack of an older, more experienced border scholar to help shape the discussion, served as serious obstacles to the production of a satisfying text. Nevertheless, in spite of the occasional lacunae, as the speaker struggled to find the appropriate words or, indeed, external factors rendered their words inaudible, it was ultimately possible to capture an authentic exchange between people of different backgrounds discussing what borders meant to them. Meanwhile, I believe the dialogues between the border scholars and the citizen scholars constitute an invaluable resource for future study of this field. This is thanks to the range and breadth of areas discussed, the juxtaposition of backgrounds and levels of experience, and, perhaps most significantly, the sense that frequently both participants, as a result of this exchange, were coming to a new understanding of the subject of borders.

The aim of the transcription was to produce a readable, authentic record of the dialogues, to capture the voices of the participants, their rhythms and idiosyncrasies of speech. Thus their words are recorded as they were spoken, with the majority of grammatical and lexical errors, as well as any distinguishing verbal tics (‘so to speak’, ‘you know’, ‘like’, ‘let’s say’) included. Errors were only corrected in very extreme circumstances when a speaker was having serious difficulty in making himself understood. Where this was done, the added word is included within parentheses. E.g. ‘I had (gone) to the mountains.’ Wherever possible, though, mistakes have been left unchanged. It is to be hoped that the judicious use of punctuation throughout the transcriptions will aid the reader in deciphering the meaning of what was originally said.

Unfinished words or sentences that were begun but unfinished have been excised. Where a speaker went back to correct him or herself, the corrected version of the sentence is the one that has been recorded. Where speakers discussed practical matters, such as how to operate the Dictaphone, the time left to speak, and so on, has briefly summarised in parentheses. E.g. (they talk in German about what to do next). When the utterance constituted a noise intended to indicate consent, disagreement or surprise, this has been recorded accordingly. E.g. “Ummm, not really.” Utterances that did not interrupt the narration of the interviewee, but merely served to indicate, say, agreement, are not transcribed. Emotional, nonverbal expressions with a meaning are indicated between brackets. E.g. (laughs)

As might be expected, the participants frequently referred to a wide variety of places, local dishes, treaties, writers, etc. All realistic efforts have been made to track down these references. While practically all such references were identified in the BS-CS dialogues, it proved logistically impossible to do so to quite the same extent for the CS-CS dialogues, partly for the reasons outlined above and partly due to the amount of time available to produce the transcription. Still, even in the case of the CS-CS dialogues, approximately 80 % of these references have successfully been tracked down.

Where it proved impossible to identify such a reference, or where the recording was incomprehensible or inaudible, it is marked (unclear). Where an unclear word was hesitantly understood by the transcriber, the word is included in parentheses with a question mark. E.g. (Tijuana?). One solution to these lacunae might be for the participants themselves to have access to these transcripts and fill in the gaps.

The software produced broadly reliable timestamps for the dialogues. In the case of the BS-CS dialogues, this is every five minutes, whereas in the case of the CS-CS dialogues, due to the greater uncertainty as to what was said, this is every two minutes. In a couple of examples, the timestamps generated by the software are not as accurate as might be desired, but they should still prove useful.

Finally, it is my wish that the reader of these transcripts finds them as illuminating and engaging as I did.

CS: Gift

BS: GamingScorpion

This recording was divided into two parts.

Part 1

CS: So nickname Gift. What does border mean to me. For me borders mean the place where the countryside is. That's what separates countries from each other. In the history borders used to work as the place, the countryside which separated and saved each country's culture and habits from other countries' habits and culture. And it also used to be as a defending place in wars and stuff like that. But I think in the 21st century, we don't use borders like that anymore. The meaning of borders have changed. The only thing borders defend us from is smuggling and illegal immigrants maybe but I think it's very useful as we do in the European Union that all the countries which are in the European Union can travel freely without passport. I think it's pretty useful and it makes easier to find jobs abroad if you want, if you are a European Union citizen. Yeah, there's Hungary and actually we have a great history of borders. Hungary's border had changed many times, and Hungary used to be three times bigger than nowadays, but it's still a great country though. Actually, I would like to tell you a story. Do you know Sopron? It's a Hungarian city called city of faith because when Hungary's borders after the World War were taken, so lands from Hungary were taken, Sopron was also taken but the citizens of Sopron disagreed with this and they fought for their freedom. There was a vote where the citizens of Sopron voted to belong still to Hungary and they won it and Hungary gave the nickname of the city of faith to Sopron. Actually, we have a lot of time and I have a little help for myself so I will take that. So as we know borders have a lot of advantages and disadvantages, as I said, for example, like in the European Union where you can cross borders with an ID card only, it's easier to find a job and, if you want to travel, it's a lot easier, but it has disadvantages for sure as the security system is not as safe maybe as in other countries. Smuggling can be done easier, but I think in the European Union, it's not that usual as in for example America, you know the border between Mexico and America, illegal immigrants and smuggling is an everyday thing there. It's not that usual in Europe, but still can happen. [00:05:02] So my opinion of borders is that it's good on one hand and the other hand it's not that good as just like everything in life has two sides. Yeah, in my opinion borders should be like the European Union. I think that's the perfect example because we still have our borders. It shows where the countryside is, but we can travel across freely. Yeah, that should be maybe like this in the whole world and borders should be only the natural borders. But as we know the world doesn't work like that. So it's not that easy. (pause) Okay, so let's talk a little bit more of Hungary's history. I don't know if you know but our history it's more than 1,000 years, Hungary's history. So it's a long time. We took lands for ourselves and then they take them back. That's how it was. But actually after the World War that was maybe the saddest thing. One day took lands from us because people there (lived? left?) as Hungary and they, though they talk about themselves as Hungarians, they didn't have a choice where to belong. They just took away the land with the people too. And for those Hungarians who got abroad like that life sometimes can be very hard because in other countries around Hungary the citizens who are from that country and Hungarians who go to live in that country, getting along is sometimes hard for them. They don't really accept Hungarians, not everyone but some of the people, and you know, it's bad for them because they can't speak anymore their mother language. They needed to learn another language too and they need to live their everyday life speaking a foreign language, even though they think about themselves as Hungarians, and that's their mother language. They still need to speak another language. But they didn't forget where they come from and most of them are still proud of that they are Hungarians even though they don't live in the country. Yeah, so that's a disadvantage of borders. In my opinion, if I could say in a perfect world there wouldn't be borders because in my opinion every people are equal, the colour or religion doesn't matter. We are all equal so we wouldn't need borders in a perfect world for sure. But that's how it should work in my opinion. Of course every people and every country could keep their habits [00:10:02] and their religion, but it shouldn't affect on the fact that we are all equal and just because there is a border between us we won't be different. Yeah, so that's how it should be. I think it's hard to make it out because not all the people think like this for sure. But if it would be that easy, then we could make the perfect world with deleting races and borders and everything which separates the U.S. and which stands in the way that we are equal. And I think it would be easier if every people spoke the same language, maybe every everyone's life would be easier because we could travel around the world and we could speak wherever and they would understand. But that's just dreaming. So yeah before the Russians left Hungary in the 80s the transportation was not available from Hungary to any other European countries, only countries where Russians were taking place. So people couldn't travel freely. Nowadays, it's a lot easier since we joined to the European Union, but before that was pretty hard time because the border of Hungary worked like a wall which separated us from the world and from improving everything even though it was not our choice. We were forced like that, but that was a really big advantage and I think that had a main cause on that why Hungary is at that point nowadays, as where it is in economic and every other point. But we are developing and try catching up to Europe, even if it's hard, but we are doing our best since we are not separated like that anymore. So yeah if I could say one thing, that should be that borders shouldn't exist anymore, like these kinds of walls, borders could just stay in the countryside and not more. The border shouldn't stop people of following their dreams or travels really or go abroad and live abroad if that's what they like because it [00:15:02] many times can happen that someone born in a country which they don't really like or they can't find them themselves, and if they can't travel and search for a place where they can find these, then their whole life can be ruined. And as we know there are many countries still nowadays where you can't travel that easily. But we should keep working on that to make it easier for people to travel wherever they want in the world without too harsh facilities. And let everyone, and give everyone the opportunity to choose where to live, I think. So because, you know, as I told before, borders sometimes mean more than just the countryside. Too much nationalism can cause that people will hate other (nationalities) without a reason. Just because that's how they were grown up and without an exact reason. They hate other countries or even, because of the culture, I think if travelling was easier and people were more open-minded, if we weren't that separated also in our mind, then we could understand each other easier and get to know other cultures and not just get to know but also understand and accept it.

Part 2

BS: Okay, so my name is (gives real name - GamingScorpion) and as you will tell from my accent, I'm from Scotland. Now, Scotland has a very famous and historic border. That is with England. That border is called, was formed as part of the Roman Empire. It represented this as far as the Roman Empire managed to get in Europe, it spread all the way up to the border with Scotland. It's called Hadrian's Wall and that was the point where, that as far as Roman soldiers got, they didn't get any further. It's thought because the Scottish, the people who lived in Scotland at the time, were very good at defending or attacking the Romans, especially attacking the Romans, and therefore the Romans sought to defend themselves from the people of Scotland, the Picts, by building Hadrian's Wall, I think if I'm correct in saying so. So for me as a Scotsman when I think of borders that's one that automatically comes to mind and I think about Hadrian's Wall. Although the wall is all but destroyed now, there's still little parts of it available to see, and it represents more. It's still the border between England and Scotland, but it doesn't have any great meaning beyond that. But when I think of borders and, it goes back to the point by Hadrian's Wall, not just Hadrian's Wall, but when I think about borders, I think very much about another world, the Berlin Wall in Berlin now. I've been to Berlin once and I was very fortunate to see the wall and I find that very a moving experience because I've always had a great love of history and, growing up and reading about the Second World War and then the events afterwards and the Cold War, seeing the berlin Wall to me was very very meaningful and very moving, and for me that represents a border. Now what has a border is the question I think that we are being asked to discuss, and I cannot offer any hard and fast textbook definition, but I would say a border is probably... When I read borders or hear of borders or think about borders, I think about politics, I think about political division between countries and sometimes within countries, I think about the politics that underlies the setting up of the border and the reason why it's there and what it seeks to do. Now, what does a border seek to do, we might want to ask ourselves, and I suppose it can be seen from the Hadrian's Wall example of being something that stops people from crossing. So the Picts, the early Scots from crossing into what was then Roman territory and attacking them, so it can be used to defend against migrants. But I suppose a border can also be used in the example of the Berlin Wall, it can be used to stop people from escaping. So that's two very different things, but it's still a border, it can stop people from crossing either to attack or to escape into a more wealthy and healthy land, or it can imprison people, and I find that a very very interesting and sad at the same time aspect. I do not think. I am perhaps more realistic or perhaps less optimistic than yourself in thinking that we could have a world without any borders. Unfortunately, I don't think that's [00:05:00] the case. I see many people who choose to build up borders within countries and between countries, and a border is an unfortunate fact or maybe even in fortunate fact, but there's not just the geographical border, which is what probably everyone thinks of it immediately. I'm doing a keynote on this early evening tonight, and I'm not just talking about geographical borders, but I'm also talking about the metaphorical borders which Machteld took touched on earlier on. For me that's just as important that are there are borders between people, there are borders between people in academia or in all walks of life that stop people from having open discussions with one another, that stop people from getting on with one another, and that can be facilitated in many ways by the media, politicians, industry, by people who see the border as serving a function for them. So the border is not just a physical entity. It can be a process, it can be an invisible entity that stops people from interacting with one another so freely and if indeed at all. So that's something I see in relation to 'what is a border?' But then I've given some examples of what I think a border is, and what other people will think a border is depends on who they are. So the example of the refugees, they will see the border as being a challenge, as being something to get over, to get round, to be able to get through to try and find a better land, a safer land, a place to live where they will not be under persecution or under the threat of war or economic hardship, where they can get a job. So in that respect a border is a great challenge for them, but for statesmen in whatever land, they will see the borders being something that is to be defended. They will see it just like the Romans, they will see a means for security, rightly or wrongly. And so I think we have to bear that in mind when we're thinking about what does a border mean to other people and, as I said, a border will have different roles, values and purposes depending on who you talk to and who you ask. So if you ask the migrant, they would give you a different example to me. If you ask them immigration officer, they would give another example different to both me and the migrant. Borders act as imaginary lines in some cases as dots on a map to signify you're leaving one country and entering another, and as you said, that can represent a moving from one culture to another, and is that so bad that you go from one culture to another? I think not. One of the things I've always loved when I travel, when I go abroad, is to see new lands and new cultures, and if we all spoke the same language, which I don't think would be possible even in an ideal world, I think then we would all have the same culture and I would not like that. I think we should accept and celebrate diversity in culture, and to accept and to celebrate that the border enables people to have different cultures, to have different languages, [00:10:00] and to see that as being not something that's bad, that something needs to be changed or to be wiped out, but something that should be celebrated and embraced and acknowledged and respected. So I'm here the first time in Austria and for me, although I've been to Germany a couple of times, I've never been to Austria, so they are separate, this is a Germanic nation and culture, and for me it's interesting to be reminded and to see a new form of Germanic culture. And again if we didn't have borders, I don't know if we could have that so well. But there is a bad side to borders. I've already talked about it. But borders have been used by the media, by the press, by politicians, right-wing politicians, to subjugate people, to enclose them in prison, to separate people, to separate families. I don't need to give any examples. The USA being a prime one. And that's an unfortunate fact of the world, but it's a fact that I do not like. In that respect we should be trying to do what we can to ensure that the border is less divisive, is less of a barrier, and that we can enable humanity and humankind and kindness to reign. But again that is something I think that is probably going to be quite a challenge. So we have that aspect as well now. One of the things that I realize is that my main interest of my love of borders arises not from any academic work that I've done. My background, I should say, is in social sciences and psychology, but I have worked in the area of health services research throughout my career, until I wrote my book about conferences now. I've always since I was a young boy had a great interest in countries and atlases and maps and capital cities, and I would try and remember all the different capital cities and all the different borders and maps and everything. And so that interest is now being ignited by my being here at this conference today, but also my looking at stuff in relation to my talk tonight. These are things that I find very interesting that I can relate to, that I can help to understand better, to give me a better understanding of the border. So that is something that allows me to engage with the conference because it's not one that I've been to before, and as I said, there's the cultural worlds. In borderland studies and in the borders themselves, as I said, I've giving you examples of Hadrian's Wall and the Berlin Wall. Another memorable example of a border that I've been to is in Switzerland, just outside of Basel, there is a piece of land called Dreilaendereck, a three-land meeting point between Switzerland and France, and on the other side of the river Germany in front of Switzerland, and that is marked by a sign-post, and it's a place that I've visited the three times that I've been to Basel. I find that a very memorable place because you can see the three different countries, but also you see there are flags and it reminds you that you can be in one country and at its very extreme. And then you're literally just a [00:15:00] stone's throw from another country, another culture. And I think that exciting. I don't find that intimidating at all. Another country that I have a great deal of love and respect for is the Netherlands. The reason I am mentioning that is because part of the Netherlands has a border with Belgium. There is a town in Belgium and the Netherlands and it's one time that it crosses the border and so it encapsulates both the countries and it has different signs so it has, the French has, I think it's the Flemish street names and then the Dutch street names, and I've not been to that but I've seen it on the TV, I've seen it in books, and I think it's a wonderful example of a place where people can be together and where they can live in a place where, yes, there is a border but that border is not so divisive. As I said, I keep coming back to this point over and over again, that borders, it depends who is in charge, who holds the power in the country? And what do they see as being the purpose of a border, what they see as being useful in the use of a border, so in that example between Belgium and the Netherlands, nobody uses it in a hostile way, no one's going to say we want this part of the town or that part. There's no searchlights, there's no barbed wire, there's no wall. It's just a little marking down the side of a street. I suppose if you were in the best of both worlds, yes, we could have borders, but not borders of barbed wires and fences and search-posts and lights and guns, but borders with just markings on the road saying you are now leaving the Netherlands, you are now entering Belgium, something like that, which I would think that as being a very good way for taking borders onwards. What more can I say? So yeah as I said, borders are also metaphorical, there's borders between people, right now between yourself and myself. Again, this is not deliberate. This is just something that comes with the - if you pardon the expression - comes with the territory. Me being who I am, where I come from, you being who you are. So there's the border of language. You're kindly speaking in English. You speak it very well. I could not speak Hungarian at all or even German. So there is a linguistic border there that we are managing to get round in a way, but it might also be a border that you may be struggling at times with my accent or some of the words I'm saying, you might be thinking I speak too fast, you might be thinking I speak too slow. You're having to think in a foreign language to understand what I'm saying and appreciate me. So I have a distinct advantage over you in that respect. So there is that border, there's also the border of jobs and experience, and that I have been a postdoc, I'm a PhD, I've done research for 17 years. And you're a student so there is a border in that respect. But I'm hoping that we've managed not to rely too much in these borders that we have between ourselves, and that we have been able to so far hold the conversation in a way that is useful, helpful, meaningful.

No dialogue was recorded.