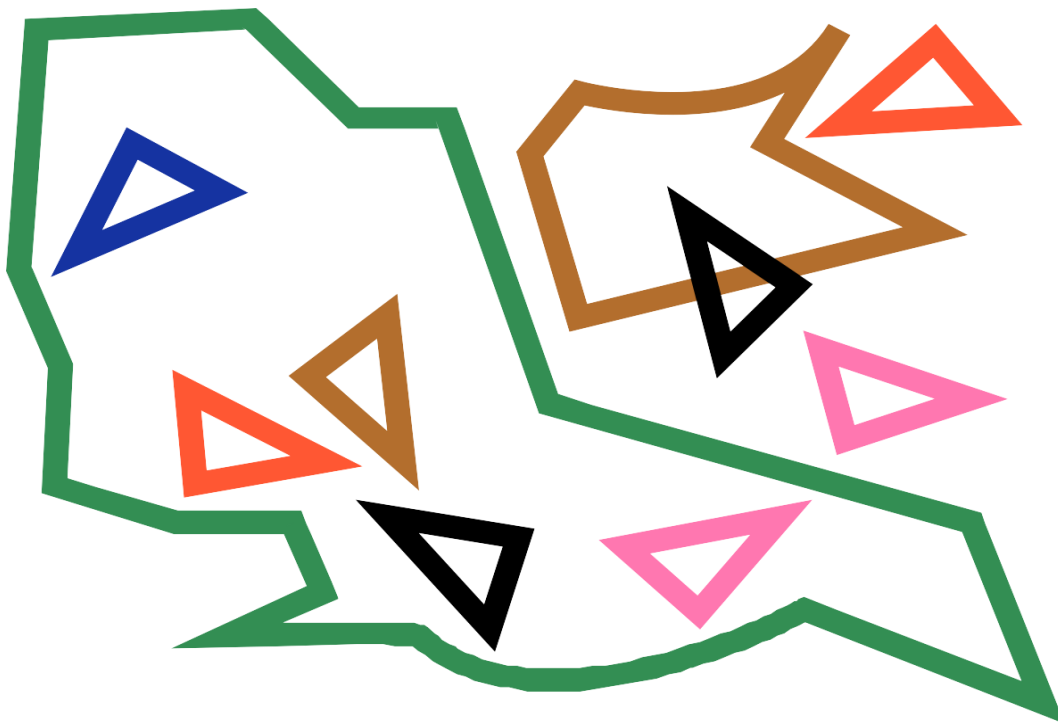


Policy Brief # 5

# **Borders, Border Regions and Europe – Interim Policy Recommendations**

B-Shapes - Borders Shaping Perceptions of European  
Societies



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## Bridging Research and Policy

Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies (B-SHAPES) is a Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Action project analysing and assessing how borders still are a key factor in how we understand societies. While research conducted by eight European universities constitutes the core of the project, B-SHAPES distinguishes itself by active engagement with other sectors. In addition to academic partners, the B-SHAPES consortium comprises an art collective, a consultancy an interest organization, a national museum and a foundation<sup>1</sup>.

B-SHAPES continuously summarizes and disseminates key findings from the research in a way which can support an evidence-informed approach to policy debates. It thereby offers considerations for policy makers and those interested in the role of borders in a wider context of EU Cohesion policy and practice. This Policy Brief (#5) takes stock of tentative policy recommendations that have been produced two years into the project. These tentative policy recommendations will be discussed and further elaborated with different sets of stakeholders before the project will conclude with a final set of policy recommendations in March 2026.



## Evidence, Analysis, and Results

The policy recommendations span four fields, drawing on four sets of data collection:

- (1) Border closures and attitudes to Europe: Articles published 2019-2024 in 18 regional or regionally oriented newspapers from the Franco-German, Danish-Swedish, Polish-German-Czech, and Hungarian-Slovak border regions.
- (2) National minorities in border regions: Analysis of 1700 articles published in minority media newspaper articles at the Czechia-Poland, Denmark-Germany, Italy-Austria, Hungary-Slovakia borders.
- (3) Landscape as heritage in border regions: A total of 104 documents originating in four border regions: the Finnish-Swedish border region (32 documents), the Swedish-Danish Öresund region (24 documents), the Danish-German border region (31 documents), and the Bulgarian borderland triangle with Greece and Turkey (17 documents).
- (4) Cultural and cultural heritage in border regions: A total of 64 policies relevant to the eight border regions comprising all ten national borders covered in the project

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<sup>1</sup> B-SHAPES is coordinated by the Centre of Border Region Studies at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). Other partners in the consortium are: Brunel University London, Halmstad University, University of Oulu, University of Wrocław, University of Strasbourg, ELTE University in Budapest, Technical University of Liberec in the Czech Republic, EURAC Research, the Bulgarian Museum of National History, the Lungomare artists' collective in South Tyrol (Italy), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR/AGEG/ARFE), KREATUS Consultancy, and the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity Foundation.



## Issue: Border closures and attitudes to Europe

**Policy recommendation target group:** EU member states, local cross-border stakeholders

**Proportionality:** as part of ongoing amendments of the Schengen Borders Code<sup>2</sup>, it is suggested that a common definition of the principle of proportionality should be established to prevent overreactions from border enforcement agencies and an excessive burden on cross-border students, families, and commuters.

**Bilateral coordination:** by definition, reimposition of border controls involves national rules on border closures and checks, but borders are subject to at least two national policy regimes. There should thus be a requirement to coordinate such impositions with the neighbouring state's government on an interjurisdictional basis, which takes into account the particular implications for border regions, their population, and other actors within the civil and economic fabric of the region. Relevant contact persons at all levels of government should be named.

**Local consultation:** to minimise the impact on cross-border students, families, and commuters, border regional stakeholders with local knowledge, such as EGTCs or Euroregions, should be consulted in designing and implementing rules governing border closures and checks. Clear rules on who is responsible for implementing policy should be established, with clear guidelines if private companies are to be involved in implementation.

**Preparation:** to prepare for possible future border closures, each member state should be required to publish acceptable forms of paperwork that allows cross-border students, families, and commuters to prove their cross-border connections, making exemptions easier to implement. As also recommended elsewhere<sup>3</sup>, joint cross-border emergency plans should be prepared for all border regions.

**Communication and information:** to avoid misunderstandings and fake news, efficient bilateral communication channels should be established to function in emergencies and beyond and facilitate cross-border, multi-level governance. As knowledge is seen as an essential tool to reduce uncertainties and fears, information points and hotlines should be set up to provide helpful information on EU and national rules that may impact cross-border mobility, labour market, education or everyday life of citizens.

**Promoting the narrative of an inclusive Europe:** The European integration process has recently been put to the test by re-borderings related to migration, the COVID-19 pandemic and securitisation issues. Despite 50 years of the Schengen Agreement, the idea of open borders as one of the foundations of the EU has been vulnerable to nationalist and Eurosceptic discourses in many member states. Europe's strength lies in its inclusive approach to diversity and cross-border exchanges, which drive economic growth and prosperity. Borderlands, with their open borders, play an essential role in this process as interstices of intercultural contact and hybridisation. To better communicate the benefits of the Schengen Agreement and European integration to societies, member states, local actors and civil society representatives should more actively promote the narrative of an inclusive Europe, highlighting the contributions of borderlands, immigrants and minority groups, and thus countering negative attitudes towards Europe and European Union.

<sup>2</sup> Council of the EU, 'Schengen: Council and European Parliament agree to update EU's borders code, press release, 6 February 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/02/06/schengen-council-and-european-parliament-agree-to-update-eu-s-borders-code/> (accessed 17 April 2024)

<sup>3</sup> Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) and European Union, 'The effects of COVID-19 induced border closures on cross-border regions', Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021



## Issue: National minorities in border regions

**Policy recommendations target group: Media Organizations and Media Networks in areas with National Minorities**

- **Diversify Voices in Reporting:**

- Include perspectives from civil society, women, young people, and migrants to provide a more comprehensive and diverse narrative on border-related issues.
- Actively seek diverse interview partners and perspectives
- Reflect diversity in the composition of the newspaper staff and boards
- Create spaces for reflective discussions on male gender bias in journalism
- Create or contribute to databases of experts from under-represented contexts (e.g. women, civil society organisations, migrants, local inhabitants, and persons with disabilities)
- Cooperate and participate in journalism training on male gender bias
- Cooperate with journalism training providers on diversity and inclusion issues, including male gender bias.
- Cooperate with journalism training providers to enhance knowledge about EU integration and European cohesion issues.

- **Emphasize Human Stories:**

- Balance what is a tendency to focus on institutional and policy reporting with attention to the reporting of human stories that emphasize the social and emotional significance of borders for minority communities, fostering a more personal connection to the European project.
- Follow the journeys/stories of individuals who cross borders for safety, economic opportunity, or family reunification, featuring local residents and their interactions with the border.
- Feature the human stories of marginalized people

- **Highlight the EU's Role in the local contexts:**

- Increase coverage of the European Union's role and activities in border regions, such as cross-border initiatives, cultural exchanges, and policies that enhance the mobility and socio-economic opportunities for minorities and border region residents generally.
- Establish a dedicated "Europe" section / feature
- Integrate local concerns with broader European contexts by highlighting how local border issues relate to the larger European integration process and the shared heritage, values, and beliefs of the EU
- Create greater awareness of the link between the human story and the EU policy or intervention that is a factor in the human story



## Issue: Landscape as heritage in border regions

**Policy recommendations target groups: EU member states and subnational policymakers**

- Promote transnational landscape and heritage plans and programs
- Promote phenomena-based holistic and inclusive policymaking
- Promote a specific focus on supporting place-based landscapes narratives which create space for the expression of intersectional identity in border regions as an asset for development and inclusion
- Include border landscape as heritage in national curriculums and at different educational levels
- Offer recourses and opportunities for local schools in the border regions to develop place-based teaching and relevant excursions (such as nature reservations, museums, historical sites) as part of their curriculums
- Promote cross-border cooperation and initiatives at schools and other local and regional organizations
- Emphasize the landscape and heritage aspects more strongly in funding schemes (e.g. Interreg), including better connecting cross-border heritage with the UNESCO world heritage label
- Promote different stakeholder events and inclusion of various actors across the border
- Promote the use of minority competencies and inclusion of minorities in policymaking for border regions

### **Raise awareness of the European Union and its role in landscape heritage planning and conservation**

- Discuss the European Union's heritage from the different perspectives of everyday life, shared culture and values. Widen the representation of the EU in:
  - Media
  - Culture events
  - Funding schemes

**Promote inclusive planning, heritage-making and regional branding activities.** The narratives of border minority communities and their landscape as heritage need to be designed by, supported with resources, and agreed together with and between the communities whom they concern. The emphasis on experiences of minorities in border regions could be a way to promote more inclusive heritage policies, as can taking account of those border regions which have more advanced intercultural and cross-border narratives underpinning civic, heritage-related, cultural and tourism-related activities.



## Issue: Cultural and cultural heritage in border regions

**Policy recommendation target group:** EU member states, EU, subnational stakeholders

- Overall**, the analysis suggests there is greater potential for connectivity between processes and multistakeholder models for regional cross-border cooperation, and individual member state policy frameworks for heritage and cultural heritage. In some cases, this join-up will be achievable at the level of a specific borderland, but this will largely depend on levels of territorial subsidiarity, the degree to which heritage is valued locally and nationally, and on the presence of pro-active and connected policymakers and practitioners. Overall, at an EU level this issue may benefit from further exploration with senior policy makers at a central EU institutional level working respectively on regional policy and on heritage with member states, to determine opportunities for read-across and more connected, joined-up working in ways which can release the potential of borderlands as collaborative fields for heritage and cultural heritage.
- Work across scales:** Actors should work more closely across scales (national, regional and municipal) to release the potential for both heritage and cultural conservation for their intrinsic value, and then secondarily within for instance the field of tourism. Heritage and culture as areas of policy and delivery are not only dependent on political and administrative policy making but also on specialist knowledge of practitioners- for example, archaeologists, heritage conservation specialists, historians, ecologists, landscape and conservation architects and so on. There is value in investing in forums where the technical and professional stakeholders who can drive cross-border approaches to heritage and cultural policy and strategy development. While modern jurisdictional borders may define an administrative territory, historical or ancient landscapes or shared heritage which runs across borders can only be articulated and brought to modern day policymakers with the agency of the technical and professional community interacting with policy and decision-making systems. The value of working cross-border with the heritage assets themselves provides opportunities for other sectors, but such approaches should be focused on the intrinsic value of heritage rather than on commercialization, as the latter can put the integrity of the former at risk. Conversely, well-conserved heritage in cross-border areas has considerable potential to grow SME sectors in tourism, culture and arts, landscape management, technical and professional services associated with heritage assets. Examples of where Member State policy and implementation work cross-border include Ireland's National Monuments Service. The NMS has at central government level committed to and operationalized an approach to developing and conserving cross-border heritage ranging from prehistoric to modern historical periods. Its approach is characterized by partnership working across the heritage sector, local government sector, NGOs and with its neighbouring jurisdiction of Northern Ireland/UK. Ireland with the UK also has a cross-border UNESCO Geopark (Cuilcagh Lakelands). Equally, other initiatives such as *b-solutions* are working to assist cross-border natural resource areas in developing governance frameworks for integrated approaches to natural heritage resources (e.g. AEBR's work with EGTC Rio Minho on the Spain-Portugal border).
- Utilize national minorities but also new minorities:** National minorities constitute important potential actors, newly arrived residents and citizens constitute an underused resource in the cross-border regional space. Cultural landscapes in a border context can change and often be more diverse and innovative than in the interior of countries. This again provides for richness and opportunities of scalability, added value and sustainable economic opportunities for borderlands. It can also revive the historical concept of borderlands as places of diversity, of

meeting places, where differences are celebrated as part of the richness of the region. The EU and Member States should pay attention to building such competencies not only in border regions but also at the centres of decision making -and not only as a feature of national diplomacy but also as a driver for development cooperation. The EU cannot function effectively without the high levels of intercultural competency which are exercised within its processes and institutions, For the future of Europe, intercultural competency (which implies considering the other, considering how policies can reach across traditional boundaries and create new choices for societies) should perhaps be valued as much as multilingualism for they are two sides of the same coin. An example of a border region where there is considerable historical precedent and potential for piloting such initiatives, while outside of the case study region, is the cross-border region between Romania and Hungary- the historical province of Transylvania, where for example the city of Oradea in Romania operates an historically informed power-sharing model of decision-making based on intercultural co-operation. Europe's borderlands are full of historical landscapes which predate contemporary borders and are therefore a hugely rich ground for developing intercultural competencies and awareness of how decision-making and policymaking can embrace rather than reject the complexity of borderlands.

- **Sustainability:** Cross-border policy design, codesign, and collaborative implementation in heritage is crucial for sustainability. Where cross-border shared natural heritage is concerned, and in responding to the climate crisis, there is a global and ethical imperative for transboundary working in the conservation and stewardship of natural heritage resources. The extent to which these are publicly valued often lies in cultural memories either obscured or activated as narratives which can build capacity for public values relating to heritage in borderlands, whether natural, built, archaeological, artistic, scientific or cultural. Transboundary collaborative governance needs to be explored, and capacity built at all levels of public governance for such processes and models. It also requires the development of shared understanding of natural heritage in border territories where it is even more important that policies do have a cross-border dimension or potential for delivery in partnership with neighbouring states- either at local, regional, central or all three levels. A specific issue which can also benefit from cross-border approaches and economic of scale in investments is the conservation of built and archaeological heritage in the context of damage from climate change, and energy efficiency in the context of historic buildings.
- **Include young people:** Intergenerational approaches to rediscovering and reimagining heritage and cultural landscapes in borderlands can prove a rich area for cultural innovation, social and civic cohesion, and the generation of heritage, arts, cultural and tourism-related SMEs in borderlands which conserve heritage and cultural resources as core assets. The involvement of young people in interpretation and in building a public understanding of heritage and cultural assets in border regions is crucial for the future. Interventions should be supported across the EU where young people are given the opportunity to engage with each other and in dialogue and interpreting heritage and culture of their borderlands. National cultural and heritage agencies should be involved in such initiatives and also consult with young people on how best to ensure that heritage and culture are seen as valuable assets for cohesion and sustainability for the future
- **More Europe:** The idea of borderlands as cross-border heritage and cultural heritage landscapes may benefit from further work to connect regional policy with EU-wide heritage and cultural heritage policymaking at central EU institutional level across functional administrative areas e.g. within the European Commission. The creation of fora where these policy alignment discussions can happen may assist with greater co-ordination and transmission of ideas across administrative boundaries within Member States engaging with the European Commission



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