

## Editorial

*Catrin Heite, Fabian Kessl & Susanne Maurer*

Borders mark but also construct and (re-)produce spaces, conceptualised as being given in a homogenous and in the same time in an enclosed way. Beyond such concepts, which take borders in a narrow sense as territorially fixed and given phenomena, the papers in this SW&S.Special Issue try to decode borders as historical, social and cultural formats and processes. The premise of the following papers is therefore that borders – or boundaries - can't be defined 'out of themselves', but they should be understood in relation to their symbolical dimensions and the surrounding spaces, the included and excluded parts. Borders are in this sense conceptualised in a strict relational way and are not limited to a territorial meaning. Otherwise, if we draw or change borders, e.g. as a geographical line, we already (re) produce or question the imagined unity of a space, a scene or a sphere embraced by these borders.

So, the existing borders are always a result of processes ordering the social. Insofar, they are a result of symbolic, social, political as well as territorial power relations. In this sense the sociologist Georg Simmel has already defined the moment of making a border as a process of marking and making social orders. For Simmel borders were main theoretical and analytical figures to develop an adequate thinking of modern societies.

The papers in this SW&S.Special Issue argue on that theoretical background. They try to illustrate the analytical potential of such a “border-analytical” notion in respect to a critical (re)working of and along borders in general and a re-arrangement of boundaries in social work and public services in special. Different aspects are focused in the different papers: border work by social work professionals as well as by public service institutions or by user groups, but also the political and institutional contexts of existing borders.

The term “border” or “boundary” is used by different disciplines, like geography, philosophy, migration studies, educational sciences or social work. Attached to such different perspectives the topic is conceptualised in different ways and by different theoretical approaches.

Research on the current regimes of migration and on the politics of border protection allude the fact that borders are powerful, because they can define – in this case as markers of a national territory – how people are allowed to move and act. This power of influence and definition can already lead to a decision about living or dying. Studies on such border politics do suggest a dual model of borders: borders are not only local, visible and material structures of border protection (external direction), but also institutional and symbolical arrangements (internal direction): Borders are therefore the result of interactions between actors, but at the same time they constitute an own unity, which is independently from those, and therefore structuring social orders. Borders in that sense do have an acting dimension, following Bruno Latour. They are not a passive structure and not only territorial, but a political, social und normative momentum. Borders structure and provoke human acting.

This notion has a kind of double-face – it can be applied to highlight social work's function as collective actor managing and also reproducing social inequality or producing normalizing effects by the application of normative standards in regard of people's life situations and conduct. On the other hand social work has historically been developed also as an attempt to soothe class conflicts and social injustice, to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor and to create a supporting infrastructure to allow a decent living for everybody. The contributions in the SW&S.Special Issue show how concepts of border working challenge social work practice as well as social work research and raise fundamental questions by focusing on social work as an agency working on the border(s).