

In betweenness

From the borderlands' experiences to a personal approach: Graz and Pècs.

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1. Introduction

"In Between? Searching for Local Histories in Borderlands of Europe" is a project driven by the [European Network Remembrance and Solidarity](#) (ENRS) that aims at "encouraging a young generation of Europeans to explore 20th-century history by talking to those who have lived it". Its second edition was held on September 12-22, 2016, and gathered young scholars aged 18-25 of five European nationalities.

After participating in a common workshop in Warsaw, the group split into four teams that travelled to the Austrian-Slovenian border near Graz; Czech Switzerland, where the Czech Republic, Germany, and Poland meet; the basin of the Danube and Drava rivers on the Hungarian-Croatian border; and to Transcarpathia, a borderland of Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary.



Student's team in Warsaw



Visit to the [Warsaw Rising Museum](#)

2. The project's structure

This edition of *"In Between?"* was organized in order to favour the search of an aware development about the meaning of concepts, as well as to help personal reflexion translated into different outputs that could reflect the process.

On the first week, Warsaw welcomed a four-day workshop focused on preparing materials, getting familiar with the suitable mechanical and archiving tools, learning interview methods and becoming confident with the empathy skills needed to manage and face personal stories of families in the borderlands. The workshop was designed as the base to deepen into a project that is not only about collecting personal stories, but about

approaching historical, cultural and political issues that represent big changes in the life experiences of those individuals, building subjectivities in a field that is not a defined place, not a defined word, not a defined concept, but “in between”: nationalities, minorities, collective, community perceptions made of individual lives.



Getting familiar with the cameras

The aim of the four-day lessons was to provide students with enough knowledge, make them able to work in good group dynamics, clarifying different kind of roles that members of the four sub-groups should develop in situ, during the interviews. Students shared knowledge and learned about photography, video, audio, and archiving procedures, as well as methods and questionnaires, getting ideas and inspiration for the staging. This training time was essential and inspiring and allowed a first approach to the four field work groups.

Workshops in Warsaw were carried out by Anna Czyżewska (oral history); Dorota Bodoraj and Tomasz Kaczor (photography in related context); Mateusz Bolesta, Magdalena Hartwig, Łukasz Karolewski and Małgorzata Kołtun (collecting archives); Maria Buko (systematizing and describing archive materials); and Mateusz Siwek and Maciej Molewski (video camera and sound recording).



Oral History workshop with Anna Czyżewska

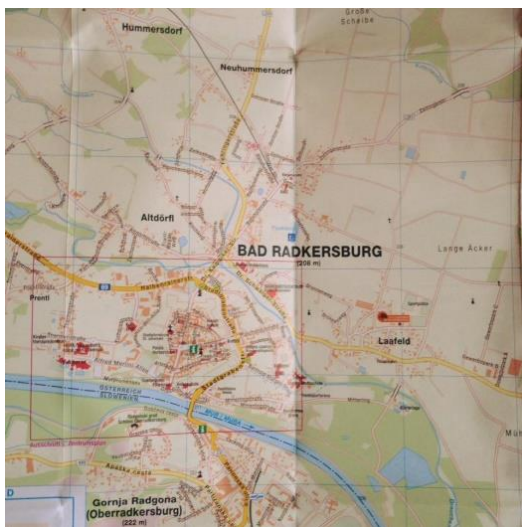
3. An approach to the group dynamics and the projects carried out in the borderlands of Graz and Pécs.

3.1. Bad Radkersburg

Austrian-Slovenian border (Graz)

ANDREA SIERRA BAZ

The [Bad Radkersburg](#) group was formed by Teresa Brenner (Translations-Austria), Karoliná Bukovská (History and German for Translation and Interpreting-Czech Republic), Sebastian Günzel (European Studies- Germany), Hanna Kovkan (Intercultural Communication-Ukraine), Tena Lavrenčič (Social and Cultural Anthropology- Croatia) and Andrea Sierra Baz (Humanities- Spain). It was supported by two local coordinators, David Kranzelbinder, photographer and coordinator of the Styrian-Slovene cultural association Pavlova Hisa (Pavel Haus), and Alexandra Kofler, historian, and journalist of "Kleine Zeitung", and also by Marta Jakubowska, our ENRS group coordinator.



Bad Radkesburg map

We've been working on interviews during the four days we spent in Bad Radkersburg, and each one of us had a specific role: sound recording, pictures, videos, taking notes while others were dealing with interviews and archiving. The stories highlighted the perception of borders, traditions, how it was and it is to live on the "other side", but also the difficulties challenged by people living in borders, such as looking for a job. While in Slovenia, for example, it was hard to earn money and make a living, many people head to Austria searching for working opportunities. That means leaving their families and being forced to adapt to a different culture and society. One of the interviewees, Maria Koertvelyesi, born in Slovenia, explained her experience as a young woman in three words: "Never give up". This is only one example of many emotional moments we had the opportunity to live.

On the fifth day, our local coordinators took us for a tour to visit the landscapes of the border. In the checkpoint of Bad Radkersburg and Gornja Radgona, we visited the old customs office, now transformed into a gallery of contemporary art named „Čezmejno genialno“. After a short interview with the co-owner, we crossed river Mur to Slovenia. Besides exploring the region, formed by beautiful wine yards, we also visited places related to the current refugee crisis – this border is currently one of the European corridors for people fleeing from Syria's war. During this tour, we could see a place that was used as a refugee camp in 2015, as well as the fence recently built by the Austrian government to control the border with Slovenia.



Mr. Wilfried Gombocz, the interviewee Karolina Bukowska and Andrea Sierra

It was an unforgettable experience during which we had the opportunity to learn about what is happening now on these borders in terms of cultural, social, economic and identity but also for deepening into personal and professional knowledge. We could also understand more about the meaning of being “in between”. While for some of our interviewees “borders are just in a piece of paper” (Doroteja Dvoršak, Slovenian, working as a waitress in Austria), for other it is a reality that divided the countries and their people at the end of the Second World War.

[Read more about this “In Between” story on the project’s website.](#)

3.2. Pécs

Croatian – Serbian – Hungarian borderland

NOELIA PAZ FERNÁNDEZ

The group was formed by seven young students from five European countries, and their mission was to meet the inhabitants, conduct and document interviews on the multicultural borderland region of Baranya County, Hungary. Although Pécs was the main venue of the project activities, participants also stopped at few other places: Erdősmecke, Pécsvárad, Sellye, Drávasztára and Piskó.

Julia Barandun (Political Sciences-Switzerland), Orsolya Gabriella Csizmár (Translation & Interpreting-Hungary), Máté Makaji (Architecture-Hungary), Klaudija Miceva (Tourism-Macedonia), Petra Mieth (History-Hungary), Noelia Paz Fernández (Art-Spain) were accompanied by Evelina Hägglund (Art-Sweden), and the ENRS coordinator, Beata Drzazga during this week. During the stay, we met representatives of six ethnic minorities living in the region - German, Romany, Croatian, Serbian, Polish and Greek – and conducted 15 interviews in six different languages – Hungarian, Serbian, Croatian, German, English, and Polish. Interviewees composed a multi-generational group of people, aged 18-90.



Pécs students' team in Erdősmecke.

Hungary is a key country due to its middle-central location in Europe. In Pécs it is particularly easy to observe how different cultures and religions started to mix in the territory, creating deep and complex identity situations. Most personal awareness of the families that interviewed was related to questioning identities regarding languages, places, traditions, objects, etc. Borderlands, in these cases, mark not only a physical divide but have a controversial effect: people need to be in a recognized place, a category from where they can that distinguish things. In other words, their systems of power need to set a definition for everybody, including the surrenders and must take into account that people have multi-diverse experiences that compose their real identity and cannot be judged under the same cultural rules.

It was curious to perceive that political issues in personal subjectivities were translated into big decisions and in a wider amplitude of identity. Questions such as “What does in between mean for you?” or “Do you feel you are in between?” raised controversial answers like “I always felt that I was something else than the others. When others were just Hungarian, I was also Croatian, both at the same time, with higher amplitude of identity inside me”. People no necessarily considered they are in an “in-between” situation.

These stories also awake current tolerance issues. Amongst the group, we carried out a discussion about a polemic topic in Europe: the Hungarian fence recently built in the Serbian border to restrict several refugee paths. The intense debate produced a conflict that resulted in loosening the schedule to include a visit to the wall-fence-border. And that happened to be one of the most emotional moments of all the project: to face that physical representation of a border made us think about all the circumstances arisen from a mere physical object, in terms of social,

political, cultural, identity issues, and human, human, human, and again human lives.



Julia Barandun interviewing Veronika Schleep

It was a week full of inspiring discussions, intense emotional experiences, but also of hard work during which participants managed to form a solid team. For each one of us, it meant something else. Some of the participants underlined the importance of practical skills they gained or developed (photography, video, and sound recording, or conducting interviews). For others, discussions and reflections shared during the workshop and the travel experience were the most valuable part of the project. For me, the real aim of In Between? was to create an experience that will have an impact on my personal and professional development, contributing to strengthening the historical awareness and understanding of the values of critical reflection, dialogue, and tolerance.

[Read more about this In Between story on the project's website](#)

4. Some general notes

This project opened a huge field of researching. Communications and social communications can run through many different mediums. Archiving documentation, interviewing, oral history, filming, building of artistic practices and projects that can express and transmit symbolical stories are key for the development of a common knowledge and essential for common awareness.

Borders should be a kind of open door to new opportunities. We consider that projects like "In Between" can promote tolerance and equality, and can help to avoid the repetition of lived situations of the past. The "in-betweenness" is not necessarily a condition for those living in and around borderlands. Maybe it is not a recognized space or a recognized state, but it is as real and as valid as the already-named categories.

Some of the interviewees only feel the original culture, others both the original and the experienced, others don't feel there is a need of insistence on the identity topic for the development of tolerance. The fixer human categories are, the more oppressed is the freedom of transformation and change, and the bigger is the feeling of being "in between". Especially on lands that have already been given a divisive sign.

Some voices

“Make love. No war.”

Wilfried Gombocz (Slovenia-Austria)

...

“But you can’t run a modern world in that way so we have to struggle to find modern identities in modern ways that we can relate to each other. [...] I think ideally our history should be our memories. [...] the most important thing is ethics. Learning to be a decent human being and having respect for other people and listening to other people’s stories and what their feelings are, and then you find that they are not that different. That ultimately we are all the same, we are all born of mothers and fathers, though that may be changing. You know that we all have childhoods and we all need affection and there’s, we have more in common than really what divides us, and it’s only an accident of history that we have created these cultures that divide us. And the future needs to generate a universal culture, whatever that will be.”

George Déak (Hungary-United States of America)

...

“Do we have to choose an identity? No. The more roots you have, the more you are”

Katalin Dretzki (Poland-Hungary)