

CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF BORDERS CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT & CALL FOR PAPERS

**The 2008 European Conference of the Association of Borderland Studies
University of Tromsø/Barents Institute, Kirkenes 11-13 September 2008**

Increasing focus has been given recently by geographers and historians to the role of cultural production and negotiation in social and territorial bordering processes. The ongoing spate of movies, documentaries, art projects, novels, websites, festivals and even tourist attractions concerning borders has given this aspect of bordering renewed topicality and economic importance, and has attracted research both in the humanities and in the social sciences. The stories such cultural practices and artefacts tell, and the images they project, give extra weight to questions about the location of borders and of border populations. In some cases, the border itself – a wall or a fence – becomes a cultural icon of great significance in the media and in everyday discourse. In a world of mobilities and securities, the outer peripheries of states are clearly linked to their hybridized urban landscapes and even to the bodies of immigrants and other border-crossers themselves. The cultural negotiation of contested borders is a crucial element of ongoing problems of security, freedom of movement, economic differentials, trafficking, fear of the other, etc.; it also promises the possibility of a creative refiguring of borders and cultural border zones into economically and symbolically productive sites of dialogue, crossing, hybridity and creativity. All these phenomena are the product of historical processes and take place in a shifting historical landscape which both creates a framework for and is formed by cultural practices. Borders are also a central metaphor in cultural theory, and there is need to reflect over the reasons for this.

This interdisciplinary conference will cross the academic divide between "border studies" in the social sciences and "border theory"/"border poetics" in the humanities in examining the ways cultural practices use discursive and semiotic strategies in order to imagine and negotiate the border in its social and historical context. It will attempt to further our understanding of the role of culture in subjective interactions with the border by border-crossers and by border zone dwellers. While focusing on these bottom-up perspectives, it will also raise questions about the need for localized solutions in top-down policy-making, actualised with the increasing economic significance of cultural production and consumption. It will ask who initiates and who benefits from such cultural practices, and what their symbolic effects are for social conditions. It aims to place cultural processes of bordering in historical contexts and show the role of cultural memory in the formation of borderscapes. It will trace the transferability of the border concept to questions of identity, subjectivity and medial exposition as facilitated by cultural practices.

A special focus of the conference will be the region in which it is set: the Norwegian-Russian-Finnish borderland and the wider contexts of the North Calotte, Barents and Arctic regions. The Arctic is an area in which the borders of the environment and energy production are being changed and are changing the geographical, historical, imaginative sense of place and space. This is a region of a layered, complex border history, of pressing social and environmental problems and possibilities involving many different cultural identities and ways of life, and of high importance today as a political and cultural hotpoint of "Western"-Russian relations within the the Artic and Sub-Arctic context. Kirkenes, an old mining town, lies at a point where the interests of many nations and indigeneous/minority groups meet, and has been a place of social,

economic, environmental, military and cultural confrontation; now it is a site of economic and cultural creativity involving the aspirations and self-narratives of local, national and global elites in an atmosphere of hybridity. It is centrally placed in relationship to the ongoing construction and contestation of territorial and symbolic borders in the Arctic sea against a background of rapid economic development of oil and gas resources. The conference will also include a final summing-up panel made up of scholars working from different perspectives on the Norwegian/Russian/Sámi/Kven/Finnish borderscape.

Suggested themes for panels:

- cultural border practices and sociological concepts of cultural belonging
- historical processes of cultural border-marking and negotiation
- economic and political importance of cultural borderings and border zone culture
- discursive, narrative, and symbolic strategies in border culture and border poetics
- the cultural turn in sociogeographical border studies
- cultural practice and social agency in border regions
- border ethics and Kantian "borderology" in a cultural frame
- culture as a source of critical perspectives on borders, justice and exclusion
- psychoanalytic understandings of cultural articulation of border subjectivity
- reflexivity in cultural border discourses and policy
- gender in the cultural production of borders
- the role of media as place of border dialogue
- external and internal borders in culturally mediated migration narratives
- new forms of art in the cultural negotiation of borders
- cultural borderscapes and historical memory
- border festivals, border art projects, border museums and border tourism
- Arctic and Sub-Arctic borders
- the cultural history of the Norwegian-Russian-Finnish borderland

Papers on both theoretical questions and on border zones worldwide, and particularly on the Norwegian-Russian-Finnish borderland, are welcome. The conference will be held in Kirkenes, in cooperation with the Barents Institute, and will include a field trip to the border and to cultural sites on both sides of the border, along with a visit to the Borderlands Museum in Kirkenes. **Please send abstracts for papers** by 15 March 2008 to Johan Schimanski (johan.schimanski@hum.uit.no). The registration deadline will be 1 May 2008. The registration fee of NOK 4640 **includes 3 hotel nights, full board and the field trip**. For more information and updates, see <http://uit.no/humfak/borderpoetics/3>.

Arrangers:

- Johan Schimanski & Stephen Wolfe, Border Poetics working group, University of Tromsø <<http://uit.no/humfak/borderpoetics/>>.
- Einar Niemi, History Department, University of Tromsø <<http://uit.no/historie/>>
- Urban Wråkberg, Research Director, Barents Institute, Kirkenes <<http://www.barentsinstitute.org/>> & participant in the project "The Construction and Negotiation of Borders", Barents Institute/Finmark University College/Research Council of Norway.