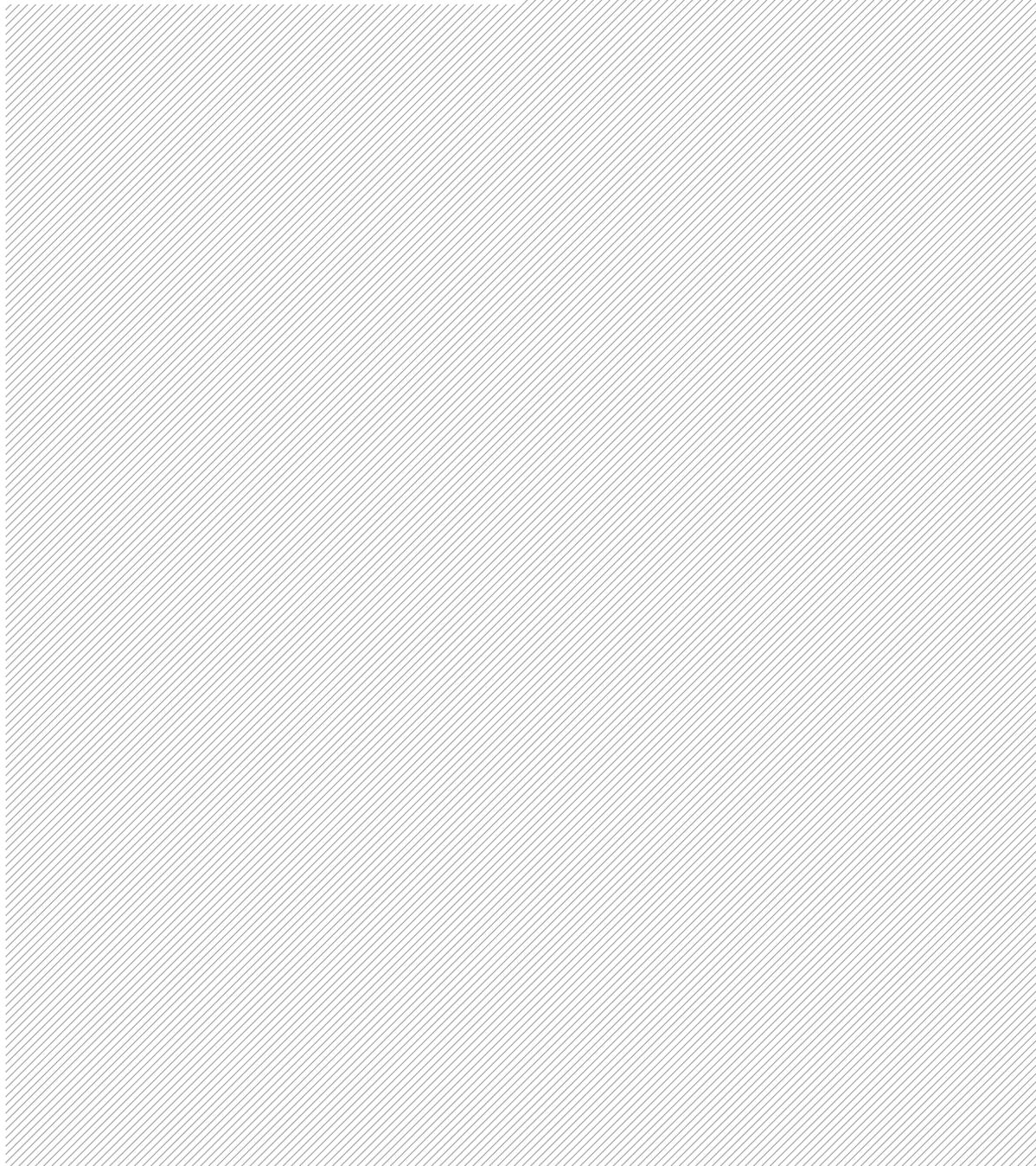


# BOOK REVIEW



# Border Life

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*Arvid Viken & Bjarge Schwenke Fors (ed.):*

***Grenseliv***

*Orkana Academic, 2014. 183 p.*

The book's title *Border Life* is poetic as well as providing a good indicator of its contents. The book offers what the title implies – reflections of people's lives along the border where 'border' means many things for people living there. 'Border' connotes a limitation, bounded territory, obstruction of movement and political institutional legitimization. It is through its inhabitants along this Norwegian-Russian border region that stretches over 196 km., that the region is filled with meaning, emotions, and human activities.

The book is the result of a research project The Construction and Negotiation of borders: Discourses related to the border between Norway and Russia, at the University of Tromsø The Arctic University of Norway (UiT). The book is multidisciplinary with various theoretical, methodological perspectives, written by 11 scientists from several scientific and disciplinary traditions. The book consists of 10 chapters, an introduction and epilogue. The chapters are organized into three thematic sections: 1). Border crossings (four chapters) 2). Frontiers on the borderline (three chapters) 3). Stagings on/off a limit (three chapters).borderline (three chapters) 3). Staging borders (three chapters).

The book is edited by Arvid Viken and Bjarge Schwenke Fors. Viken is a Professor of tourism at UiT. He has a research interest in destination development, location change, northern tourism, and border issues. Bjarge Schwenke Fors is a social anthropologist and border researcher. Schwenke Fors is affiliated with the EU-funded research project European Regions, EU External Borders and the immediate Neighbors Analyzing Regional Development Options through Policies and Practices and Cross-Border Cooperation (EUBORDERREGIONS).

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Border Research is a broad field which originates from limology. Traditionally limology reduced a given geographic unit and its function to passive markers of the government's spaciousness. Many scientists have been reproducing what is called a "territorial trap" that limits their research to legitimate political institutions and the so-called territorial materiality that the border represents. Later researchers have directed the attention towards those processes that constitute the border, where the border is understood as something circular and overlapping.

In the introductory chapter the editors give a general contextualization of the data presented in the chapters *Border and The great political content*. The book's main ambition is to illustrate how communities socially and culturally relate to the Norwegian-Russian border that is constantly changing. Globalization, politics, historical events as The Cold War, perestroika, Barents politics, new visa practices, and increased border crossings as a result of this constitutes a necessary context to understand what goes on at a micro level. The section "Border Research and border discourses" presents a general theoretical anchoring that falls under Scott's four border-categories: 1. Discursive, 2. Material/territorial manifestation, 3. Perceptual / emotional / border 4. Mediating border (art, culture, dissemination). Another central reference is Lefebvre (1991) and De Certeau (1984). Their models are not particularly clear and not fully implemented in the analysis, but works rather as a frame for further reading.

All in all this book is a collection of interdisciplinary studies that are well-written. These contributions highlight the border not as a given geographic entity, but rather as a construct that comes to life through the inhabitants' practices. The questions cover the importance of politics in the light of border residents' everyday lives, how they handle personal border issues, limit traffic and neighbouring citizens. The book discusses how the proximity to the border represents both a central dynamic and dysfunctional elements of community development.

The book focuses on negotiable aspects like art, culture, language, visa requirements, student exchanges, joint projects, tourism – anything that constitute human everyday life -- organizing, reconstructing, challenging, and constructing the "new" border. The border is here understood as the framework for life and work, culture, and society. Peter Haugseth's chapter *twin city in the Norwegian-Russian border zone* underlines explicitly how the Barents Region as a constructed place has become a brand and a laboratory for cooperation. Haugseth discusses how specific practices for cooperation enforce new place identities. Such questions can easily lead to answers that

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underpin political strategies that work to cultivate some "special" identities. Anne-Marit Rasmussen's data in the chapter "Suppose you do not find anything special here, then! Enough border focus" shows how young people want to be perceived as "normal" and will distance themselves from a stereotyping of Kirkenes as an exotic frontier. However, it is obvious that some practices and experiences are symptomatic for border cities, while some features are constructed. This is also what Viken and Espiritu contribution in "Border Regimes and Russification of Kirkenes" argues. Viken and Espiritu made a regression analysis of the population of Kirkenes in light of variables such as sex, age, knowledge, contacts, and threat perception. The study has a number of exciting discoveries. They argue that although public awareness helps against prejudice and fear, there is no correlation between close relationships and attitudes towards border neighbors.

Kjell Olsen's chapter entitled "Gendered border stories" are among the most fascinating analysis in the book. It presents people's interesting and entertaining stories and how this underpins certain politics. Stories are complex cultural expressions, which refers to global, national, and local discourses. Olsen's contribution can be read as a critique of how different understandings and representations of the border, also produces various gendered reproduction of a master narrative of this region.

The concluding chapters are written by the editors. Arvid Viken's "Barents spektakkel; Aesthetisation and sublimation in border policy" is questioning the manipulative powers, the exercise of soft power and regimentation. Bjarge Schwenke Fors' chapter "The Samovar Theater - Drama at the border" represents the Samovar Theater as an actor that performs as a cultural bridge for the Norwegian Foreign Department (UD). The Samovar theater is an artistic and socially interesting case not only for analytical reflection on rhetoric and marketing of Kirkenes as a "real border" but also how artists' creative forms meet more invisible forms of power. Schwenke Fors says among other things that, "[A] border focus has been requested, sponsored, and stimulated centrally". This is also, in my opinion, the book's unifying theme. This should have been elaborated more explicit in the final chapter.

All in all, the book *Border Life* is for the most part both interesting and informative. The book delivers what it promises and provides an introduction to the phenomenon of border life. It brings forth how contact is an ambivalent processes and a social and symbolic construction of the border. The book is recommended! My overall impression is that the book is an important contribution to everyone working to-

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wards Russia both students and researchers who are concerned with perspectives on borders generally and descriptions of the Norwegian - Russian Border particularly. The book is a multidisciplinary collection of contributions coming from sociology, anthropology, folklore, history, pedagogy and linguistics. It therefore shows the diversified and complex epistemological anchoring of border studies today. I do not know of any similar books on the Norwegian-Russian border and hope it will also be translated into Russian.

*(Translated from the original Norwegian text by Gaute Svensson.)*

