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## New Borders for a Changing Europe

### Cross-border Cooperation and Governance

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# Borders of Comfort: Spatial Economic Bordering Processes in the European Union

HENK VAN HOUTUM

The state governments of the European Union have agreed to relax the EU's internal borders between the member states in order to further economic growth for the Union as a whole. The integration process is meant to create a unified and integrated *economic* space across the member states. Here state borders are viewed as 'breaking' and fragmenting economic space and thereby interrupting the potential network of market areas. Borders cause non-linear discontinuities and blockages in the cross-border flows of goods and services, and in the mobility of capital and labour by raising accessibility costs (European Commission, 1988). In contrast, the making of a United European 'place' is associated with concepts such as the 'Single European Market', the 'Internal Market', 'Borderless Europe', a 'Europe of the Regions', 'Eu(ro)regions', 'Economic and Monetary Union', 'Euroland', and so forth. Funding programmes are set up to make a reality of these imaginaries of spatial unification, focussing in particular on the enhancement of cross-border harmonization, cohesion and development, in initiatives like INTERREG, for example, which funds cross-border networking between actors in border regions. Currently the key word in the policy documents is *solidarity* (EC, 2000). The success of European spatial policy is seen to depend on solid partnerships, close cooperation and solidarity among the richer and poorer member-states and regions of the European Union. Economic and geographical studies of the EU integration process mostly argue that borders impede the free movement of information and activities, and hence should be seen as physical and institutional obstructions to smooth transfers which would result in higher levels of transnational integration and welfare (see for example, Ratti, 1993a, 1993b; EC, 1988). Studies focusing on the obstructive effects of borders are often concerned with strategies for 'overcoming' borders (see for example, Ratti, 1993a, 1993b; van Houtum, 2000a, b). In short, the words 'border' and 'barrier' have become interchangeable in most of the economic and geographical discourse on European integration.

However, the flipside of 'border as barrier' is of course the border as a means of protection for a territorialized economy. Borders are also a

means and symbol of place-making. Despite, or indeed perhaps because of, the EU integration discourse, the issue of the territorial demarcation of economic interests has in fact become more prominent. The integration discourse is not merely 'led from above' by the EU's central institutions, it is also initiated and shaped by and in the member states. In a way, as Alan Milward has famously argued (1992), the integration process has certified the existence and influence of the nation-states involved. Manuel Castells has put it even more bluntly:

> The formation of the European Union ... was not a process of building the European federal state of the future, but the construction of a political cartel, the Brussels cartel, in which European nation-states can still carve out, collectively, some level of sovereignty from the new global disorder, and then distribute the benefits among its members, under endlessly negotiated rules (Castells 1998: 267).

Especially since the late 1980s and the launching of the Single Market programme, territorial units, be they states, regions or cities, have been (re)emphasizing the relevance of their economic existence (re)claiming space, and stressing the need for funds to restructure their own economies. Discussions of territorial sovereignty over economic affairs, and of national and regional competitiveness, marketing and identity have come to the foreground of political attention and economic debate. Economics thereby has moved into an 'interface' between integration and differentiation. Accounts of the integration of economic flows go hand in hand with the solidification and re-bordering of territorial economies.

Yet, within economics there is surprisingly little debate about the economic reasons for the persistence of borders. Almost none of the textbooks and articles on international economics mention the words border, boundary or frontier. Here much is assumed or taken for granted, little is debated or ascertained. Questions about the normative basis of borders, or to what extent some economic activities might prosper just because of the presence of the border, or why borders matter in economic affairs in the first place, are almost totally neglected. But in order to understand such questions, and how a society decides what is the economically 'optimal' degree of border permeability, we need to understand the assumed normative principles of welfare maximization and self-interest, and extend the debate in economics to encompass the social construction of bounded economies as such. Rather than merely zooming in to analyse the most efficient trade-off between the marginal costs and marginal benefits of opening borders, as dominant thinking in economics would do, we need more insight into the social processes and



implications of making and reproducing borders. In the words of Sibley (2001: 240): 'It could be argued that binary divisions are deeply etched into social space and it is a deeper understanding of boundary erection and distancing that is required if we are to provide alternatives to exclusion and conflict'.

In this essay I argue that borders are first and foremost social phenomena. A border is not merely a line in space, it is a social process, contingent on continuous re-imagination and re-interpretation (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002). The question then becomes not what is 'optimal' within a given bordered framework, but rather why and how the economy is bordered. A better understanding of the economic basis of borders could deepen the debate on cross-border economic integration, and also transcend the often taken-for-granted boundaries between academic disciplines and their subfields (see also Thompson, 2000). The essay therefore explores the social production of economic borders and the reasons for them. It focuses on the assumed inevitability of difference and the mental rigidity of borders in economic life. What explains the persistence of this claiming of economic space, even in situations where it might not be optimal from a material point of view? In short, what are borders meant to protect? In the first section, I situate the dominant economic thinking about optimizing the permeability of borders within a more general theoretical framework, focusing in particular on the social relevance and desire for comforting order in society. In the second section, I focus on discourses about the 'Europeanization' and the 'nationalization' or 'regionalization' of economic flows, discussing in particular the logic of attempts to control the mobility of people and goods nationally which runs counter to the strong discursive rhetoric of the EU's cross-border integration. In the third and final section I sum up the results of this theoretical attempt to reach a deeper understanding of economic bordering.

## THE CONTINUOUS DESIRE FOR ECONOMIC BORDERS

### *Fencing Wealth*

The protection of (the growth of) the economy is a form of self-interest of a (self-)defined group of human beings. The stronger that protection is felt to be needed, the stronger will be the bureaucratic control of cross-border mobility. No society is able and willing to share all its wealth with others. The wish to protect and keep hold of profitable assets in a certain place prevents a truly borderless mobility of economic flows. On the other hand, no society is able to close its borders completely either. That would mean an end to building up the relative wealth of the bordered community, since exchange with others within and across the borders of the community is

what makes profits. Paradoxically enough, the openness of social interaction that is needed to gain wealth is inversely related to the claimed need for closure to protect that wealth. What this means is that bordered spaces are always necessarily in a state of flux, they are never constant, never fully controlled, never finished, always waiting for tomorrow. There are always, as Massey (1999: 284) points out, 'connections to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not), potential links which may never be established'.

As a consequence, the wealth of nations can never be completely controlled, modelled or predicted, which is precisely why in political debate there is so much anxiety about the influences from 'outside', the fluid sources of mobility beyond the direct control of the hierarchically organized unit itself. Bauman (2000) contends that we are living in a time of 'liquid modernity'. But this fluidity, however, often leads to more, not less, management. In hierarchically organized structures an increase in the volatility of the environment often leads to attempts to enhance the solidity of the unit, to control the gates and focus on the protection of the 'core'. Politicians in such contexts generally appeal rhetorically to the 'natural' consistency and cohesion of the bounded area in which people live. On the one hand they address the need to try to attract the 'right' assets from outside and, on the other hand, they persist in maintaining control over future movements that are 'threatening' to erode the present wealth in the territory. This reminds us of Sack's well-known 1986 account of territoriality, in which he argues that territoriality must be seen as a *spatial strategy* focused on regulating movements of information, resources and people where borders are actively used to control, classify and communicate. As James Anderson (2001) argues, following Sack on this point, territoriality is inherently conflictual and its claiming tends to generate rival territorialities in 'a space-filling process'. 'In the interest of control, it (territoriality) reifies power, de-personalises social relationships, and oversimplifies and hence distorts social realities' (Anderson, 2001:19). In principle, political categorizations of information, resources and people are a result of being able to judge and claim which space is ours, not theirs, and which space is allowed to be (temporarily) theirs as well. In terms of solidarity such categorization is always a debatable choice.

The role of borders in solidarity is to a large extent a political governance issue, for the economics of borders cannot be seen apart from politics (Anderson, 2001). Governments claim territories and control over mobility. The persistence of borders is to a certain extent a conscious act of those who have an interest in maintaining sovereignty and difference. The people engaged in political activities in the territory, as well as the



owners and managers of the media, have an interest in promoting the territorialization.[1] Yet, as Foucault (1982) has made clear, the will to control, the governing power, is not (merely) above us, it is (also) within us. Producing borders of solidarity is therefore also a question of how humans conceive and reproduce themselves.

### *The Production of Desire*

We have then to ask ourselves where the lack of solidarity that is assumed and/or taken-for-granted derives from. In creating economic borders in exchange between people and societies, order in the distribution of wealth is assumed, with wealth being generally understood as the ability to cope successfully with the scarcity of resources. Labelling resources as 'scarce' in economic terms means that, given the preference structure of the economic actors, the price of obtaining one scarce resource is higher than for other resources. Economics involves to a large extent the optimal production of scarce assets and the success in exchanging (trading) them for other assets. Which assets are defined as scarce depends on the preferences of the economic actors involved and what they see as relevant and capable of fulfilling their desires. What is scarce and relevant for some might be irrelevant for others, and hence scarcity is contingent and contextual, not absolute. We produce scarcity ourselves. Scarcity in itself would be meaningless in a world in which there were no limits to the willingness to share assets. Hence, to be more precise, what is bordered is not wealth alone, but also solidarity, that is, the readiness to share what we have defined as wealth. The possession of scarce assets, depending on how that scarcity is constructed, generates a way to distinguish oneself socially. In a capitalist society this need to identify oneself socially often leads to tendencies of compulsive buying behaviour, invoked by fierce marketing and the construction of 'desires'.

In his famous work 'Essay Concerning Human Understanding' John Locke (1690) saw desire as one of the determining powers of the will of people. The basis of desire was, in his view, the feeling of uneasiness induced by the absence of some good:

> For desire being nothing but an uneasiness in the want of an absent good, in reference to any pain felt, ease is that absent good; and till that ease be attained, we may call it desire (Locke 1690, Chapter XXI).

In our contemporary era, this concept of desire as reducing uneasiness caused by the feeling that something is missing is most dominantly and outspokenly utilized by scholars like Lacan and Deleuze and Guattari. In his thought-provoking post-Freudian analysis on the psyche, Lacan (1994)

uses the concept of desire in the sense of the wish to become a 'unified I'. His argument is that ever since separation from the m(Other) and the consequent entering into the symbolic order – the order of the Law and the Name-of-the-Father – the subject is constantly seeking re-unification with its origin. The subject is trying to fill the lack, the void, of the unbordered subject, which renders him/her uneasy and brings discomfort. Interpreted differently, the subject is constantly seeking to find the borders of the self, constantly in search of identification with something to fill their existential lack. They do this by a constant comparing and confronting with the symbolic Other: 'Man's desire is the desire of the Other' (Lacan, 1994: 38, 115). Desire in Lacan's terms is hence interpersonally embedded. Bordering the other is creating oneself, to paraphrase Lacan. The Other is constitutive of the imaginary identification of a whole self. We only come to know ourselves as a self through representing the Other as distinct from ourselves. In seeking this whole self, the role of fantasy is crucial according to Lacan's theory. For Lacan, fantasy is the 'screen masking the void' (Zizek, 1989: 126); it is the 'fixation of desire' (Albertsen and Diken, 2001). The belief in a fantasy of borders produces the necessary illusion that what is lacking in one's identity is filled, that one is unified and coherent. The self perpetuates itself by unremittingly reproducing and selling us the fantasy of the enclosed, bordered self, while at the same time denying that this is a fantasy (Cavallaro, 2001).

Believing in the truthfulness of a self-devised orderly scheme of reality, with or without dependence on a significant Other, be it a political or a religious authority or community, means that some of the vulnerability and doubts one lives with can be reduced. The will to control, to reduce one's doubt and vulnerability, is an act of survival, not only in physical but also in socio-psychological terms – the survival of the subject in everyday struggles for the identification of selfhood and respect. Believing in a form of rationality helps to gain some control over the complexities of life. Borders must therefore be seen as a strategic effort of fixation, of gaining control in order to achieve *ease*. They create a home for, or in, one's self, in which 'home' is understood in Boesch's terms as 'Ein Ort des leichten Handelns (a place of easy actions)' (Boesch (1963: 350). Here drawing up borders is a space-fixing process which gives the impression of a physical process *as if* it concerned a physically identifiable entity with objective borders (see also Bauman, 1997). It is in this sense that believing in the truthfulness of a self-devised pure and orderly scheme of reality, a fantasy, is a consequence of the unconscious desire to be able to reduce these feelings of uneasiness, vulnerability and doubts.

Put differently, borders are simulacra, to use Baudrillard's (and Deleuze's) term, representing a reality copied from a model, where the



model has become unknown or maybe was never known at all (Baudrillard, 1994; van Houtum and Strüver, 2002). This is not to be mistaken for Plato's simulacrum (idea) which is a debased reflection and conceptualized as inferior to the ideal form from which it is derived. Both Baudrillard's and Plato's simulacra are negatives, but a simulacrum as Baudrillard and later also Deleuze and Guattari conceptualized it, does not replace reality, rather it appropriates reality in the operation of despotic overcoding (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Hence, the border as a simulacrum does not hide truth, or imagine reality, it is a truth and represents a reality (van Houtum and Strüver, 2002). Yet, it remains an appropriation of truth and reality only in the eye of the beholder. For the easiness gained by bordering one's identity is never complete. Desire has no end, for imaginations of wholeness might give one an image of oneself as distinct from another, but they never align with us perfectly. The subject might attempt to close the 'hole in the self' through an endless, metonymic chain of complements, like the perfect house, the ideal neighbourhood, fully predictable neighbours, or a fully gated community. But that will not stop the desire. The lack in mankind's quest for the fullness of selfhood can never be filled, since that is what defines the subjective being. The unfulfilment is perpetual. More than Lacan, it is Deleuze and Guattari who in their well-known work of 1983 made an explicit and elaborate analysis of the perpetual link between the social and desire. Deleuze and Guattari use Lacan's notion of desire as a flux, a metonymy, to describe the evolution of order in society which is always in motion, continuously in the process of formation and deformation. However, they do not accept Lacan's psycho-analytical foundations of the concept of desire. Unlike Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari (1983) define desire positively, not as based on a lack, but as an autonomous, intrinsically social and productive force, without any reference to a quest for reunification with one's origin. In their view, desire is not a fact of human nature, as Freud argues (and hence Lacan's term Anti-Oedipus), or a lack because of a separation from the (m)Other (as Lacan argues), but is instead the result of a process of continuous social codification: society is a 'desire-machine'.

### *Comforting Distantiation*

In economic terms the perpetual quest for fullness and ease translates into a continuous striving for and upgrading of *comfort*, a word that is derived from the Latin word *confortare*, which translates as to strengthen, to ease. Economics is in fact the science that fulfils itself as a study of perpetual unfulfilment. Implicitly therefore, in the economy borders are constructed to produce and protect the *comfort* that we desire for ourselves. Gaining

wealth is a way of experiencing more control over the things that are happening to us. In this sense, we are our own politicians of economic space. Appropriating assets and immobilizing flows, in other words producing and demarcating economic borders, is a way of creating social and individual ease and protection. Property marks the highest level of control and easiness; and conditional exchange (quid pro quo) is the next best means of reducing uncertainties and increasing peace of mind. What is outside the borders has a higher uncertainty and is beyond immediate and rightful control. Borders stabilize expectations concerning what is outside us and thereby reduce doubts, uncertainty and vulnerability. Hence, as Bauman (1999: 64) argues, (b)ordering, is a way of leaving things out of account when planning our actions. Things are orderly, if they behave as you have expected them to. More precisely, expectations are a way of (b)ordering and 'fixing and boxing' the dynamic other and the outside, with the intent to (b)order and position one's self and one's doubts. Mapping the social environment via the appropriation of assets helps to create distance between oneself and the things that are happening around us. Drawing up economic borders is another way of saying 'keep your distance'.

Through this mechanism of distantiation, borders enable people to construct a social focal point, a selection of social priorities. A subject living in a bordered economic place is consequently to a large extent involved in a compliant act of socialization, stimulated by the commercial or political pressure of the spatially delimited interest-group. However, the constitutive other, beyond the border of oneself or of the imagined community, is present and 'needed' by definition, for a border without 'a beyond' would not be a border (see also Derrida, 1973; Luhmann, 1985; Jenkins, 1996). It is through the awareness and perception of otherness, of 'different forms of being' (Reichert, 1996: 92), that borders are produced and reproduced. The other is hence actively involved by definition, in a sense it is inside not outside. In the words of Mouffe (1992: 235) 'While politics aims at constructing a political community and creating a unity, a fully inclusive political and economic community and a final unity can never be realised since there will permanently be a "constitutive outside".' And, as Foucault has made clear, this constitutive other is not fixed either, the other is not always the same but is contingent and dispersed (Foucault, 1972). Hence, the ideal (b)order is always a subject of perpetual desire, it can never be realized.

The situatedness and embeddedness of economic bordering processes as rooted in everyday practice and representation which are emphasized here must be contrasted with the logic of some abstract order outside or above social life (cf. Whatmore, 1999), as well as with an assumed political neutrality of the economy. For (b)ordering our own *Oikos*, distantiating the



other, is, as argued above, socially produced and never neutral. Borders are metonymic beliefs and as such are implicitly relational and moral. They create a space of legitimate withdrawal, where actions need not be justified, where the beyond-space is morally emptied, neutralized, tranquillized, made indifferent. In short, bordering is an ordering of *spaces of (in)difference* (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002). That which is beyond the constructed differentiating border of comfort (*difference*) is often neglected (or rendered a matter of indifference).

Although ontologically a fantasy, the aspiration to a world of purity and order (cf. Bauman, 1997; 1999) remains powerful. Despite having moral sympathy for attempts and appeals to liquify modernity even further (following, for example, the postmodernist Bauman 2000), it seems to me that the classical belief that the desire for comfort can be optimized through the practice of spatial bordering, ordering and othering is still modern practice (see van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002). Borders of comfort provide a mental refuge in our late-modern or postmodern world that is seemingly more and more interwoven, liquid and uncertain. Although we 'know' that full control is an illusion, a fantasy, we still 'believe' in the relevance and power of protection and control. The easiness people (still) apparently believe they can attain from a dichotomization between chaos and order, between what is allowed 'inside' and what should be left 'outside' – this container-image of social relations, or 'territorial trap' as John Agnew (1994) called it – is a persistent force that cannot be left unstudied and unexplained. As long as desire is a metonymy, and value is attached to property as a way of ordering and easing the complexity of the world, as long as sameness is negotiated and difference produced, there will be desire for borders in our economic interactions. This implies that the practice of bordering is a perpetual social process which has constantly to be viewed critically and questioned. To use the words of Deleuze and Guattari: 'What are your lines? What map are you in the process of making or rearranging? What abstract line will you draw, and at what price, for yourself and for others?' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 203). In the next section, the argument is further contextualized and elaborated by examining several practices by which economic spaces are claimed and borders are (re)produced in and by the European Union.

## ECONOMIC BORDER PRODUCTIONS IN AND BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

### *The Production of the EU*

The desire for comfort takes many different territorial forms in the economy. To begin with, looking at the economy in the European Union

as a whole, the argument can be made that together the member states of the EU have appropriated a great deal of space by territorializing the exclusive membership of their club (see also Mamadouh, 2001). This space is usually claimed by the word 'Europe'. To speak of a *European integration* process, as is often done, is however a misleading and delusive notion. It is not European integration but *European Union integration.* To speak of 'European integration' suggests, as Smith (1995) has argued, that unity in Europe is virtually a fact and an unquestioned good, which is a technocratic and drastic oversimplification of the complex nature of the geography of Europe. Moreover, the division between what is 'European' and what is not 'European' is highly arbitrary: it is still largely based on a mental map of land situated somewhere between, and contrasted with, the discursive abstractions of the Atlantic Ocean, Africa and Asia (see among others, Den Boer, 1997). Europe is an idea that has become rooted in our imaginations and practices. Maps play an important role in this mental rooting process. Anssi Paasi (2000) contends that maps are deeply ideological in shaping consciousness. They naturalize the cultural and culturalize the natural (Wood, 1992). The relativeness of *land* boundaries may help to explain what is perceived as 'European'. To the east, Europe's borders are generally perceived as highly problematic, whereas on the southern and western side there is far less debate, at least within the EU. Much more than zones of uninhabited land, water still remains a sharp mental divider. Yet, there is no obvious reason why the idea of 'Europe' could not be extended to include more distant countries or regions, the same as there is no *a priori* logic or justification why other discursive categories like 'Africa' and 'Asia' could not be extended to encompass the 'European' continent.

Inside the European Union club, citizens of the member states are encouraged to network and wander around freely in order to increase comfort for all, while at the same time the entrance gates of the club are strongly patrolled and guarded. A more lively academic debate is needed on what seems to be a paradoxical use of rhetorical arguments for defending the protection of the outer borders of the EU versus the emphasis on the opening of its internal borders and the appeal to solidarity within in the EU. For it is debatable what the intensive boosting of free trade is worth when freedom is based on exclusive membership. Neo-liberal arguments about the benefits of free trade underpin the economic rhetoric about the EU's internal borders, whereas classical protectionist arguments are applied at its external borders. The internal market programme implies an attempt at 'freezing' the outer borders of the EU while at the same time 'liquifying' the inner borders. The ambiguous policy regarding import-taxes for non-EU products is a case in point.



After years of strict protection of the EU economy, it has recently been decided that the outer borders of the Union will be opened for products of (former) developing countries: exporters from these countries no longer have to pay import-taxes to the EU. But again there are limits. The traditionally strong EU farmers' lobby, which has received a substantial proportion of total EU subsidies over recent decades, has succeeded in arranging a long-term transition phase for agricultural products. These are precisely the kind of products that are the most important export goods of these poorer countries.

### *National Borders as Handmaidens of (In)difference*

Despite the powerful EU rhetoric of integration, national bordering of the economy is still a remarkably persistent way of demarcating, proposing and valorizing borders. The 'status' of the 'national' economy, despite (or because of) increasing postmodernism, globalization and integration, is still 'breaking news'. Statistical economic accounts still refer mainly to the *national* economy, the *national* gross product and the *national* interest rate. It thereby takes an *a priori* spatial form for granted, but also sees it as something to be preserved. The national economic unity is consequently still taken as an underlying structure of 'rationality', which can be pre-specified and around which a relational geography of the social may be logically constructed (Daly, 1991). As a result there is much academic concern over the policy possibilities and need to upgrade the 'uniqueness' and 'competitiveness' of the self-proclaimed economic entity. Studies of theories and strategies that elevate territorial differentiation and a claimed unavoidability of upgrading territorial 'competitiveness' are among the best-sellers (for example, Porter, 1990). Borders between economic territories, as demarcations of such spatial differentiations, are thereby constantly being produced and acclaimed.[2] In the words of the Group of Lisbon (1995: xiii) in their report on the limits of competition: 'Competing in the global economy ... has become the everyday slogan of multinational corporation advertisers, business school managers, trendy economists and political leaders.' In this competitive political 'game', politicians are keen to express their concerns or their pride with regard to national (or regional) developments. The competitive rat race for the 'national wealth' commands political power (Anderson, 2001: 21). Are we doing better than yesterday, what are the new trends and threats, and how are we doing compared to our neighbours, or compared with the other power(s) over 'there'? This national 'sport' of 'we-ing' is striking (see, for example, Robinson, 1962; Reich, 1991). Apparently, we believe, or are meant to believe, that we have a key interest in nationalizing economic activities. Some scholars indeed argue that nationalism (as well as regionalism and other performances of spatial

'place-making') could be economically beneficial in the sense that it creates security and certainty within one's own domain, thereby enhancing the possibility of active socialization within and identification with a certain space, creating trust and solidarity among its inhabitants (see Levi-Faur, 1997). For instance, Johnson (1965: 176) explicitly argues that actively inspiring a national identity, national values and national culture is often seen as necessary for the dominant modus operandi in achieving progress in present economics: 'Nationalism can accordingly be conceived of as a state of social psychology or political sentiment that attaches value to having property...owned by members of the national group'. In this respect, one could argue that the belief in the benefits of nationalism in economic affairs is leading to more, not less, inward-looking behaviour. Members from other national communities, especially if they have strongly differing conventions and maybe another language, are then perceived and treated differently, leading to significantly more intra-community than inter-community linkages. This leads to a 'mental distance', to an assumed difference between inter-community and intra-community attitudes and behaviour (van Houtum, 1998, 1999). Much more than a rational costs/benefits analysis, this mental distance effect is able to explain a great deal of the centripetal orientation of entrepreneurs, even in border regions (van Houtum, 1998, 1999). Crossing the border then becomes a question of willingness to break with the routine patterns of uneasiness-aversion. The relevance of nationalism in economic affairs makes clear that the maintenance of national borders is dependent on ourselves and our imaginations. As Benedict Anderson (1991: 6) stated: 'Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.' Nationalizing what we think are characteristic and important elements of economic exchange provides comfort, as Reich (1991) suggests, because we within the nation are in it together. Although our world is supposedly being ever more interlinked in terms of the mobility of goods, money and information, it is still seen as 'normal' to think in terms of such *we*-categorizations.

### *Bordering 'Economic Refugees' in and by the EU*

One of the most revealing contemporary illustrations of thinking in *we*-categorizations is the policy towards 'economic refugees' within the EU. The issue of mobile, migrant people, such as refugees, so significant for our present era, causes a great deal of intense, sometimes phobic, political discussion in national contexts. Across the EU the temptation to arrest their movement, to spatially fix the mobile 'others', now seems to be growing to disconcerting levels. The feeling that nothing is secure anymore in our globalizing, mobile world is one which strikes the



purity-believers in affluent societies, like the EU, the most. Refugees are predominantly considered as people 'out of place' everywhere, as the intruders, the strangers, the stubborn people who do not fit, who spoil the picture, who offend the aesthetically gratifying, comforting and morally reassuring sense of togetherness and unity (cf. Bauman, 1997). For those who propagate belief in a spatially comforting order, the mobility of these detached and unordered people is distressing and agonizing. In the words of Bauman (1997: 17):

> If the strangers are the people who do not fit the cognitive, moral or aesthetic map of the world... if they befog and eclipse the boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen; if... they gestate uncertainty, which in its turn breeds the discomfort of feeling lost –then each society produces such strangers. While drawing its borders and charting its cognitive, aesthetic and moral maps, it cannot but gestate people who conceal borderlines crucial to its orderly and/or meaningful life and so are accused of causing the discomfort experience as the most painful and the least bearable.

By entering the imagined 'homeland' and into 'our homes', strangers are particularly in a position to make clear how the 'right' to exclude and the 'right' to privacy are produced and maintained. For, in our treatment of others, it becomes clear who we are ourselves (cf. Kristeva, 1988). It is strangers who bring to the surface the marking and protection of the produced and reproduced social borders, and other practices of social exclusion, indifference and intolerance, which otherwise often remain hidden (Bauman, 1997; van Houtum and Strüver, 2002). Illustrative of the present climate in the EU concerning the treatment of Others is the fact that in 2002 the government of the Netherlands chose to create a separate minister for 'Policy on Strangers and Integration', as part of the Ministry of Justice, thereby implicitly making strangers *a priori* subject to governmental criminalization. Other EU governments like those of Denmark, Italy, Austria and Spain are equally explicit and strong-minded in their negative attitude towards strangers from non-EU countries. Morally the increasingly outspoken conservative attitude in contemporary politics in the EU is worrying. Paradoxically, however, the purity-believers are not much helped by the dominant economic theory on which the internal market was founded. For in its purest form, dominant thinking in economics suggests that free international movement of production factors (capital, products, services and labour) maximizes efficiency. In other words, in principle an efficient economy does not include the protection of places – it is borderless (Robinson, 1962). Yet despite the tendency to criticize those governments that openly practise an

antagonistic protectionist policy against the mobility of 'economic migrants' and 'refugees' or 'asylum-seekers', there is presently no country that has unrestricted entry from outside its territory. Almost every self-proclaimed national economy is using its sovereignty to control the flow of migrants and refugees. Seen on a global scale, there is substantially incomplete freedom of labour, making the idea of a global economy and supposedly free-factor mobility a utopian wish or claim, rather than a reality. Low-rated foreign economic refugees are labelled as 'redundant'; in the same way cheap goods are labelled as a form of 'dumping', a term which conjures up images of huge piles of consumer durables and cheap novelty items littering our beaches (Reich, 1991: 71). Such 'dumping' is seen as socially unwanted yet unavoidable.

In general, it is easier to ship goods across a border than for people to cross it. A major difference between goods and people lies in the transfer of property rights. In the case of immigration the owner of the production factor – that is, labour – travels along with the production factor itself, thereby maintaining their ownership over this production factor. 'Human capital' can be exploited, but cannot be legally appropriated. The difference in property rights between goods and people has consequences for the perception of degrees of freedom and control. Some foreign goods might be interpreted as competitive with the domestically produced goods, and hence might be restricted in their admittance, but people who maintain their ownership over their own production factor, in addition to such competitive effect, are perceived to directly influence the imagined (id)entity of society and the production and diffusion of wealth in society. The entry of cheap foreign labour is therefore often seen in conservative terms. This lack of freedom of movement holds also for people from the associated countries outside the EU trying to find work within it. For instance, Germany asked for a post-entry transition phase before low-rated labourers from eastern European countries, such as Poland, are allowed to work in Germany. The newcomers are perceived as the 'outsiders', people from the world beyond the border whose mobility is feared.

### *Openness for Foreign Capital*

An important exception to this conservative stance on the permeability of borders is 'alien' people who are tourists and businesspeople who wish to spend or invest in the country (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002). Such incomes are used not to inculcate national solidarity but to display success. The door is wide open for those who upgrade the territorialized economy, for those who add comfort. This holds for people and capital from countries within as well as from outside the EU. Attracting consumption, financial and production flows into one's territory from



whatever source has increasingly become a highly competitive matter. In present-day European society, marketing and 'selling' one's own territory, be it a city, region or state, has become an important 'business'. In the race to attract these money flows, tax concessions and other financial instruments are used, not to restrict but to enhance the permeability of the border. For tourists as well for investors, the economic calculation of opening the border is generally assumed to be net-positive. Yet, it often remains unclear to what extent these often costly and selective efforts actually pay off, and for whom they pay off. Nonetheless, the significance of business discourse in territorial governance is heightening. Cities in particular are increasingly perceived as 'entrepreneurial' spatial units that 'compete' with each other in 'selling' their 'products' (see Harvey, 1989), and 'competition' between places is nowadays sometimes even labelled an 'economic war'.[3] Those elements that were already shining are polished up further, and the filth and the impurity is cleaned and wiped up or excluded in the representation of the city (cf. Sibley, 1995). The result is a purification of places, in which only the marketable elements of cities are selected and highlighted[4] and local myths and traditions are reinvented and reimaged in an attempt to stress their uniqueness (see also Kearns and Philo, 1993; Hall and Hubbard, 1996). This practice could be referred to as the *objectification of space*, and it facilitates its exploitation, commodification, performance and marketing. Places model for the making of postcards and postcards model for the making of places. The careful orchestration of the city image for tourists and investors at the same time is meant to boost civic pride and identification with one's own city, thereby contributing to the hegemony and legitimization of those 'city-entrepreneurs' in political control (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1996). Glossy brochures and leaflets are used to exploit the image of openness and attractiveness even further, contributing to the objectification of bordered spaces and the local territorialization of assets in the EU.

For instance, in Nijmegen, as in many other cities in the Netherlands, large-scale inner-city regeneration developments are undertaken. 'Old' and 'ugly' elements of the city are broken down and replaced by new and 'attractive' symbol-boosting and image-building constructions to reinforce the position of the city on the metaphorical 'map'. In this era of the objectification of space, the inner-city is more and more perceived as the salon of the city, a place that needs to be cleaned, polished, beautified and 'refurnished' regularly following the latest architectional fashions and consumer lifestyles (see also Dormans et al. 2002). Similarly, Harvey (1989: 13) emphasized the apparently contemporary 'need' for a constant redesigning of 'entrepreneurial cities':

> It is at this point that we can identify an albeit subterranean but nonetheless vital connection between the rise of urban entrepreneurialism and the post-modern penchant for design of urban fragments rather than comprehensive urban planning, for ephemerality and eclecticism of fashion and style rather than the search for enduring values, for quotation and fiction rather than invention and function, and finally, for medium over message and image over substance.

As is the case for every large-scale urban 'refurnishment' nowadays, the city of Nijmegen accompanies its inner-city purification project with a telling slogan printed on postcards and billboards: 'Nijmegen wordt zo mooi, kom maar eens kijken' (Nijmegen is becoming so beautiful, come and have a look yourself). The Ruhr area in Germany, to take another example of this objectification of space, is a region that since the Industrial Revolution has been dominated by coal and steel industries, and is now drastically reshaping and reformulating its strategic identity (see van Houtum and Lagendijk, 2001). The prevailing image was of a dirty, unhealthy area, but since the shut-down of the major coal and steel industries, it is now being re-imaged as a clean, refreshed and adventurous region full of interesting industrial monuments (see www.derpott kocht.de). The region has become an experience, an event, 'Das Abenteuer Ruhrgebiet' (The adventure of the Ruhr). It is quite literally purified of its image as a black region of coal and steel and reshaped into and promoted as a green (rural) area.

Sometimes the borders of territories themselves, as physical lines on the map or in the landscape, become the subject of intense economization. The Berlin Wall, for example, has become subject to what can be called 'place-branding'. Its geopolitical symbolic character has changed drastically in the past 40 years. It was discursively proclaimed at the outset as an icon of 'protection' and later became a symbol of the 'divide' between West and East in Europe. The 'Brandenburger Tor' (The Brandenburg Gate), as a central, distinctive feature of the Berlin Wall, is now being used to symbolize the re-integrated, future-oriented city of Berlin, as well as the unification of Germany. Since its opening in December 1989, the Berlin Wall and especially the Brandenburg Gate have become first and foremost places of remembrance and imagination, as well as brand products to be marketed (see Figure 1), to attract tourists, and feature on almost every tourist photo and postcard of Berlin.

Besides being open for tourists and investors, EU borders are also open for some specified types of labour from outside the European Union, namely those that add unique qualities to the national economy, such as



FIGURE 1

SELLING THE BERLIN WALL

Made by Frank Wowra (1994)

gifted soccer-players, scientists or managers. That this selective policy, based on such arbitrary grounds, leads to curious situations may not come as a surprise. In the Netherlands there was some discussion whether it was appropriate for Maxima Zorreguieta, the new queen to be, who is from Argentina, to have so quickly and silently received a permit to stay in the Netherlands, when compared to 'non-royal aliens'. Another illustration comes from the last regional elections in North Rhine Westphalia in Germany, where one of the major political issues was how to solve the shortage of computer experts. The regional Christian Democratic Party considered attracting Indian computer experts to solve the problem, but the Social Democratic Party won a considerable number of votes by claiming that what was needed was more children, rather than more people from India ('Kinder statt Inder'). Recently, the issue again had political importance when some German industry groups argued that Germany needs more immigrant workers to sustain its labour ranks and compete globally. And in the Netherlands, some captains of industry claimed that 'speed-offices' are needed whereby unique labourers from abroad could bypass the normal immigrant procedures. Likewise, in some

other countries of the EU with a labour deficit in certain economic sectors, some politicians have argued that people waiting for political asylum should perhaps be given a work permit, thereby making the already thin and arbitrary line between 'economic' and 'political' refugees even more questionable.

## CONCLUSION

European Union integration invokes and induces a continuous breaking up and renewal of existing power structures, thereby continuously subverting existing spatial economic orderings of property and belonging. Hence the capitalist process of integration, flanked by a visionary EU policy, must not be seen as an undifferentiated system disembodied from time and space (Anderson, 2001). Faced with the developments of integration and the fluidity of people and goods, spatial territories increasingly emphasize their uniqueness, their own identity and contrasting differences. Some forms of cross-border mobility, particularly of 'redundant' economic refugees, are subject to heavy scrutiny, mistrust and lack of solidarity, whereas imports of foreign capital and tourist spending are increasingly subject to heavy competition – an alleged economic 'war'. In this continuous (re)production and symbolic (re)shaping of the national economic (id)entity and purity, borders are designated a vigorous instrumental role. They act as a strategic means to filter, immobilize and exclude the presumably discomforting flows of goods and especially people. A spatial economic border represents a normative order that distributes advantages and disadvantages. Consequently, economic borders differentiate between those who benefit from the division and those who are left out. Economic borders could hence be seen as norms made for others that reveal much about who we are ourselves. In the EU, the inclusion versus exclusion of others is increasingly determined on the basis of a cost–benefit calculation. Solidarity, a prime issue in current redistributive policies of the EU, thereby remains subject to the making of borders of comfort.

Yet, there is no 'natural' logic in the existence of a spatial economic community, nor are there any guarantees of its persistence. In present debates on 'community', there is a widespread acknowledgement that the persistence of a spatially unified community is largely dependent on the triggering and maintenance of a common imagination of, and trust in, that unity. It is crucially dependent on continuous and active reproduction. The region and the nation are in this respect not necessarily more unified or coherent in identity terms than the hybrid of separation and togetherness that is the EU (Sidaway, 2001). The identity and borders of any



community can never be fixed, or closed, as they are subject to constant subversion, threat or recovery from alternative differential articulations (Daly, 1991). Despite internal market pressures to 'liquify' the economic space within the EU, national and regional/urban solidifications and the 'fixing and boxing' of assets remain important ways of ordering the complexity of the world, of trying to reduce doubt and uncertainty and provide mental shields of comfort. These borders of comfort are a means to attain the desire for control and appropriation over one's home and identity. They create the feeling of an easiness that can be identified with the feeling that one can comfortably lose control. Borders of comfort are a strategic neo-liberal means to protect emptiness and justify indifference. The consequence is that the EU is faced with a continuous search for fulfilling re-bordering processes that have been stimulated by the initiatives towards de-bordering.

The rhetoric of a 'borderless Europe' is seriously misleading for several reasons. First, what is being referred to is not 'Europe' but the 'European Union'. Second, economic bordering processes are still significant *within* the EU, leading to increasing opposition between spatial expressions of territoriality at various spatial scales. And third, the Union as whole is not at all borderless, since its *external* borders have been maintained and indeed strengthened. The power of the discourse on cross-border integration and free trade is hence not only fractured by the spatial bordering of property and by belonging to the various territorial communities within the EU, it is also weakened by the policies of the EU itself with respect to defending the outer borders of its territory. The 'fortress' of the post-war and post-wall EU, most notably vis-à-vis economic immigration policy and trade policy, is built on rather shaky ground. Contradictory arguments are used to demarcate the bordering of the Union from 'others'.

In sum, from a spatial economic point of view, the EU's integration process is, and will continue to be, a development of mutually influencing processes of integration *and* differentiation. The specificity of a spatial economic bordered unity is involuntary, uncertain and ambiguous in the context of 'the infinite play of differences' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 111; Daly 1991). Given the contextuality and contingency of any process of economic 'place making' and the defining of discomforting others, we always need to be ready to elucidate and deconstruct the constitutive, often mystified, elements of spatialization, as researchers such as Paasi (2000) and Sidaway (2001) remind us. To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari's words (see above), what map are we making when (b)ordering and at what price? What is the price paid for our utopian fulfilment of desire for ourselves and for others? Analysing this research question

demands a sceptical attitude towards the desire for and claims to 'uniqueness' and 'purity' in economic places (Sibley, 1995; Natter and Jones, 1997). This is precisely because there is no linear or predetermined route for the (bordered spaces in the) European Union to take, crucially dependent as it is on our own fantasies, narratives and imaginaries. A task for researchers is therefore to examine critically the desired borders of comfort produced in and by the European Union, both in the past and in the future.

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## NOTES

1. The sphere of territorial competitiveness and prestige is also prominently visible and manifested in international or interregional sporting contests in which the players are seen as representatives of the whole territorial unit. In such representative games, the often fanatical celebration of socio-spatial identity is then induced and invoked by a range of actors, including the players themselves, the supporters, business people, politicians, and the media (see also van Houtum, and van Dam, 2002).
2. There is a real danger of economists falling into the trap of becoming handmaidens of difference and indifference (Storper, 1999, p.16; see also Lagendijk and Kramsch, 2001).
3. See e.g. http://woodrow.mpls.frb.fed.us/sylloge/econwar/index.html.
4. 'Selling' a city/region in the EU is often addressed to two sets of people: those who 'buy' the city/region and those who 'fund' the city/region. For potential investors and tourists there are positive marketing campaigns and the branding of the most beautiful and attractive elements of the city/region. But this often goes hand in hand with 'negative' campaigns to explicitly demonstrate its most pitiful and unattractive features to EU and other authorities responsible for redistributing urban/regional funds for redevelopment.

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# Cross-Border Environmental Governance and EC Law

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Rapid and endemic deterioration of the global environment is undoubtedly one of the most complex issues currently facing policy makers throughout the world, not least because pollution ignores the limitations of political boundaries. Whereas the principle of state sovereignty informed international laws governing the exploitation of natural resources until the first half of the twentieth century, the past fifty years have witnessed a growing realization that activities within one state have the capacity to affect environmental quality within other states – whether adjacent or otherwise. The phenomenon of transboundary environmental pollution has forced the international community to accept not only that environmental protection is beyond the capacity of individual nation states, but also that cooperation is crucial to effective environmental governance. This political consensus has gradually stimulated the development of two broad streams of procedural norms designed to tackle the problem of transboundary environmental pollution. The first of these requires states proposing to undertake activities that might have an impact on the environmental quality of other states to notify and consult potentially affected countries of these proposals. A second but more nascent generation of procedural principles has embraced the related global consensus that effective public participation in environmental governance is fundamental to the sustainable management of national and shared natural resources (Ebbesson, 1997). In effect, where transboundary environmental impacts are concerned, states are increasingly required to consult not only the governments of affected states but also citizens within those states. Consequently, transboundary environmental cooperation is no longer within the exclusive discretion and control of government bodies. Citizens of potentially affected states are now being conferred with legal rights to participate in the process of environmental governance within the proposing state.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the nature and scope of cross-border participatory rights under European Community environmental law. In particular, this essay will assess the likely significance of those rights for cross-border environmental governance on the island of Ireland. Although the development of cross-border participatory rights at