On Borders: Reflections of a European Border Scholar

by Martin van der Velde
Co-Editor, Journal of Borderland Studies

Living in a world where national borders play an increasingly paradoxical role, studying borders can be for many a fascinating job. In the last five years especially, the topic has blossomed as never before. In the second half of the last century, borders were more and more considered to be outdated and soon to be extinct (mostly because of the unstoppable and almost autonomous process of globalisation). The first years of the new millennium made quite clear that borders are still major instruments in dealing with global developments, especially the geopolitical ones. This is mainly so because the world’s organisation is still largely based on territorial principles, and the basic “national instincts” when dealing with threats (e.g. terrorism, but also environmental issues) are protecting the territory at its outer limits, its borders.

Recent history shows, however, that the current threats are very often not territory-based but have more global and/or network dimensions. A major issue in this respect is therefore how territorial organisations are dealing with non-territorial issues and how this is reflected in borders and border-regimes.

This dilemma has also not gone unnoticed in the social sciences, being firmly rooted in society. Be it in publications, conferences or research-projects, very often border and security issues are touched upon. Not only is the border-issue “creeping” into all kinds of disciplines, the area of border-studies itself becomes more encompassing. So one could say that the thematic or disciplinary boundaries around the field of “border studies” are blurring.

The observation that scientific study of borders is getting more and more “borderless” does not mean that they have disappeared.

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Distance Learning in the Social Sciences

by Dennis Catlin
WSSA Council

Below is the first part of a two-part article. The second part will appear in the Spring 2006 issue.

Distance learning in higher education is a controversial issue for faculties in almost every institution of higher education. The focus of much of the research in higher education distance learning has been on whether there is a significant difference between live classroom instruction and the various forms of distance learning, including exclusively on-line instruction. The controversy has not been settled. Brown and Liedholm (2002) found that undergraduate students in a principles of microeconomics course who participated in a virtual classroom performed significantly worse than their counterparts did in a live classroom setting. Conversely, Navarro and Shoemaker (1999) found those economics graduate students who were “cyberlearners”

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Changes to the WSSA News

by Larry Gould
WSSA Executive Director

During recent discussion among the members of the Executive Council it was decided to reduce the publication of WSSA News to two issues per year, but increase the size of each issue. The rationale for this was that we no longer need the Winter issue for announcing the elections and distributing the ballots. This is now done by direct mail to each member. The net result of this change has been a tremendous increase in voting.

There were, however, other considerations, primary of which was to make WSSA News more informative concerning social science and related issues. To this end we are publishing selected pieces such as the article by Dennis Catlin on teaching and the article by Martin van der Velde on crossing borders. Through articles such as these, we hope to bring important social science issues to the attention of our members.

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whereas on the American continent the economy has always been on the forefront. Full-fledged integration here never has been on the agenda. This also influences the role that is ascribed to borders. Although NAFTA is also aiming at a certain level of integration, borders within the treaty region are still serving as separators and protectors at least for certain categories of cross-border flows. Within the EU, the ultimate goal is (at least for the Eurocrats in Brussels) to eradicate the national borders completely. Or are we just watching the final convulsion of the state and its borders as we know them? Either way, the ABS (www.absborderlands.org) and the JBS are interesting venues to participate in the dialogue between scholars dealing with the important topic of border studies. Since the ABS meets annually with the WSSA, you too can take part in this process.

References