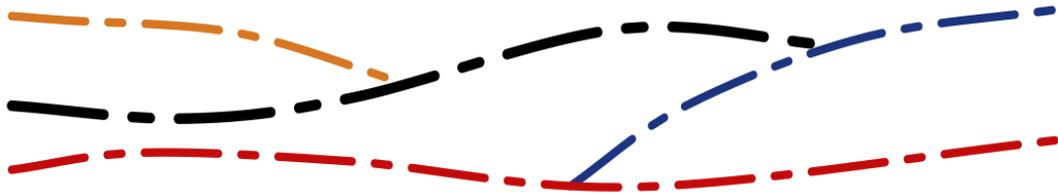


# EUBORDERSCAPES



## Working Paper 6

### Imaginarities: Post-Structuralist Readings of Bordering and Europeanization

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## **Abstract**

The concept of “bordering” suggests that the drawing of boundaries and borders in everyday life cannot be neatly separated from politics and geo-strategy. By way of bordering, the top-down government of borders meets bottom-up governance and state-centred border paradigms are often reconfigured by social agents who create different social, political and economic arenas of action. Spontaneous and context-generating social practice typically implies routines of boundary drawing which manifest themselves as re-interpretations of political borders, but also as materialized bottom-up borderlines between social groups, cultures, economic spheres and governance arenas – which eventually might become formalized as political borders. What has generally been missing in this broader discussion is a clear perspective on the driving forces and the multi-level mechanisms of bordering – oscillating between structure and agency, and transcending the individual or collective solipsism of constructionist thinking which has generally ignored the material aspects of borders. For example, to date the question of how political and public discourse on borders create, and promote, specific concepts of borders, has only partially been tackled.

This paper adopts the perspective developed by Post-Structuralist Political Economy (PSPE) in order to shed light on the agendas and workings of bordering, and the significance of corresponding (multi-level) discourse on borders. It clarifies the basic definitions of imaginaries, introduces a heuristic definition compatible with the concept of bordering, illustrates the role of imaginaries within discourse and develops a critical perspective on power relations addressed and modified by imaginaries. Finally, practical examples are given of the workings of imaginaries in discourse on borders and Europeanization.

## **Introduction**

Similar to many other areas of the social sciences, border studies have been exposed to the cultural turn for a considerable amount of time now. Theoretical concepts of borders which formerly were informed by political geography and its inherent structuralist and functionalist thinking have made way for constructivist understandings of borders (Paasi 1998; van Houtum et al. 2005; Geisen and van Houtum 2008; Doevenspeck 2011). What once had been a matter of political power, state intervention and geostrategy, is now conceptualised as a plethora of constructions and constructionisms. Theoretical terms such as bordering, debordering and rebordering not only indicate that borders are conceived as shifting, if not fluid concepts. These terms also suggest to think about borders in terms of social practice, i.e. of everyday construal, continual re-interpretation, symbol-building, informal institutionalising, identity building, community building and the routinization of action (van Houtum and Naerssen 2002; Newman 2006; Scott 2009; Aure 2011; Bürkner 2011; Scott 2012). They have been conceptualized as flexible multi-level and cross-level items, vested in social routines, and shaped by shifting political and economic interest (Meinhof 2004; Paasi and Prokkola 2008; Scott and van Houtum 2009). They relate to everyday reconceptualizations of space which in different analytical contexts had been captured

under headings such as spatial symbol-making, everyday re-territorialization and local place-making (Berg and van Houtum 2003; Strüver 2005; Bürkner 2009; Weiske et al. 2009; Wagner 2010; Doevenspeck 2011; Niemczik-Arambaşa 2012; Müller 2013).

While the drawing of boundaries and borders in everyday life might appear as a field of social practice which is separated from politics and geo-strategy, the opposite is true. By way of bordering, the top-down government of borders meets bottom-up governance (van Houtum et al. 2005; Aure 2011). Pre-conceived (and state-centred) concepts of borders have to stand the test of practitioners. In many cases such concepts are accommodated, revisited and altered by social agents moulding different social, political and economic arenas of action. Spontaneous and context-generating social practice typically implies routines of boundary drawing which manifest themselves as re-interpretations of political borders, but also as materialized bottom-up borderlines between social groups, cultures, economic spheres and governance arenas – which eventually might become formalized as political borders.

Much has been written about the general shift in theoretical perspectives on borders which has been enabled by this specific understanding of bordering, occasionally named “bordering turn” (van Houtum et al. 2005; Kolosov 2005; Newman 2006). Also, an increasing number of scholars have engaged in giving practical examples of bordering, however at times making use of this theoretical term in a very general way only (Aure 2011; Kaiser 2012). What has generally been missing is a clear perspective on the driving forces and the multi-level mechanisms of bordering – oscillating between structure and agency, and transcending the individual or collective solipsism of constructionist thinking which has rarely provided satisfying insights regarding material aspects of borders.

To date, for example, the question of how political and public discourse on borders create, and promote, specific concepts of borders, has only partially been tackled. This is astonishing since public debates have always rendered borders intelligible as contested constructs. The present struggle about the European external border and the territorial belonging of Ukraine is not only a geopolitical issue, negotiated between the new geostrategic blocs of the EU and Russia. It also involves a war of antagonistic concepts of cultural and social coherence, of identities, naturalized economic divisions and legitimized imagined communities etc. (cf. earlier debates about the narrative construction of European identity”, Eder 2007). Public discourse in EU member countries, in Ukraine and in Russia involve a variety of pre-conceived ideas, rhetoric patterns, images, symbols, claims for coherence, naturalized understandings of identity and belonging, etc. Some authors have spontaneously made use of the notion of imaginaries in order to grasp this fuzzy web of heterogeneous ideas and images generated, transmitted and reshaped in discourse (Liikanen 2014). However, in many cases a metaphoric usage of the term prevails, leaving a solid theoretical underpinning still a desideratum.

Recent literature on Post-Structural Political Economy (PSPE) and Cultural Political Economy (CPE) have ventured into the theoretical exploration of imaginaries as integral elements of discourse, policy-making and power-based intervention (PSPE: Larner 2000; Larner and Le Heron 2002; Le Heron 2007; Wetzstein and LeHeron 2010; Wetzstein 2013; CPE: Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008; Jessop and Ngai-Ling 2010; Jessop 2012; Jessop 2013; Sum and Jessop 2013). By doing so, they have managed to show that social construal, the institutionalization and the material representation of social constructs largely draw upon discourse in order to

create influence, relevance and legitimation, to shape and launch political projects, to legitimize political structures and power, and to pursue long-term political goals. Imaginaries have been identified here as basic semiotic items which structure discourse, and which serve as a lubricant of political controversy and contestation.

This paper adopts the perspective developed by PSPE in order to spotlight the agendas and workings of bordering, and the significance of corresponding (multi-level) discourse on borders. It clarifies the basic definitions of imaginaries, introduces a heuristic definition compatible with the concept of bordering, illustrates the role of imaginaries within discourse and develops a critical perspective on power relations addressed and modified by imaginaries. Finally, practical examples are given of the workings of imaginaries in discourse on borders and Europeanization.

### **Imaginaries as a theoretical concept**

Discourses on borders and bordering persistently circulate around imagined and socially construed realities. However, while being fascinated by the promise to gain more insight into the seminal stages and the following shifts of practical concepts of borders, border scholars often find themselves unprepared when it comes to methodology. Although near to the bordering perspective, social constructivism offers limited opportunities to get hold of the span between the social construal of boundaries and the material construction of borders. Although central constructivist concepts negotiate individual and groupwise perception and ideation concerning the world they live in, and the institutionalization and objectivation of social constructs (Berger and Luckmann 1980), the focus mainly is on the individual and its concept building, rather than on the interplay of meaning (or agency) and structure. Moreover, a systematic constructivist theoretical exploration into the production and utilization of basic ideas, images, symbols and sentiments tied to the social and political projects of the day has seldom been undertaken.

It is exactly here that two more focused concepts come in: the concept of Post-Structuralist Political Economy (PSPE) as developed by Australasian geography (Larner 1997; Larner 2000; Larner and Le Heron 2002; Wetzstein and Le Heron 2010; Wetzstein 2013), and the concept of Cultural Political Economy (CPE), prominently advanced by Bob Jessop and colleagues (Jessop 2012; Jessop 2013; Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008; Jessop and Sum 2010). Both schools have identified imaginaries as theoretical items which are central to the analysis of political projects and discourse. The following considerations shall explore their explanatory power and relevance. Although initially confined to the narrower field of political economy, the concept can be extended to the analysis of political and social arenas, especially to discourse related to bordering and everyday concepts of borders.

The concept of Post-Structural Political Economy has recently been advanced by economic geographers in Australia and New Zealand (LeHeron 2006; Wetzstein/Le Heron 2010; Wetzstein 2013). The basic idea is that political and economic processes are fundamentally contingent and open-ended. They are influenced by institutional context, socio-economic disparities, political interests and strategic goals. For the practical elaboration of political projects, imaginaries have a particular significance. Imaginaries are understood as context-specific sets of basic ideas, images, imaginations, symbols and sentiments which are assembled to coherent intellectual projects and strategic concepts (Wetzstein/Le Heron 2010). In the neoliberal context of urban and regional development in Australia and New

Zealand, such projects typically emerge as collaborations between economic and political stakeholders, sometimes resembling traditional urban growth coalitions (cf. Molotch 1976), sometimes including new types of governance guided by the felt necessities of globalization and neoliberalism (Wetzstein 2013b).

According to Wetzstein and Le Heron, imaginaries of varying origin, key stakeholders and resources become seminal to political projects within specific contexts and arenas of action (Wetzstein and Le Heron 2010). Economic, political, and spatial imaginaries are often derived from overarching ideologies and world views, e.g. from neo-liberalism, utilitarianism, communitarianism, individualism, hedonism, anti-commercialism, socialism, etc. Individual imaginaries are basically contested or drawn into competition with other imaginaries. In the course of globalization neoliberal market-related imaginaries have enjoyed political preference and they tend to assume dominant positions in a variety of political projects and across several scales. However context matters, and discourse usually entails continual re-interpretations of imaginaries, which in turn often have unpredictable effects on running negotiations, conflicts, governance processes etc.

In contrast to the more focused perspective developed by PSPE, the CPE approach towards imaginaries involves a broader perspective on instituted economic and political relations and their social embeddings (Jessop 2013: 235; Sum and Jessop 2013). Claiming to be part of a semiotic turn (instead of an unspecific “cultural” turn), it develops a special concern with the social production of intersubjective meaning. All social phenomena are considered to have “semiotic *and* material properties” (Jessop 2013: 235, emphasis by Jessop). CPE is ascribed the task to study “their interconnections and co-evolution in constructing as well as construing social relations” (ibid.), thereby avoiding the schism between structuralism and constructivism. Moreover, discourse acquires a particular significance in gluing semiosis to the material. The co-evolution of semiosis and structuration involves intellectual complexity reduction, embedded in specific social relations, and based on “potentially complementary but possibly contrary or disconnected mechanisms” (ibid.).

Social imaginaries assume a pivotal role in this understanding of meaning production: An imaginary is defined as “a semiotic ensemble (without tightly defined boundaries) that frames individual subjects’ lived experience of an inordinately complex world and/or guides collective calculation about that world. There are many such imaginaries and they are involved in complex and tangled relations at different sites and scales of action...” (ibid.; see also Sum and Jessop 2013: 164f). With regard to economic relations, Jessop assumes a selective function of imaginaries. They “identify, privilege, and seek to stabilize some economic activities from the totality of economic relations. They give meaning and shape thereby to the ‘economic’ field but are always selectively defined” (Jessop 2013: 36). As a consequence of their operationalization and institutionalization within a specific field of action and relations (here: the economy), imaginaries transform and naturalize the economic items they have touched upon, resulting in an instituted economy with specific emergent properties. Dominant imaginaries shape the institutionalization of economic relations, implying structural contradictions and strategic dilemmas inherent in field-specific relations. These dilemmas continually create material and conceptual crises, and they eventually provoke search for new imaginaries.

Although this concept focuses on economic relations and the fixation of their semiotic aspects, it can easily be transferred to other fields of social action and structuration. The

level of abstraction chosen allows for a multitude of applications and operationalizations. As social practice always includes the selection of strategically relevant bits of meaning, imaginaries can be claimed to guide everyday relations and agents' orientations as well as formalized politics or planning.

Moreover, though embedded into a concept which aims at resolving the basic contradiction between structuralist and constructivist perspectives, the category of imaginaries developed by CPE promises to contribute complementary, rather than diverging, perspectives to the concept of PSPE. It adds to it a general explanation of the basic mechanisms of semiosis, derived from the assumption that complexity reduction is guided by imaginaries. Where PSPE makes a point for the operational tailoring of imaginaries to make them fit into concrete political projects, CPE lays more weight on the ontological aspects of the creation of imaginaries. Both definitions appear to be compatible, in spite of the different methodological orientation (post-structuralism vs. post-materialism) and the scope of explanation provided by their theoretical embedding concepts. An additional link between the two concepts is affected by their specific nature as bridging concepts which seek to reconcile semiosis and the material. In both cases, imaginaries assume the quality of factors that reduce complexity, transmitted by discourse and resulting in institutionalization resp. structuration.

### **Re-shaping the concept of imaginaries**

My short exploration into the current state of theorizing imaginaries has rendered the notion relevant to the analysis of social relations and discourse. Yet up to this date only partial embeddings into overarching theoretical statements can be found (more so by Sum and Jessop 2013). While the footage of PSPE and CPE refer to different yet compatible ramifications of basic post-material positions, their connection to clear-cut theories of discourse or theories of power is loose and occasionally fuzzy. Therefore I will combine those aspects of both approaches, which contribute to a common understanding of imaginaries as roughly related to political economy, with more specific understandings of power and discourse formation. Particularly in those fields of analysis which are characterized by controversy and struggle over concepts or strategies, there is immediate need to incorporate theoretically based notions of legitimation, interest, resources of action, and power. Hence, an explicit link to Foucault's concepts of power and governmentality is introduced here. Before considering necessary theoretical elements that inform my own reformulation of the concept of imaginaries, the ideas to be adopted or retained from PSPE and CPE each will be considered.

From the PSPE approach I take the idea that imaginaries are part of political projects, and part of discourses expediting these projects. PSPE already contains a clue to the category of power, yet it is not too strong as it is confined to the logic and the social embeddings of the projects under scrutiny. For example, as soon as encounters between economic and political elites are analyzed, maybe in the formal shape of local growth coalitions, the relevance of power as a theoretical category cannot be overlooked. Yet its impact, and the scope of the entire approach, is hardly conceived beyond the context of the concrete project. The general openness of discourse, including the capability of agents to transcend scales when addressing targets, ideas, claims for legitimacy etc. has not been incorporated too much into this concept.

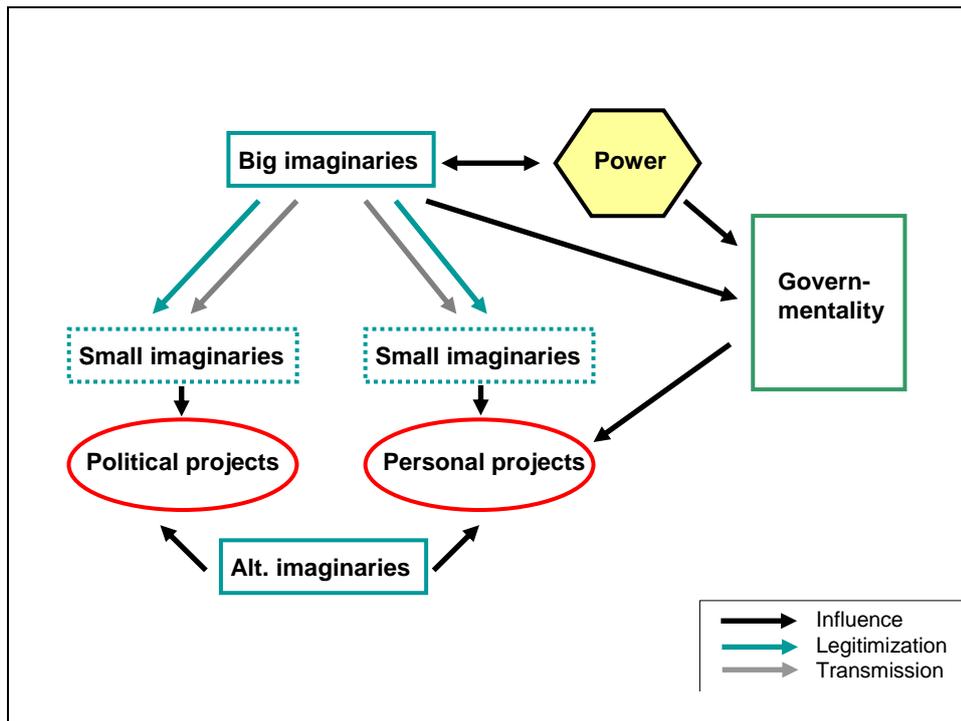
From CPE I adopt the idea of the discursive selection of preferred imaginaries. Together with the general perspective on semiosis, CPE conceives imaginaries (at least implicitly) as being dependent on political, economic and social interest – albeit often hidden behind a theoretical language which focuses on the emergence and evolution of social artefacts. In Jessop’s framework of reference, imaginaries are subdued to the “evolutionary mechanisms of variation, selection, and retention already familiar in institutional economics” (Jessop 2013: 37). This idea is suspicious of remaining a rhetorical figure as it focuses on a series of items which are not firmly rooted in social theory. A characteristic sentence reads: “CPE semiotic analysis ... studies the co-evolution of semiotic and extra-semiotic factors and processes in the contingent emergence, subsequent privileging, and ongoing realization of specific discursive and material practices” (ibid.). This evokes a naturalized picture of “selection” which – analogous to biological evolution? – entails the idea of stronger and weaker “factors” resulting in dominant and marginalized imaginaries.

This institutionalist bias of the CPE reading of imaginary formation is complemented by a peculiar evolutionary rhetoric, including the assumption of specific periods within a pathway of discourse which are dominated by either variation, selection or retention (ibid.). However the very nature of power building, the utilization of power, the formation of interest and impact, and the act of legitimizing (or denouncing) an imaginary remain unclear and undertheorized. As a consequence, the focus of my reformulation will remain on PSPE understandings of imaginaries, augmented by a Foucauldian reading of power and governmentality, and supplemented by a broadened perspective on semiosis and materiality borrowed from CPE. A more elaborate argument will be developed in the following section (see below, pp. 10-14).

Taking up the PSPE concept, an important distinction has to be made with regard to the scope of imaginaries (see figure 1). Developing the basic concept a bit further, I assume that there is a certain amount of diversification involved in the practical usage of imaginaries. Stakeholders usually make explicit and/or implicit reference to the “big” imaginaries around. Yet in order to make them fit better into their projects, they alter and reshape them in context-specific ways. These “accommodated” imaginaries are referred to as “small” imaginaries here. Within a particular (project-related) discourse, they back up specific purposes and targets in a more pointed way than big imaginaries might do (although in a strategic respect it is sometimes better to vaguely address very general ideas so as not to expose obvious targets and procedures to criticism).

To give an hypothetical example from the field of urban development: A downtown redevelopment project might be pursued by politicians and private entrepreneurs who want to enhance the global visibility of the ambitious architecture, strengthen the area’s economic impact on the city and increase its attractiveness for future investment. The “big” imaginary involved is composed of coherent neo-liberal ideas, images, symbols, etc. related to market liberalization, political de-regulation, privatization and competitiveness. The “small” imaginary in tune with the concrete project can be described as a set of ideas, images etc. that refer to the new attractiveness of the area, not only for investors but also for other uses that might give the city a better position in interurban competition. The “big” imaginary has thus been tailored down to the specific needs of the project and the specificities of local discourse, yet the connection of the small imaginary to the bigger one from which it has been derived is still clearly visible.

**Figure 1:** A model of Imaginaries



Source: Author's draft

Another distinction takes its inspiration from CPE considerations about the significance of the everyday in semiosis. It aims at enhancing the scope of the category of imaginaries. Accordingly, it is useful to conceptualize not only political projects but also **personal projects** that are developed by individual stakeholders. While the political project resides in the public sphere and is exposed to multi-level (economic, political) competition, controversy, and even conflict between several stakeholders, the personal project is withdrawn from the public but still affects it in several ways. It focuses on fundamental conceptions of life conduct, career plans, the realization of lifestyles and the establishment of family/household configurations. It relates to basic questions such as “What do I want to achieve within my particular professional or private context?”, or “What conditions can I create in order to have a good life in this particular place?” The individual answers manifest themselves in personal projects that often include some basic interest in accumulating financial capital, buying private property, acquiring a better social status, living in segregated neighbourhoods, participating in neighbourhood activism (e.g. NIMBY groups) etc. Following CPE assumptions, it can be said that everyday practice naturally informs semiosis, as much as institutionalized political or economic interest does. In this sense, personal projects easily become politicized: Policy making, then, does not only involve formal action within a political system or a context of governance; it must also be understood as the collective outcome of informal individual and group-specific thrust towards mobilizing specific resources in favour of specific personal aims.

The interests and orientations relevant to personal projects also have a connection to “big” imaginaries. E. g. in the case of neo-liberalism, such orientation might lie in the individual conviction that everyone has a natural stake in the market, that she/he will be able to realize her/his chance, and therefore must perform in a specific way. Yet this connection is probably weaker than in political projects where stakeholders usually have a stronger commitment to

political ideologies and related imaginaries. Hence “small” imaginaries tied to personal projects might appear to be more detached from the bigger ones, focussing more on short-term accomplishments in moulding personal living conditions. Nevertheless, these “personalized” imaginaries might combine easily with “politicized” imaginaries in connection with political projects. Individual stakeholders usually have no problem showing that their basic convictions, personal conduct, lifestyles and everyday orientations are in line with the political convictions they contribute to, or the political project they are part of. This is what in everyday life is usually referred to as the street credibility and moral integrity of stakeholders.

The concept of imaginaries would not be complete if we did not pay attention to alternative imaginaries that are always around. It is easily intelligible that discourses on political projects entail different political arguments and positionings, i.e. the inevitable pros and cons. Even the projects themselves are often characterized by controversy. A dominant imaginary addressed by influential stakeholders might be challenged by other (often less influential) stakeholders who refer to an alternative “big” imaginary. To cite the example of the downtown redevelopment project again, construction companies and collaborating politicians might refer to the hegemonic neo-liberal imaginary in one way or another, while an association of local residents that is also part of the project (e. g. by means of neighbourhood-based governance) addresses an imaginary of universal social inclusion (e. g. of the “Right to the City” type, cf. Harvey 2003). Of course, this alternative “big” imaginary is also apt to becoming accommodated to the specificities of the local projects. Accordingly, these stakeholders would probably claim that urban redevelopment should serve the purpose of substantially improving the living conditions of local residents instead of simply attracting more capital or embellishing superficial images of the city.

### **Imaginaries, power and governmentality**

The obvious clash of imaginaries which can be observed in such empirical cases is not simply an encounter of abstract ideas or political convictions. Since imaginaries are closely connected to power relations and hegemonic ideologies, and to the availability and the usage of power resources, they acquire important functions with regard to political struggle and everyday competition for resources (fig. 1). The most important function that imaginaries serve is as transmission belts between power and action. They give legitimation to specific targets, procedures and routines – or, at least, stakeholders **try** to legitimize their action by referring to big and small imaginaries that are already utilized by powerful stakeholders and institutions. Imaginaries also help legitimise the use of power in order to achieve political and personal aims.

The **types of power** involved shall not be elaborated too much upon here. It must suffice to introduce a rough distinction between structural, institutionalized power and socially generated power. Structural power is embodied in central authorities such as nation states and political systems, but also in a variety of other institutionalized forces: in cliques, associations, supranational organizations, economic enterprises etc. (Larner 1997, with reference to Rose 1993 and Dean 1994). These institutions, organizations and agents take benefits from the exclusionary accumulation and restricted access to power resources (money, political pressure, institutionalized networks, weapons/armies, monopolies). Socially generated power is achieved through direct social interaction and network building. It can be described as a personal resource acquired by membership in a group. It is a

concrete means of making other individuals do what you want them to do. Yet at the same time it goes far beyond that since the exertion of power has structural effects (e.g. via routinization, institutionalization etc.). The social techniques involved are trust building, persuasion, repression, making friends, creating a sense of mutuality etc.

According to Foucault, these two categories of power cannot be told apart from each other since they can be conceived as parts of networks of power relations. Foucault alludes to his observation that in practice there is no real separation between top-down and bottom-up radiations of power; rather, power tends to circulate, and permeate all levels of existence (Hall 1997: 50, with reference to Foucault 1980: 119), turning all stakeholders into oppressors and oppressed participants of discourse alike. Hence, power is not only repressing, seeking to control, but also productive, generating knowledge, discourse and social relations (ibid.).

This dual nature of power is reflected in its two-sided relationship with imaginaries: On the one hand, imaginaries are produced and distributed by means of power; on the other hand, imaginaries serve as points of reference that legitimize the accumulation and usage of power. Both functions are usually accepted by social agents, regardless if they are capable of influencing them or not. This general acceptance will be theorized here by adopting the Foucauldian notion of governmentality (Foucault 1980; Foucault 2009). Accordingly, governmentality is understood as the internalization of rules that make persons behave in a self-regulated way, in line with the logic and purposes of established political rule and hegemonial ideologies. It refers to imaginaries as important ideological and motivational backdrops to the internalization of dispositions and rules that guide autonomous action. In other words: Imaginaries legitimize socially negotiated *and* subjectivated rules of conduct, performativity, self-representation, mutuality, fairness, justice, etc. Governmentality also embodies power as a special resource because the internalization of rules and convictions needs driving forces which cannot be derived from the radiance of imaginaries alone. In this way, governmentality can be understood as the double outcome of the workings of imaginaries and various representations of power.

**Governmentality** strikes back on projects – this is the main effect which has to be acknowledged in connection with the conceptualization of imaginaries (cf. Larner et al. 2007). The usage of this concept differs from Foucault in its leverage point, which is very close to everyday practice. Foucault would take the state and its top-down access to the population as the major subject of analysis, defining governmentality as an “ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security” (Foucault 1991: 102). Although Foucault left some space for the idea that governmentality triggers apt mentalities and self-governing capacities on the side of social agents, he would have hesitated to postulate general bottom-up responses.

It is exactly here that PSPE makes a clear point in favour of integrating into the concept ground level stakeholders as objects *and* active representatives of governmentality (cf. a similar endeavour made by Rose 1996). Again, the example of urban redevelopment gives an idea of the significance of this understanding of governmentality. Top-down policy-making and urban regimes usually rely on particular modes of personal conduct and performativity

displayed by key protagonists. These stakeholders would embody a focused interest in redevelopment, as well as the imaginary behind it. For example, urban managers promoting the global visibility of the city through a particular redevelopment project would make themselves up as visionary promoters of the cutting edge of globalized modernization. They would try to behave in a way that symbolizes the key messages derived from the imaginaries involved. This integration of social practice and political/economic projects has to be conceptualized in order to understand the indebtedness of stakeholders to project philosophies and argumentative positions in discourse. It could be described as a co-evolution of semiosis and material practice (as Jessop would certainly do), yet only with the specification that governmentality creates the individual or collective disposition to prioritize and pre-select certain imaginaries over alternative ones.

Taking this “embodying” aspect of governmentality into consideration, it can be said that it is not only the protagonists’ explicit reference to imaginaries that makes projects an interesting subject of analysis. In fact there is much more tacit usage of imaginaries around (in terms of symbolizing, tagging, embodying etc.) than open verbal communication about them. This **implicit** rootedness of imaginaries in projects can be empirically traced back to governmentality. It implies the routinization of thinking and action based on governmentality, and the informal and formal institutionalization of emergent routines.

The close affiliation of imaginaries, power and governmentality with political and personal projects gives way to a broadened understanding of social practice. It can be assumed that imaginaries allow for interest-bound ideational arrangements and changing modes of configuring social fields and spaces. This “politicized” perspective on social practice should be able to establish a critical approach to the analysis of multi-scale socio-spatial reconfiguration. In particular, it has the potential to overcome the obvious harmlessness of analytical work that understands social practice as something that mysteriously emerges or unfolds “from within”. To return to the issue of borders and Europeanization, focused analysis of the role of imaginaries in Europeanization, border-related governance and the social construction of borders promises to deliver a fresh reassessment of social change and the restructuring of the everyday.

## **Imaginaries and discourse**

While it might appear obvious that imaginaries and ideation are integral parts of discourse, it is still necessary to outline their relevance for discourse analysis a bit further. A first approach to the conceptualization of discourse can be derived from Foucault himself (Foucault 1980 and 1981). The adaptation of Foucault’s understanding of power and governmentality to the PSPE model of imaginaries given, it would be natural to draw in his concept of discourse, too. However a closer look at his original ideas reveals that, although his concern is about discursive practices reflecting power relationships, the theoretical concept itself is rather vague and abstract, serving more as a guide to acquiring general analytical orientation than a source of methodological inspiration (Hobbs 2008; Kendall and Wickham 1999). It is centred on the generation of truth and knowledge in discourse, where the subject is put in a passive, indeed subordinate position: The subject is produced in discourse only, becoming the bearer, rather than creator, of the kind of knowledge which discourse produces. At the same time, it can become the object through which power is relayed (Hobbs 2008, with reference to Hall 1997).

While basic empirical work informed by Foucault might deal with dispositives (i.e. the entirety of discourses and their social, institutional and structural embeddings; see Foucault 1980: 194ff), it will also be important to analyse stakeholder coalitions and speakers' positions reflecting power. More detailed methodical prescriptions can hardly be given. A heuristic point of departure might be to identify imaginaries as coherent sets of beliefs, ideas, images etc. which are attached to political projects in the sense sketched above, and to search the speaker-dependent usage of imaginaries for indications of power relations, hierarchies, legitimation claimed for, etc.

This perspective provides a more or less static view at discourse, applying cross-sectional analysis as a first step of reconstruction. However discourse is never static; it always entails a succession of discursive events and consecutive contributions by speakers. For the task of better accounting for the dynamism inherent to discourse, a concept such as Jessop's might give some inspiration. It focuses on the discursive flow of events, textual representations of social practice, upcoming and down-turning power representations, cycles of dominance and marginalization of imaginaries, etc. By introducing the distinction between the re-politicization and sedimentation of discourses (Jessop: 35; Jessop 2009), Jessop explicitly refers to the reiterative quality of discourse, and the recursive adaptation and reinterpretation of imaginaries. Re-politicization refers to the socially arbitrary nature of social relations and hence, the contingent nature of discourse. Sedimentation gives rise to the appearance of the structural fixity of social relations and power. Both aspects of discourse have a dialectic relation, implying learning as a relevant category. Learning is conceived as a specific process which entails "the variation, selection, and retention of competing economic imaginaries (including recovered as well as extant and new imaginaries)..." (Jessop 2013: 35). The emphasis on the interactive component of discourse, which is developed here, might not fully meet the Foucauldian need to focus more on representations and the ubiquitous permeation of the social world with power relations and governmentality. However the attempt at dynamizing the concept of discourse is noteworthy and deserves further consideration.

A possible way of achieving a processual, dynamic perspective could consist in a periodization of discourse. The progression of discourse might be conceptualized in terms of vectors (mainstream directions and stable bifurcations effected by sedimentation), turns (initiating new vectors, meanders, loops etc., mainly effected by re-politicization) and ruptures (where a discourse ends and is replaced by a different one; prominent cases have been triggered by the fall of Eastern communism). Such a conceptualization of discourse progressions would promote a better understanding of the changing definitions of imaginaries, and the shifts in their instrumentalization for political (and other) ends.

### **Plausibilities: Reconstructing imaginaries in the context of Europeanization and bordering**

At first sight, the task to identify imaginaries in practice appears to be hard to accomplish. However a closer look at the very nature of political, economic and social projects often makes things easier than anticipated. For a first start at checking the plausibility of the concept I chose two different subjects which provide good occasions of clearly describing imaginaries: i) tangible projects at the local level that involve visible stakeholders and protagonists of guiding ideas and visions, and ii) abstract normative projects (such as the transnational project of European integration) where stakeholders are not always easily

visible, often operating at a remote political level. The routines of reconstructing imaginaries are similar in both cases, with an additional challenge coming up by the task to identify stakeholders on the “abstract” side.

i) Point of departure #1: Concrete projects shall be exemplified here by a hypothetical case of bordering. The subject is a city marketing campaign launched by a binational twin city located at the German-Polish border. The campaign addresses the economic and cultural gateway function of the two parts of the city, the historical significance of this gateway (in terms of a common cultural heritage), and the economic attractiveness of the specific location, where lower wage levels and costs on one side combine with relatively well-established markets (e.g. made up of tourism) and better access to customers on the other side. The local case of the twin city of Görlitz/Zgorzelec meets this specification in several respects (cf. Rudolf and Jaeger 2007; Weiske et al. 2009), yet for reasons of clarity of the exemplification the description has been simplified and stylized so that the case assumes an ideal type character.

The “small” imaginary used by the protagonists of city marketing refers to the economy. The twin city has to “sell” its assets on an international market made up by cities which compete for external investment. In order to attract investors, it has to lay out marketable features in the urban “showroom”: for instance, the proof that profitable investment has been made here in the past; or, explicit reference to a successful history of local entrepreneurship; an account of important cultural possessions that easily combine with a favourable economic atmosphere, etc. The imaginary covers all the small pieces of the marketing strategy and allows for generalized statements such as “Wealth and prosperity arise out of attractiveness; once the city is attractive, everybody will benefit from it”.

Not surprisingly, the “big” imaginary related to this proposition is rooted in neoliberalism. It is expressed by the basic idea that social development should conform to market principles. It demands for market-conform alignments of local politics and projects, yet without necessarily suggesting the more specific normative ideas and urban “imperatives” that are present in the “small” imaginary.

At the level of imaginaries, the European dimension comes in as a secondary reference connected to the issue of attractiveness. It stresses the importance of building local stepping stones to European unity. Major stakeholders acting in favour of the gateway function repeatedly refer to the vision of an integrated, coalesced Europe which should bring wealth and the “good life” to everyone. This imaginary is easily compatible to the neo-liberal one: It suggests a universal imperative to remove obstacles on the way to an all-encompassing yet vague “European field”. The small imaginary derived from it more specifically refers to the removal of separating economic barriers, resulting clearly in a perspective towards de-bordering. The vision implies the construction of a unified border-transcending economic space which is not only ready for future investment but also for free transnational exchange of commodities, labour, capital, cultural goods, etc.

In our fictive empirical case, the obviously dominant neo-liberal imaginary (in its “small” and “big” versions) reflects power relations that favour political and economic decision-takers over civil society agents and other private stakeholders. The imaginary also corresponds to modes of governmentality which imply a certain rightfulness, relevance and natural authority of economic transnational perspectives applied to the border and to the larger

project of Europeanization. There even is a certain degree of indebtedness of all stakeholders to the idea that the city needs economic initiative, and that the call for meeting the needs of “the market” is rightful in one way or another. Governmentality of the neoliberal type to a certain degree resonates with the local stakeholders, regardless of their social status, political orientation, particular interest etc. Together with the implementation of corresponding imaginaries, it helps legitimize opinion leadership, stakeholder coalitions, supportive social networks and the creation of local power resources in favour of those who already acquired dominant discourse positions.

Nevertheless the dominant “small” imaginary, which has a cross-border integrative connotation, has been challenged by the local parliamentary opposition in the wealthier part of the twin city, and by NGOs that support it. They vote for business improvement and the development of a strong economic infrastructure in their part of the city only, claiming that this part had always been the centre of economic activities in the historical past, and that it has performed significantly better during the past years. Accordingly, only money that is invested here would bring profit and wealth to the city. This idea conforms to recent changes in East German regional policy which seeks to support economically strong locations, hoping to create new growth poles (Bürkner 2006; Ribhegge 2006). The “small” imaginary closely attached to this proposition refers to local autonomy and the “survival of the (economically) fittest”. It also covers the assumption that a distinct socio-cultural milieu would be needed to build the basis of (one-sided) local autonomy and viability. It carries connotations of cultural and economic superiority, both in economic and cultural respects. It also refers to competition, yet it defines competition as fundamentally local, restricted to a micro-region located on one “national” side of the border. This imaginary has two major implications: Firstly, the significance of cross-border integration (as an effect of integral twin city development) is shaded off, thereby also lowering the relevance of the idea of European integration. And secondly, the global aspect of competition supported by the dominant neoliberal imaginary is completely missing here. This imaginary lends itself to bottom-up re-bordering of the conservative localist type that has already been empirically explored for the German-Polish border region (Bürkner 2002 and 2013; Dürrschmidt 2006). The emphasis on the “national German side” might additionally be reinforced by the long-lasting repercussions of East German transition which still foster tendencies of preserving small regional pockets of GDR nostalgia.

The big imaginary which is evoked by this smaller one is connected to the alleged prevalence of national societies and economies over global (and European) relations. It is connected with conservative regionalism or localism, i.e. projects which aim at defending domestic culture and structural context against globalism. In the particular context of a “bi-national” border it claims for conformity with “national” rule, addressing feelings of “national” superiority.

Although this imaginary, obviously preferred by a minority of stakeholders only, cannot claim for general acceptance, it incites controversial debates, and different ways of individual and collective involvement. There is not only ongoing struggle over the purpose, ends and means of the local project. There also is a subliminal clash of different types of governmentality that resonate with the different imaginaries. While the neo-liberal imaginaries (small as well as big versions) are connected to a widely shared type of governmentality which demands market-conform conduct, self-governance and performance from everyone, the imaginary of “national autonomy” refers to a type of

governmentality which belongs to a historical arrangement of political forces, definitions of power, border concepts etc. derived from the Westphalian welfare state of First Modernity, and preserved in a peculiar fashion during the era of communism. While governmentality implied by global neo-liberalism relies on hegemonic power that legitimizes this specific type of governmentality, the competing type of governmentality is not fully backed up by top-down structural power. State nationalism still accompanies the general project of globalizing modernization, but it cannot create an orientation and a suggestive power which is strong enough to reunite all stakeholders. Hence, support for the “national autonomy” imaginary is mainly created by social power generated within a local or regional milieu. This does not mean that stakeholders making use of this sort of power cannot act in a successful way; they might even endanger the city-marketing project by producing visible signs of political deviation and resistance. However in the long run the legitimation claimed by them via the relatively marginalized imaginary is prone to fail in face of the stability of the dominant imaginary.

ii) Point of departure #2: Abstract projects seem to be less tangible; however they are relevant as they usually encompass a high amount of ideational backlog that reveals big imaginaries in various degrees of obviousness. The most favourable cases are constituted by overarching European projects such as the realization of the Internal Market. Here the ideal of enabling unrestricted flows of economic factors within a structurally homogeneous (yet regionally diversified) economic space is formulated in very close affinity to the neo-liberal imaginary that comes with globalization. The completed Internal Market would thus show optimal conformity to the ideal of globally homogenized and unrestricted economic spaces. Such spaces would allow for easy transnational and transregional transfer of money, goods, people and organizations according to the requirements of economic projects pursued by global players and networks.

Governmentality is created here by continual reference-making to ultimate norms and ideals which allegedly guide the implementation of the Internal Market. Good life for everyone, democracy, political participation, free access to education, free mobility, regard of human rights, peacefulness and other high values are reclaimed in policy discourses at the EU level, and they trickle down to the population of the member states, as part of the phenomenon of “Europeanization” (Radaelli and Featherstone 2003; Börzel and Risse 2003). Projects coming along with this overhang of normativity rest upon a suggestive power which makes “resistance useless”. The imperatives of democracy and the marketization of all aspects of social life assume an overwhelming quality; they can simultaneously seize individuals and collectives at the intellectual, emotional and symbolic levels of their everyday lives.

A less conspicuous, nevertheless revealing, case would consist in hidden references to such imaginaries. Hidden references are often contained in sectoral policy projects at the EU level that at first sight seem to take a neutral position towards Europeanization. However, closer inspection of relevant documents and discourse might reveal a certain “European” bias of arguments, scenarios, images and symbols that are established as integral parts of the project. For example, education policy under the name of the Bologna Process would employ a rhetoric of European integration that makes ample use of categories such as “homogenization of educational standards”, “intercultural learning”, “equivalence of qualification”, “international exchange of knowledge carriers”, “creating a homogeneous European knowledge space” etc. (Fichter-Wolf 2013). The first impression is that the dominant imaginary is indebted to humanism, that it is simply about overcoming national

barriers to academic exchange and knowledge production. A closer look at relevant discourses, e.g. the discourse on the Common European Space of Knowledge, or on a future unified Space of Higher Education, reveals many more references to the Unified Internal Market, to the claim for mobility of qualified workforce, and to guiding ideas about the future role of Europe in global competition. In fact, neo-liberalism to a high degree informs the “sectoral” imaginary in question, including the strong pull towards achieving European hegemony in an expanding global knowledge society – which, notabene, is imagined in economic, rather than humanistic, terms.

Sectoral discourse thus tends to involve heterogeneous imaginaries which might only become visible below the surface level of discourse. It will be important to explore the hidden references and allusions to imaginaries at a deeper level in order to achieve a comprehensive record of the richness of discourses that touch upon Europeanization and bordering. It will also be important to explore the congruence and divergence of the imaginaries involved – within individual sectoral discourses as well as across sectoral policies. In this manner, basic contradictions of EU policy, e.g. those between the strict border regime at the external borders and the “easy mobility” regime in the internal EU space, will receive a more differentiated understanding than in the past. In particular, a series of open questions as to the types of governmentality involved, and the specific progression of discourse, immediately impose themselves.

## **Conclusions**

In the context of the social construction of borders it can be assumed that strategically designed arrangements of ideas and imaginaries acquire specific social meanings. Definitions of borders, of Europeanness, European integration etc. often represent pointed understandings and selective adaptations of more general ideas. These understandings may be conceived as dependent on contexts, interests, and scopes for political and economic action – according to the logic supplied by the imaginary dominant in that specific context. Hence imaginaries must be analytically reconstructed with special care to their context-boundedness and strategic significance. The teleological selectivity of references, their mutual ideological distance, their social, political and economic impact, and their interference with stakeholders’ basic interests must be claimed as preferred subjects of border-related analysis.

As the discussion in the second part of this paper has demonstrated, the PSPE concept of imaginaries adds a significant number of interpretations and questions to the analysis of policy-making and discourse in the field of Europeanization and bordering. The theoretical model gives point to the assumption that a focus on the interplay between different sources and types of power, governmentality, and imaginaries will provide a coherent analytical clue to the specific local and national implementations of the big ideas of Europeanization, a borderless Europe, intense cross-border cooperation, cultural rapprochement of heterogeneous populations, transnational regionalism etc.

A critical appraisal of the PSPE approach from the perspective of Cultural Political Economy has endorsed the analytical focus on discourse and the representation resp. utilization of imaginaries in political projects. It has also clarified the need for developing a deepened analysis of the dialectics of semiosis and materiality when reconstructing discourse. Necessary debates on the efficacy of discourse led by imaginaries are still in the state of

nascency. The implementation, stabilization and strategic utilization of imaginaries, combined with specific power relations and continual attempts of creating power resources, supposedly has structural effects: It naturalizes the subjects and ideological positions claimed for in discourse, and it determines the progression of discourse.

The processual perspective on the development of political projects, and corresponding discourse, still has to be elaborated upon. Here Jessop's idea of an interplay between the re-politicization and sedimentation of discourse might be helpful, although his institutionalist background assumption of a contingent evolution of discourse might not be very conducive to a critical analysis of power. It might distract scholars' attention from the very drivers of controversy and power formation. But this is a story which must be told in more detail on another occasion.

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