Border/scapes. Borderlands and design studies in dialogue

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All over the years 2000s, post-9/11 securitization discourses and the resulting re-affirmation of political borders into a renewed global geography of in/exclusion (Cruz, 2004, p. 1) have deeply influenced the study of borders and borderlands in their mutual social, economic and spatial interweaving. The intensification and multiplication of international migrations fluxes, transnational and transbordering processes (Irazábal, 2014) have produced a series of new transcalar topographies of knowledge with different outcomes, both in academic urban studies and in professional design practices.

In a recent publication, A companion to Border Studies, Wilson and Donnan (2012) stressed the «increasing prominence of borders in the lives of many people in all parts of the world» in consideration that «there are more international borders in the world today than ever there were before» (Wilson and Donnan, 2012, pp. 1-2; Boddington, 1999, p. 4; Irazábal, 2014, p. 1). In this framework, some lines of research have assumed particular relevance in relation to spatial disciplines. For instance, the identification of borders as «social constructs and processes rather than stable entities» (Paasi, 2005, p. 19) that are «socially produced and reproduced, and thus are always susceptible to be modified, transformed, erased, recreated, reimagined, transgressed» (Soja, 2005, p. 34). Furthermore a conceptual shift occurred in different disciplinary fields in the last years: from a conception of borders as geographical and political peripheries and national ‘edge-lands’ to another one recognizing them as ‘new centres’, ‘new begging’ (Wilson and Donnan, 2012, pp. 3, 13; Eker and Van Houtum, 2013) and «spatial points of origin» (Schoonderbeek in these pages).

The growing international and cross-disciplinary interest towards new conceptualizations and approaches to borders, such as the borderscapes notion (Rajaram and Grundy-War, 2007; Brambilla and van Houtum, 2012), have opened innovative understandings of the mutual ‘shaping’ processes between political borders, (supra)national power relations and structures, transnational socio-spatial practices and networks and everyday «border struggles» (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). By exploring the borderscapes notion as a guiding concept in its different meanings, through the work of scholars, architects and planners practicing on/across borderlands, and envisioning the border in its «constant state of becoming» (Brambilla, 2014, p. 4), this Theme for Territorio intends to contribute to a reciprocal dialogue between borderlands studies and design studies. Though not exhaustive of the broad production on borders and borderlands design, the dossier aims to clarify how border studies can be relevant for design disciplines.

Parole chiave: borderscapes; borderlands design; dialogo interdisciplinare