

Borderwalks as a tool to foster European Integration

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Abstract

This contribution examines how guided “Borderwalks”, which are structured, thematic and participatory walks along national borders, can foster European integration by raising awareness of the legal, administrative, historical and cultural dimensions of border regions. Using the Upper Rhine region between Germany, France and Switzerland as a case study, “Borderwalks” are presented as an application-oriented tool for civil society, students, politicians and public administrations. Despite the objective of overcoming borders through European integration, border regions continue to face persistent legal, administrative and social barriers. The contribution first identifies the factors that shape European identity in border regions, drawing on insights from political science, social sciences and public administration, before introducing “Borderwalks” as a practical method that combines place-based learning with dialogue among diverse stakeholders. The Upper Rhine region exemplifies both the achievements and the remaining challenges of cross-border cooperation, including fragmented legal frameworks, differing administrative procedures and limited public awareness of EU policies. “Borderwalks” create a platform to identify and discuss these obstacles through concrete locations that illustrate border effects in everyday life, such as cross-border commerce, historical sites or transport infrastructure. These examples provide opportunities to explain differences in national legislation, the functioning of the EU internal market and the historical development of European cooperation. Conducted bilingually or with simultaneous translation, “Borderwalks” also promote multilingualism and intercultural exchange. Beyond raising awareness, they can contribute to identifying practical legal and administrative solutions to cross-border barriers, such as the mutual recognition of administrative requirements or improvements in cross-border transport. As a bottom-up approach, the concept complements the objectives of ECBM 2.0 by strengthening European identity and promoting the European values of freedom of movement, democracy, and the rule of law. While centred on the Upper Rhine region, the proposed methodology is readily transferable to other European border regions.

Keywords: Borderwalk, Border Effects, Legal and Administrative, European Fundamental Freedoms, Didactic Tool

Introduction

Even though political borders, for example within the European Union, have in many cases become physically and materially less visible as a result of European integration, border regions continue to experience a disproportionate number of legal, administrative and socio-economic challenges arising from the existing of national boundaries. At the same time, these regions reveal a unique laboratory of historical, cultural, linguistic and institutional similarities and differences that shape everyday cross-border interactions.

In this context, the concept of the Borderwalk was developed within in the cross-border Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence (University of Strasbourg, 2025). The Borderwalk is an innovative educational format, that enables participants to explore and critically reflect on the multiple dimensions of borders within a short walking distance. The aim is, to experience various scientific dimensions of a border that is often invisible at first glance today by means of visible border effects and to show its scientific background.

The novelty of the Borderwalk is that it can be used to convey interdisciplinary content on the one hand and can be adapted to various target groups of students, experts from science and research to administrative staff and multilingual for international groups on the other hand.

By raising awareness of the (in)visible manifestations of borders in everyday life, the Borderwalk contributes to fostering European integration at the subnational level in border regions. It encourages participants to better understand both the achievements and the remaining challenges of European integration, thereby strengthening cross-border cooperation, mutual understanding and a shared sense of European belonging.

Borderwalk, Border and Boundary Effects - Terms, Definitions and Didactic Classification

To examine the potential of Borderwalks as a tool for fostering European integration through the identification and visualisation of cross-border obstacles, the article first outlines the conceptual foundations of the Borderwalk and subsequently situates it within a didactic framework. For this purpose, the terms of the Borderwalk, the border and border effects are first defined and illustrated using the first cross-border Borderwalk to be implemented in Kehl/Strasbourg. In the following section, the Borderwalk as a concept will be analysed from a didactic perspective.

Borderwalk - Definition and dissemination of the Borderwalk as a term and tool

The term Borderwalk has not yet been comprehensively defined. Linguistically, it combines the terms “border” as synonym for boundary and “walk” as a route for light strolling or a short hike. Accordingly, the term in its literal sense initially includes a walk along and across a border.

As developed in the context of this contribution, however, the Borderwalk represents considerably more than a physical route. The overarching goal of the Borderwalk concept – apart of the aim of fostering European Integration is to make it possible to experience various scientific dimensions of a border that is often invisible at first glance today by means of visible border effects within a manageable distance and to show their legal and administrative background.

Comparable initiatives can be found in several cross-border contexts. Borderwalks in a similar sense have been organised along the Austrian-Czech border (Regional Management Oberösterreich, 2025), in Bratislava (BAUM cityregion, 2024) and in other forms on the border between Mexico and the USA (North Dakota State University, 2012). In a different form – without a guided route – but under the term “Borderwalk”, a comparable project was carried out within the framework of the cross-border Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence by Marlies Vermeulen and Remy Kroese with a “Border Crossing Act Instrument” (University of Strasbourg, 2023).

The Borderwalk model developed at Kehl University of Applied Sciences (Kehl University of Applied Sciences, 2024) differs from these approaches through its stronger orientation towards a didactic tool which is versatile, making it adaptable to both interdisciplinary contexts and specific target groups.

Borders and Border Effects

The concept of the Borderwalk implies a boundary (“border”). In the context of this contribution, however, the term is understood in a broad sense.

In its primary understanding, the term encompasses the border in the sense of a political-geographical sovereignty dividing line between the territory of two states or their subdivisions (Khan, 2004, p. 12 ff.). A distinction is made here between so-called natural borders of the first order (which, due to their separating form as obstacles to mobility, are often also cultural and linguistic borders, such as mountain ridges) and the later natural borders of the second order, such as rivers, which originally had a primarily connecting character, but were often changeable due to the lack of canalisation and were therefore typically only defined as natural borders in the 19th century. However, boundaries can also be defined independently of natural features, so-called tearing bed boundaries as straight lines between two points or along longitude or latitude.

At the same time, the concept of a border cannot be reduced to a political or geographical line (Kleinschmidt, 2011, p. 9 ff.). From a geographical perspective, spatial transition areas can also be defined as border regions. Borders can also be transitional areas between two different (e.g. aggregate or mind) states, (mental) spaces, systems or categories. A boundary can therefore also be understood physically, conceptually or functionally and marks the end of one area as well as the beginning of another.

Closely related to the concept of borders are border effects. Within border studies (the term also occurs in other academic disciplines), border effects could be understood as all direct and indirect effects of borders on social, economic, cultural and political processes in the areas adjacent to the borders. The term is intended to cover both separating and connecting effects of borders (Brunet-Jailly, 2011, p. 1f.; Brunet-Jailly, 2005, p. 633 f.).

Application examples: The Borderwalks in Kehl/Strasbourg and Breisach/Neuf-Brisach

In the following, the basic concept of the Borderwalk between Kehl (Germany) and Strasbourg (France), which was the first Borderwalk concretely implemented by Kehl University of Applied Sciences, will be presented exemplarily.

The university's geographical location, situated 800 metres from the German-French border along the Rhine, provides particularly favourable conditions. Kehl University of Applied Sciences offers interdisciplinary programmes preparing students for careers in public administration.

The guided Borderwalk currently implemented in the Kehl-Strasbourg border region (University of Strasbourg, 2024) is intended to sensitise the participants to various legal and administrative aspects of the European Union and cross-border cooperation over a distance of approximately 3.5 kilometres, starting at the Hochschule/Läger stop of the cross-border Strasbourg tram on the German side of the Rhine. These aspects are intended to complement the teaching of legal and administrative content, which represents about 50 % of the curriculum.

Figure 1: Typical route of the Borderwalk Kehl/Strasbourg; visualisation by Google Maps

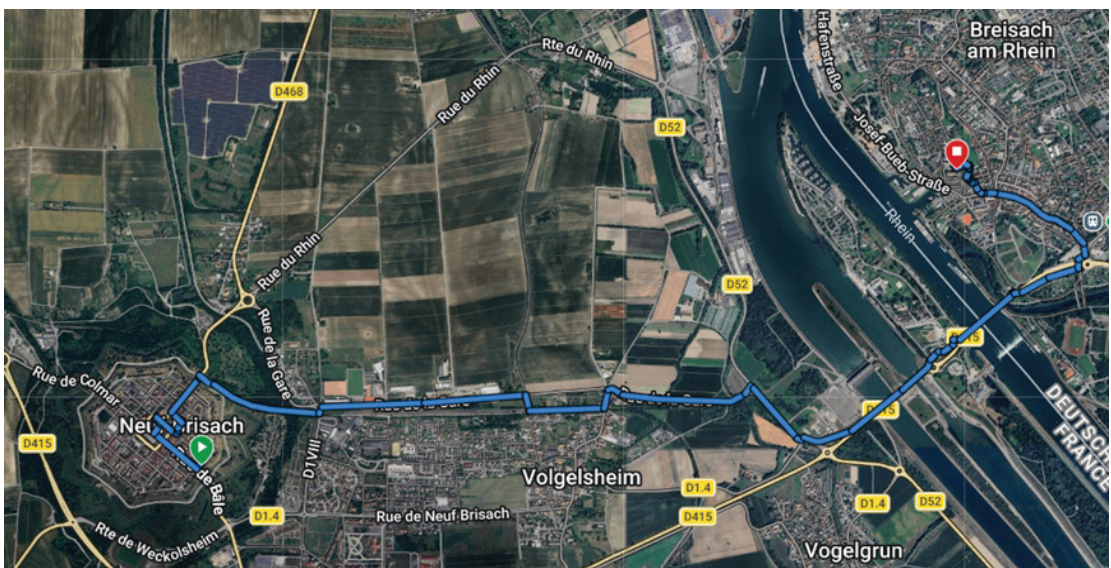


At the same time, the Borderwalk can currently be addressed on the same route in a targeted and subject-specific way, for example on aspects of the EU internal market and fundamental freedoms, the common history of Kehl and Strasbourg, wars and cultures of remembrance, on the complexity of cross-border cooperation in various policy areas from internal security and police and customs cooperation, to cross-border infrastructures (new construction of the Europa Bridge, Passerelle, local heating networks, cross-border tram) as well as visible signs of the otherwise invisible legal and administrative border.

The interdisciplinary character of the Borderwalk enables the integration of perspectives from border studies, law and administrative sciences, European studies, political science, history, architecture, urban and spatial planning (urbanism), as well as sociology, can be addressed as academic disciplines.

Beyond its educational objectives, the Borderwalk also highlights the unique selling points of Kehl University of Applied Sciences, in particular its application orientation, its focus on public administration, Europe and cross-border cooperation, as well as the implementation of foreign-language study modules (Filière Française). The range of target groups is extensive and ranges from groups of students from European Schools who request the Borderwalk in connection with a visit to the city of Strasbourg or the European Parliament as part of excursions or project days on these topics, to international students (Erasmus+ incomings), international visitor groups (e.g. at research workshops), stakeholder groups, to the public and various local actors of civil society. The Borderwalk thus reflects the university's "Third Mission" by extending academic engagement beyond teaching and research and facilitating the exchange of knowledge with societal actors (University of Vienna, 2021; Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung, 2025).

Figure 2: Typical route of the Borderwalk Breisach/Neuf-Breisach; visualisation by Google Maps



Recently, the concept of the Borderwalk had been expanded together with students and research assistants to the area of Neuf Brisach – Breisach on an approximately 6.5 km long walk from Neuf-Brisach (France) to Breisach (Germany), which could also be done on foot, by e-scooter, or by bicycle.

Next to come is a trinational Borderwalk around Basel Badischer Bahnhof. In addition, a videographic preparation of the border walk was commissioned with the aim of being able to offer a digital “bad weather option”. Furthermore, multi-day options of the concept as well as an unguided alternative are also to be developed. This means that Borderwalks can also be integrated into third-place encounter programmes (Baden-Württemberg, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2025).

Subject-specific and didactic classification of the basic concept

The basic concept of the Borderwalk, which can be expanded in many ways, can be integrated into various subject-specific and subject-didactic contexts. While its conceptual foundations are closely linked to law and administrative sciences, the format is equally applicable to fields such as spatial and urban planning, economics, architecture and sociology.

With the didactic (meta-)concept of the Borderwalk, subject-specific content from various scientific disciplines can be combined with interdisciplinary general didactic elements such as learning in public space, target group differentiation, project-oriented learning or citizenship education (Ehmke, Reusser & Fischer-Schöneborn, 2022), which will be briefly outlined below.

Overarching didactic elements

With the aim of creating a tool that is as application-oriented as possible, which presents theoretical and practical aspects of (in)visible boundary features in an application-oriented and target group-specific way, numerous overarching didactic elements were combined in the development of the Borderwalk. This shows that the concept of the Borderwalk is predestined for use in interdisciplinary teaching/learning scenarios.

Learning in public spaces

In spatial terms, the Borderwalk can be seen as an embodiment of the concept of learning in public space. In the context of spatial planning, public space is initially understood as “the totality of all urban spaces that are fundamentally accessible and usable by the general public” (Berding & Selle, 2018, p. 1639). As the basic concept of the Borderwalk takes place outside conventional educational settings and is conducted along publicly accessible streets, pathways, and open spaces, it directly engages with such environments as learning spaces. However, it can also be subsumed under the sociological definitional approaches, according to which space is defined as “relational (arrangement) of living beings and social goods in places” (Löw, 2022, p. 25, 171) and the public sphere

as “the general access to something” (Habermas, 2023). The concept is based on the combination of formal learning at the various waystations, where certain connections are taught, and informal learning through the absorption and experience of the impressions during the course of the route and the cognitive link between the two forms of learning. The findings from both forms can be secured, for example, as part of a follow-up afterwards.

Target group differentiation as a didactic principle

Another characteristic of the Borderwalk is that the didactic concept can be differentiated according to target groups. Target group differentiation is a didactic principle according to which the teaching/learning offers can be adapted to the individual or group-specific requirements of the learners in terms of personnel, with the aim of constructively taking heterogeneity into account in learning processes and thus breaking down learning barriers. Differentiation can take place in various dimensions, for example in the adaptation of intellectual levels, but also in terms of language (multilingualism) as well as thematic interests, cultural backgrounds, prior knowledge and other (e.g. social) factors.

The Borderwalk accommodates such differentiation by allowing content, language, methodological approaches and discussion formats to be adapted to the respective target audience. Consequently, identical geographical routes and learning setting can be utilised to address diverse educational objectives and participant groups. This flexibility enables the format to reach learners with different levels of expertise and varying interests while maintaining a coherent spatial and conceptual framework.

Project-based learning

The Borderwalk exhibits key characteristics of project-based learning. The term project-oriented learning is understood to mean “learning in social contexts with a meaningful reference to the living environment with the active participation and responsibility of the learners” (Gudjons, 2014, p. 137). By linking academic content directly to observable phenomena within a cross-border environment, the Borderwalk facilitates the contextualisation of theoretical knowledge and promotes the development of problem-oriented perspectives.

It is also conceivable that certain target groups, such as students, could be involved in the development of the Borderwalks through suitable teaching/learning events. Thus, the Borderwalk is particularly suitable for curricular integration, for example into the introductory phase of studies in addition to the student recruitment phase. In terms of content, new stations can be developed and thematised, but also Borderwalks can be individualised and developed individually, for example in the form of podcasts or video clips.

In this respect, students can participate in the creation of their own Borderwalk and adopt the concept and the content to be conveyed with it.

Experimental learning

The Borderwalk can furthermore be interpreted through the lens of experimental learning. This is particularly evident when participants are involved in the preparation of the Borderwalk, such as groups of students who, after completing a Borderwalk, are given the task in the course of a teaching/learning event to find suitable stations for a certain other topic or for a comparable thematisation at another point and to describe them scientifically and then present this on the occasion of a trial run, the “experimental learning cycle”, consisting of the four characteristic stages (experience, reflection, conceptualisation, active experimentation), is passed through (Kolb, 2014, p. 50 ff.). In this sense, Borderwalks could be also integrated into the framework of research-based learning (Huber, 2015, p. 15 ff.).

European Education / Citizenship education

From the perspective of European education or citizenship education, the goal of education is seen as enabling “the confrontation with socially relevant key problems that affect the life of the individual and the coexistence in society” (Klafki, 2007, p. 60). The walk along the border, in which (in)visible border features are deliberately made tangible, precisely enables this confrontation with various key problems that affect individual or overall social daily coexistence.

In the area of legal courses (constitutional and European law), there are various ways of addressing European fundamental freedoms and the principle of territoriality under international law. Also, in the context of school education, which can be associated with the university as a venue as a direct starting point for early career and study orientation at grammar schools, a thematisation of European values and basic structures in the subject of social studies would be just as conceivable as a historical outline of European integration.

In addition, it is also conceivable to address key problems or circumstances relevant to civil society, for example regarding the cross-border consumption behaviour of tobacco products.

Bilingual teaching / subject-specific language acquisition

The Borderwalk also offers considerable potential for bilingual and multilingual learning environments. Language acquisition is particularly efficient when language is seen primarily as a means of communication, especially successful communication aimed at mutual understanding is considered more important than grammatically and error-free use of the language. In this respect, the Borderwalk can offer an activating introduction that lowers the inhibition threshold to communicate in the target language through the concrete confrontation with the respective other language, border encounters with people or even

street or advertising signs (Frey, 2014, p. 310). This effect can be reinforced by the fact that the participants in the Borderwalk come from both countries, for example in the context of a cross-border course (e.g. cross-border project management) designed together with a partner institution. The target group of civil society, for example through the involvement of German and French citizens from Kehl and Strasbourg, could experience a lively bilingual discussion at the individual stations of the Borderwalk.

Other didactic elements

In addition to the didactic elements mentioned above, the Borderwalk incorporates through its involvement of the participants further didactic elements, such as interactive learning, collaborative knowledge construction and situated learning. Depending on its design and intended audience, the format may also include aspects of service learning, particularly in cases where the Borderwalk is later made available to society.

General scientific background: Borderwalks and Cross-border governance

Characteristic of all cross-border Borderwalk concepts is that, in addition to its overarching didactic classification and the specific didactic elements, the format can generally be seen as an element of horizontal integration (Beck, J. 2022, p. 24 f.) in the context of cross-border governance (Frey, 2011).

Specific scientific elements and subject-didactic dimensions

While the overarching didactic principles of the Borderwalk remain largely transferable across disciplines, the respective subject-didactic and thus methodological and non-material elements naturally vary between the various scientific disciplines.

From a didactic point of view, the various stations should be classified as an application of the case study method, enabling participants to analyse concrete situations and derive broader insights from particular examples (Zumbach, Haider & Mandl, 2008, p. 1 f.)

Using the example of law, the Borderwalk can procedurally use the method of an inspection (e.g. § 26(1) no. 4 VwVfG) in the context of the required investigation of the facts (§ 24(1) VwVfG). Consequently, the practical application of the principle of official investigation is one of the central aspects of legal and administrative science education as it takes place at Kehl University of Applied Sciences.

Interim conclusion

With this Borderwalk concept, numerous individual didactic elements can be linked together. Due to its scalability and adaptability to different target groups, the concept can be broadly applied in various subject-didactic contexts.

Basic concept and potential variations of the Borderwalk

In the following, the basic concept - illustrated by the specific examples of the Borderwalks already implemented in Kehl/Strasbourg and Neuf-Brisach/Breisach - will be used as a basis for discussing further variations.

Basic concept of the Borderwalk

The basic concept of the Borderwalk is to make the border - which is usually invisible - visible and scientifically explainable within a cross-border living space, using the shortest possible route to highlight its visible effects. Ideally, the stops along this route can be organised around different subject areas and academic disciplines.

In its basic conception, the Borderwalk consists of a walking route that connects the various stations. Whenever feasible, the route is organised as a circular trail. Where a circular route cannot be realised, the outward or return journey may be completed by cross-border public transport services, such as train, bus or tram connections, thereby incorporating additional dimensions of cross-border mobility into the experience.

The didactic structure of each station follows a three-step approach consisting of observation, explanation and thematic contextualisation. Participants are first invited to identify and describe the observable characteristics of the site (“What can be seen here?”). Subsequently, explanatory perspectives are introduced in order to analyse the underlying causes and mechanisms (“Why is this the case?”). Finally, these explanations are adapted to the respective target audience and embedded within the overarching thematic focus of the Borderwalk. This approach combines empirical observation with scientific interpretation and facilitates the communication of complex border-related phenomena in an accessible and context-sensitive manner.

Exemplary representation of a Borderwalk station with Theming - Tobacco shops on the German side near the border

A particularly illustrative Borderwalk station is provided by tobacco shops located on the German side of the Franco-German border. As a classic example of a station can serve a tobacco shop on the German side near the border with French cigarette advertising. These establishments make visible the practical consequences of regulatory and fiscal differences between the neighbouring states and thereby offer an accessible entry point for discussing European integration and cross-border economic behaviour.

At the level of direct observation, in both cities, a building on the German side can be seen, which is usually close to the border, which can be reached directly by car and which is aimed at walk-in customers. A striking feature is the extensive use of French-language advertising for cigarettes and other tobacco products (“ancien prix”). Promotional materials frequently include French health warnings, such as “fumer diminue la fertilité.

Moreover, many of these businesses display the traditional French symbol of licensed tobacco retailers (“la carotte”), indicating that their primary clientele consists of French-speaking consumers. In some cases, the operators themselves are French nationals.

*Figure 3: Tobacco shop in Kehl
(SWR, 2025)*



*Figure 4: Tobacco shop in Breisach
(Badische Zeitung, 2024).*



In this example, the explanatory dimension and thematic contextualisation focuses on the economic and legal factors underlying this spatial concentration of tobacco retailers. The target group adaptation is usually done via the aspect that tobacco products are probably cheaper in Germany than in France. In addition, the opening and operation of a tobacco shop in Germany - even for French nationals - could probably be less restrictive than in France.

In terms of trade law, the normal business licence in this respect should be considered here, as well as the special provisions of the Tobacco Tax Act and the Youth Protection Act (advertising regulations).

With regard to the topic of the European Union or EU law, it should be pointed out that strict quantitative restrictions on the duty-free import of tobacco products for non-commercial, personal use from an EU country to France, as they used to exist on the basis of a decree (e.g. on 200 cigarettes, a stick), no longer exist (Voisin’s neighbors, 2024) today, now the EU guideline values (about 800 cigarettes, 4 cartons) are used as the benchmark. In this respect, Union citizens can now make use of the free movement of goods (Art. 28 et seq. TFEU, in particular the prohibition of customs duties Art. 30 TFEU and the prohibition of quantitative restrictions on imports and measures having equivalent effect, Art. 34 TFEU) within these guideline values.

The opening of a corresponding business is also possible for French nationals without discrimination within the framework of the freedom of establishment (Art. 49 TFEU). The accumulation can also be explained by the fact that no minimum distances or numerical limits are currently permitted between tobacco shops - unlike, for example, between gambling halls (§ 25(1) GlüStV 2021).

In France, on the other hand, the sale of tobacco products is permitted only in special tobacco shops (*bureau de tabac*) and subject to numerous additional restrictions (Article L 3512-10 et seq. of the Public Security Code).

The background to the different prices for tobacco products is actually the different levels of tobacco tax at national level.

Tobacco tax in Germany is regulated by the Tobacco Tax Act. For example, for cigarettes, it amounts to 12.28 cents plus 19.84% of the retail selling price, but at least 24,163 cents per cigarette less the VAT of the retail selling price, for a pack of 20 cigarettes, therefore at least 3.56 euros.

In France, the tax is determined by Art. 565 et seq. of the *Code général des impôts* and Art. L314-24 et seq. of the *Code des impositions sur les biens et services*.

The price of a pack of Marlboro brand cigarettes with 20 cigarettes was between 8.70 and 9 euros in Germany in 2024, and around 11 euros in France (Statista, 2026).

Variations of the Borderwalk Concept (on the same route)

The Borderwalk concept is inherently adaptable and can be modified along several dimensions. The following variations involve conducting the same Borderwalk (same route) with stronger thematic focus and thus differ from the versions described above, which propose more significant conceptual deviations.

Same route, different thematic perspectives

A key strength of the Borderwalk lies in the fact that individual stations can be interpreted through multiple disciplinary lenses. The same route may therefore be offered with different thematic focal points depending on the educational objectives and the expertise of the organisers. While the basic version developed at Kehl – Strasbourg primarily focuses on legal and administrative dimensions, alternative thematic perspectives can easily be integrated.

Possible thematic variants include historical perspectives, migration and cross-border mobility, architectural and urban-development patterns, language use and advertising practises, as well as regulatory frameworks such as gambling regulation, cannabis legislation or taxation.

Same route, different target groups

Beyond thematic variation, the Borderwalk can also be adapted to different target audiences. Within the university context, the concept may be employed not only for students from various disciplines but also for perspective students, international guests (groups) such as incoming Erasmus students or guest researchers in order to sensibilise them for the specific aspects of border regions and European Integration.

Suitable target groups in this sense could also be actors in (local) civil society, visitor groups or tourists in general in order to reach the civil society. Furthermore, the Borderwalk can be tailored to local and regional government officials, administrative practitioners and political decision-makers. In these cases, the thematic focus may shift towards issues such as municipal public infrastructure and cross-border administrative cooperation.

Alternative variations of Mobility and Route Design

In addition to the possibilities of adapting the same route to other thematic contexts and other target groups, some further variations would be conceivable on this basis.

Other means of transport - other routes

An adaptation or extension of the routes is obvious, provided that other means of transport and modes of transport are considered. While walking remains the most direct ways of experiencing the spatial manifestations of borders, alternative modes of mobility may broaden the range of accessible stations and mobility-themed perspectives.

In this context, it is conceivable to offer a cross-border sports programme that takes up the (in)visible border aspects as an intercultural encounter concept (e.g. a running group).

The use of e-scooters or bicycles, for example in connection with appropriate public rental systems, should also be considered. In this case, a corresponding point of contact for the border walk theme is likely to lie directly in the means of transport itself, as corresponding rental systems are often not applicable across borders.

An adaptation of the means of transport would have to be adapted according to a barrier-free route design that is suitable for people with limited mobility. In the basic option of the border walk already carried out at Kehl University of Applied Sciences, accessibility is given.

The advantage of this is greater mobility and thus a larger number of different stations and thus the creation of a network of potential stations that can be individually put together by individual users of the concept.

Individual and Self-Guided Formats

The Borderwalk may also be implemented in self-guided formats. In such cases, participants explore the route independently while receiving information through digital or physical guidance systems. Possible approaches include fixed QR codes at stations, mobile web applications or GPS-based guidance tools that provide location-specific information and tasks.

Such self-guided formats increase flexibility and scalability while reducing organisational requirements. They also allow participants to explore the route on their own and according to their individual interests.

High-End Alternative: Unguided Borderwalk with Mental Maps

A more exploratory variant consists of an unguided Borderwalk based on the method of mental mapping. In this format, the participants at a certain starting point are asked to get to another destination on the other side of the border independently and with a free choice of means of transport. On the way, the participants are asked to fill out a mental map with which they trace their route and freely draw or write down their associations with the border or the border effects.

The concept builds on the model of a Border Crossing Act instrument developed by Marlies Vermeulen and Remy Kroese and shown as part of the activities of the cross-border Jean Monnet Center of Excellence (University of Strasbourg, 2023).

Digital and weather-independent alternative

Regardless of potential expansion and adaptation options for the Borderwalk, it can be transferred into digital formats. Such adaptations may serve as weather-independent alternatives, accessibility measures, or instruments for reaching geographically dispersed audiences.

By means of a videographic preparation of the route to be run, the border walk can be simulated accordingly and can be carried out without restrictions even in potentially bad weather. For example, an event format in the context of an interactive discussion round could be considered, in which the video is played to the participants and interrupted or rounded off by corresponding speeches planned for the individual stations. This option is also ideal for target group and topic-specific adaptation and could also be offered in a hybrid or online format. This possibility also opens up the opportunity to reach members of other border areas with this topic. For example, an online event format would be conceivable, in which representatives of different border regions make their respective (in) visible border features available for joint discussion. Ideally, in addition to the scientists, students who can have this event format credited (for example in the form of a seminar) should also be included.

Multi-day formats and integration into multi-day events

The Borderwalk can also be easily integrated into cross-border third-party encounters or seminars, for example in a school or student context, or in the context of town and municipality partnerships for cross-border cooperation or German-French friendship.

Building on this approach, the concept may also be expanded into multi-day event formats dedicated to the exploration of border regions. Such programmes could be held “along the borders”, combining several Borderwalks conducted at different border crossings, for example at Breisach - Neuf Brisach or Weil am Rhein – Basel.

Empirical values of already carried out Borderwalks

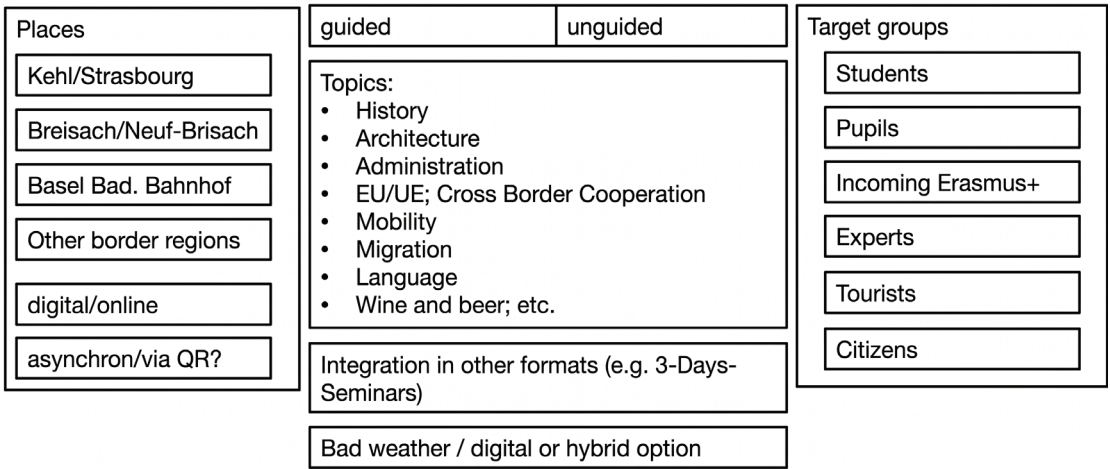
Since the development and first implementation of the Borderwalk concept presented in 2023, more than 30 walks in Kehl/Strasbourg with over 500 participants and 2 test walks in Breisach/Neuf-Brisach with a total of 40 participants in German, French or English, with and without translation, have been carried out on a voluntary basis. In addition to schoolchildren, the target groups of the previous implementation were students, researchers, administrative experts (practitioners) and members of civil society and even residents.

Participant feedback was extremely positive, several participants participated more than one time. Options of deepening the discussed topics were frequently asked. A didactical embedding in the sense of preparation or debriefing is increasing the added value.

The Borderwalk variations - graphical summary

The following graphic is intended to graphically summarise the goal and customisation options of the Borderwalk:

Figure 5: Representation of the various conceivable options of the borderwalk, own illustration.



Conclusion: Characteristic Features of the Borderwalk and how it fosters European Integration

The Borderwalk represents a didactic concept that can be adapted and scaled in several dimensions, with which a now largely invisible border can be made perceptible by means of visible border effects. By combining direct observation with contextual explanation, the concept translates abstract political, legal, economic and social themes into tangible learning experiences situated within a concrete cross-border environment.

The particular strength of the Borderwalk lies in its multidimensionality and scalability: the concept can be adapted or scaled vertically to different target groups (e.g. from national or international pupils to students to civil society actors or administrators or researchers), as well as horizontally to a variety of policy fields such as political systems, law, architecture, history, migration or mobility. At the same time, the Borderwalk remains spatially transferable and can be implemented in different locations within the same border region or adapted to entirely different border contexts. The Borderwalk concept can still be used spatially flexibly and can be transferred to various border locations in the same border area (in this case, for example, the German-French border area, in this case, for example, Kehl/Strasbourg, Breisach/Neuf-Brisach) or to other border areas. As the border effects have similar reasons especially the borders in middle and eastern Europe (e.g. the border of Germany and Poland) seem to be predestined for a transfer of the concept in order to reinforce cross border cooperation.

Beyond its didactic value, however, the concept has a particular potential to foster European Integration. One of the paradoxes of successful integration is that many of its achievements have become largely invisible in everyday life. Open borders, freedom of movement, cross-border commuting, integrated labour markets and shared public spaces are often taken for granted by citizens, especially in highly integrated border regions. At the same time, national legal systems, administrative structures and cultural practices continue to produce visible differences and border effects. The Borderwalk makes this dual reality visible: it demonstrates both the visible and invisible border effects and highlights the extent to which European Integration has transformed the borders' significance. Thereby, the Borderwalk enables a multi-perspective examination of borders and border effects as social, political and spatial phenomena and contributes to the formation of a reflected European border awareness.

Moreover, the concept creates opportunities for intercultural encounter and dialogue. By bringing together participants from different national, linguistic and professional backgrounds, Borderwalks encourage the exchange of perspectives on shared cross-border spaces. Such interactions can strengthen mutual understanding, reduce mental barriers and contribute to the development of a common sense of belonging within Europe.

In doing so, the Borderwalk is a didactic tool that raises awareness of European aspects, (in)visible border characteristics and, from a technical point of view, a target group-oriented space for knowledge and discussion in a low-threshold manner by means of an easily adaptable concept.

Notes

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