



Archnet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research
www.archnet-ijar.net/ -- <https://archnet.org/collections/34>

BOOK REVIEW: THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF BORDER LANDSCAPES

Florian Wiedmann

Keywords

border landscapes;
social ecology;
post conflict;
contested space

ArchNet-IJAR is indexed and listed in several databases, including:

- *Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals*
- *EBSCO-Current Abstracts-Art and Architecture*
- *CNKI: China National Knowledge Infrastructure*
- *DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals*
- *Pro-Quest*
- *Scopus-Elsevier*
- *Web of Science*

Abstract

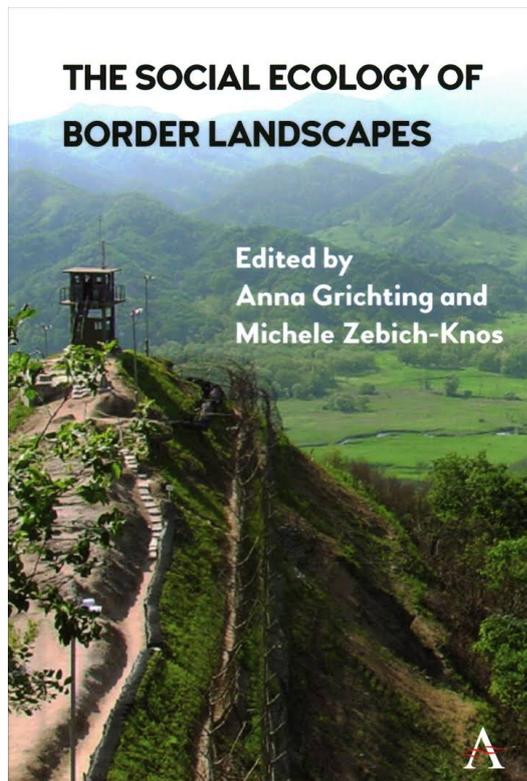
The Social Ecology of Border Landscapes, edited by Grichting and Zebich-Kros, is part of the Anthem Series on International Environmental Policy, which seeks to provide new evidence-based insights on global environmental governance. The book attempts to address this objective by inviting a wide variety of authors from various disciplines to contribute international case studies on border landscapes. All these studies are situated in the field of critical social theory and social ecology in particular – a subject that is focused on the complex interrelationships between nature and society. The wide range of scientific perspectives on social-ecological systems is categorised into four main parts: Frames, Bridges, Corridors and Portals. This structure functions as a suitable guide to distinguish major focal points within the rather complex discourse.

F. Wiedmann*,

F. Wiedmann*, Department of Architecture, University of Strathclyde,
75 Montrose Street, Glasgow G1 1XJ United Kingdom

*Corresponding Author's email address: florian.wiedmann@strath.ac.uk

The *Social Ecology of Border Landscapes*, edited by Grichting and Zebich-Kros, is part of the Anthem Series on International Environmental Policy, which seeks to provide new evidence-based insights on global environmental governance. The book attempts to address this objective by inviting a wide variety of authors from various disciplines to contribute international case studies on border landscapes. All these studies are situated in the field of critical social theory and social ecology in particular – a subject that is focused on the complex interrelationships between nature and society. The wide range of scientific perspectives on social-ecological systems is categorised into four main parts: Frames, Bridges, Corridors and Portals. This structure functions as a suitable guide to distinguish major focal points within the rather complex discourse.



After an insightful introduction of the overall topic and the book's contents, the first part (Frames) establishes some general frameworks about how social ecologies can be mapped in border territories. In Chapter 1, Brunet-Jailly states the basic notion that borders are continuously evolving worldwide and that a large share of the total of 10 million square kilometres of borderland are very difficult to access and use. Chapter 2 introduces transboundary conservation strategies in the form of peace parks as best-practice solutions for conservation and social exchange. After a discussion by Cunningham and Bede Scharper of the gated ecologies concept, which is a response to the various social and ecological issues of security fencing, Part II (Bridges) commences with an exploration of the Balkans Peace Park (Chapter 4). This is followed by studies on a crane habitat restoration project across the Korean Demilitarized Zone (Chapter 5) and on the San Pedro River along the Mexico-United States border (Chapter 6), which are important examples of how border landscapes are shaped by various factors and how strategies can be launched.

The second part of the book ends with Grichting's chapter introducing newly emerging landscapes along former borders in East Germany and in Cyprus, where the Military Buffer Zone has been regained for Cypriot communities. The author argues that any shared space can only emerge if there is a shared participatory process co-creating the surrounding environment and thus reflecting all social groups and their particular needs. After this last chapter focusing on Bridges, which reach out to access and re-use open borderlands, Part III (Corridors) comprises various chapters that examine the narrow, congested and still conflicted spaces along borders experienced in South Lebanon, Palestine and Northern Ireland. Shibli (Chapter 8) examines the border between Israel and Lebanon and the adaptive use of small spaces as the direct result of human interaction to make life more bearable in conflict zones. In the following chapter, Bulle investigates the Shu'fat Refugee Camp in East Jerusalem and how the erected Israeli security wall has impacted day-to-day politics in a confined space. The final chapter of this third part of the book is an essay by Murtagh on urban alternatives and collaborative economics in Belfast. It includes an important outlook on how challenging it is to dissolve the

borders of long-lasting conflicts and to establish less divisive spaces, which can only be achieved with the participation of the communities.

The last part (Portals) consists of three main chapters that examine various angles on what borderlands are and how they can be regained for society. Borderlands in this context are not only rooted in physical walls but also intangible walls, such as the barriers created by Aboriginal coping mechanisms and the white population in Australia. This social ecological resilience is explored by Birrell and Hill via an essay written as a spoken dialogue between two people discussing allegories and stories. After this unconventional approach that highlights the borderlands in people's subjective experience, Tavares focuses in his chapter on the rather concrete implications of re-legislating the soil along the borders in Amazonia in Peru. The author presents the various consequences and threats of a new forest law for indigenous populations. In his view, the resistance to the neoliberal concept of land as a commodity is more important for the preservation of socio-ecological diversity than the defence of abstract land rights. Thus, a recognition of customary rights that have historically shaped territories instead of following neoliberal enclosures is often the most essential way to support communities as well as to preserve the environment.

The thirteenth and last chapter is Conley's analysis of the reterritorialization of natural and social ecologies by exploring a park in Algeria, which was previously reserved for foreigners during colonial times. Today, this park is used by social groups, who were once excluded from its confines. Thus, as in previous chapters, attractive and accessible public realms are highlighted as the most crucial factor and a symbol for the restoration or at least the healing of conflicted spaces. The book is concluded by Zebich-Knos and his summary of the book as well as a small outlook on future implications. The summary is an important attempt to integrate and interrelate the essential outcomes of all contributions within this broad, diverse and complex theme. After stating that borders are not only physical divisions but also lines of separation between people and their mindsets, the author moves on to the overall observation that borders are so diverse in their composition and structure that they should be studied using more than one approach. In this context, economic activities are highlighted as crucial indicators for how local developments can evolve in bounded spaces before a brief glimpse on the future role of governance concludes the entire book.

This carefully selected array of essays has achieved two major objectives. The book identifies the social ecology of border landscapes by introducing an intuitive approach rather than a strict definition, which enables new ways of exploring this important topic. The structuring of the book in simple but clear themes guides readers to a fluid understanding of how border landscapes can be perceived and studied. Secondly, the book covers a wide range of aspects with its rich selection of international cases and various disciplines and thus perspectives. The only thing that could be criticized is the rather generic conclusion that the two main lessons for future policy making and border management are the integration of local needs and behaviours, and that border environments should be seen as part of a large global community and not as an isolated ecosystem. Such obvious conclusions are limited and thus contribute little to any dynamic and interesting discourse on how border landscapes can be discovered as new spaces that can generate opportunities to end conflicts between humans, and between humans and their natural environment.

REFERENCES

Grichting, A. & Zebich-Knos, M. (Eds.) (2017). *The Social Ecology of Border Landscapes*. London: Anthem Press.