



Maastricht University

THE HARDENING  
AND SOFTENING  
OF BORDERS:  
EUROPE IN A  
GLOBALISING WORLD

# Table of content

<b>Introduction</b>	
Prof. Thomas Conzelmann and Prof. Sophie Vanhoonacker	4
<b>Crossing Borders in the Labour Market</b>	<b>8</b>
Saena Chakkar	10
Milan Kovačević	12
Alina Shirshikova	14
Timo Walz	16
<b>Embodying Borders</b>	<b>18</b>
Maha Naami	20
Marie Rickert	22
Cecilia Schenetti	24
<b>The EU Crisis of Values</b>	<b>26</b>
Andreina De Leo	28
Aida Halilovic	30
Akudo Kyoshia McGee	32
<b>Societal Transitions and Knowledge Exchange</b>	<b>34</b>
Sara Atwater	36
Tereza Bauer	38
Judith van Puyvelde	40

# LIMES – Researching the hardening and softening of Europe's borders in a globalising world

In the period 2020-2021, thirteen talented researchers joined the LIMES project, an interfaculty research network of Maastricht University, co-funded by the European Commission<sup>1</sup>. As its name suggests, the key focus of LIMES is on the theme of borders, and more particularly on how they are being constructed, experienced and transformed.

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Maastricht, 27 October 2023

The dynamics of 'softening' and 'hardening' borders have become key issues in social, cultural and political transformations. For one, the nation-state is no longer the obvious space that structures political, economic, social and cultural processes. Borders are becoming increasingly more permeable in trade, the environment, employment, social activism, and many other fields. This is not only the case for the EU, but also a reality at the global level. At the same time, hard borders and hard border thinking are returning as people and communities are becoming concerned about the real or perceived dissolution of borders around them. A good illustration are the 2015 and

2023 migration crises, which have led several EU member states to unilaterally close their internal borders.

Starting from the assumption that the complexity of issues at stake requires innovative and multi-disciplinary approaches, LIMES has brought together a group of open-minded researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds, ranging from anthropology over law and political sciences to economics. Through a range of innovative projects, they have explored the dynamics of borders each in their own way.

Next to creating cutting-edge academic research, another key focus of the LIMES

network is the employability of its researchers after they have concluded their PhD theses. The PhD candidates have participated in an intensive training programme, covering skills that are relevant in academic as well as non-academic work environments. Special attention has been paid to media engagement with both traditional and new media. In addition, all have spent about six months of their PhD trajectory at external organizations, providing them with unique additional insights for their research. This double focus is also reflected in the network's output of academic publications, publications for broader (also non-academic) audiences such as policy briefs and blogs, and social media entries.

Following three and a half years of hard work, we are proud to present the colourful group of researchers and their research findings. The results, which have also been debated at a conference organised in Maastricht on 27 October 2023, are organised around the four thematic clusters of 'crossing borders in the labour market', 'embodying borders', 'the EU crisis of values' and 'societal transitions and knowledge exchange'.



*A PhD is always a journey towards what comes after. The LIMES project offered me many opportunities to feel ready for what comes next.*

**Timo Walz, LIMES researcher**

Beyond portraying their work, the researchers also reflect on the link with the overarching border theme. Each of them also prepared a quote reflecting on what they have learned and valued in the LIMES experience. We wish you an enjoyable read.

**Prof. Thomas Conzelmann and Prof. Sophie Vanhoonacker**  
Maastricht University

# Crossing Borders in the Labour Market

Research in this cluster looks at the role of labour market borders in the lives, well-being and movements of people. The focus is on migrants, employees and liberal art graduates and how they deal with national, regional, cultural and occupational borders. Topics addressed by the four researchers of this cluster include the role of the recognition of foreign qualifications in the labour market, crossing borders between higher education and the labour market among graduates of liberal arts colleges, geographical mobility in education and workplace loneliness.



## Saena Chakkar

**Saena Chakkar is a PhD candidate at the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, situated at Maastricht University's School of Business and Economics. Her research interests include labour economics, economics of education and migration studies. Through her tutoring experience during her PhD, she discovered her passion for teaching.**

### **Research Focus and Methodology**

Imagine a young ambitious woman, Oumaima. She has a master's degree from the International University of Rabat and would like to work in her field of study in Belgium. Some fields, such as nursing or architecture, require a formal recognition in order to be able to practice the profession. For other fields, recognition is not mandatory, but it can serve as a signal for employ-

ers unfamiliar with foreign educational systems. There still is limited empirical evidence to what extent Oumaima, and people with similar aspirations, can actually profit from getting their qualification recognized. That question is at the heart of Saena's dissertation: she uses novel administrative data to assess when and why recognition of foreign qualifications can be relevant in the cross-border labour market careers of migrants. She aims at contributing to a better understanding of the complex processes migrants experience in getting their elsewhere acquired human capital valued on the local labour market. She also studies the power dynamics behind the labour market institution of diploma recognition.

### **Relation to Borders**

The topic of foreign qualification recognition can play a role in crossing various types of borders in a migrant's labour market career. On the one hand, accessing a European country for labour market purposes for non-EU migrants usually requires a job offer as part of visa requirements. Getting a qualification recognised can therefore be an indispensable step to cross national borders. It can also help local employers understand

foreign qualifications and therefore facilitate securing a job offer in the destination country. On the other hand, foreign qualification recognition can also be vital in crossing borders on the labour market, such as gaining access to regulated occupations.

### **Findings and Takeaways**

Using public employment service data, Saena found that recognition does in fact increase the probability of finding a job, for certain groups of non-EU migrants. In another paper, she looks at the extent to which the relaxation of foreign qualification requirements for non-EU migrants facilitates migration to Germany. To explore this, Saena has used data from the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) in Nurnberg, Germany, where she spent six months during her secondment. In other papers, she has used Belgian administrative data to understand what mechanisms are behind the labour market effects of foreign qualification recognition. In her research, Saena collaborates closely with policy actors who are involved in practical aspects of recognition policies in the labour market.



*Having our interdisciplinary team of LIMES PhDs as a sounding board for academic and non-academic issues really enriched my PhD experience.*



Milan Kovačević

**Milan Kovačević graduated in economics at the University of Novi Sad, his hometown. He worked in diverse jobs, including copy-writing, and wrote two novels. In 2017, he received an Erasmus Mundus scholarship, studying at the universities of Glasgow, Barcelona, and Rotterdam, where he earned a cum laude MA degree in interdisciplinary social science.**

### Research Focus and Methodology

Milan's research explores the relationship between the development of liberal arts education (LAE) in the Netherlands and the world of work, focusing on the career preparedness and employability of Dutch university college graduates. The first article of his dissertation examines how employability develops in university college students

compared to their peers from a traditional bachelor's programme. The second article addresses a common critique of LAE—the notion that its graduates are unprepared for a specialized master's programme. The third article looks into the employers' perceptions of LAE and the different kinds of signals that a university college degree might send in the labour market. Finally, the fourth article investigates the labour market outcomes of university college graduates—their employment status, salary, job satisfaction, and related indicators.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic, the research employs a variety of methods, both quantitative and qualitative. These include statistical analyses, designing and conducting a survey, as well as interviews with employers.

### Relation to Borders

In Milan's research, borders are understood in a broader sense, figuratively rather than literally, as borders of employability that LAE graduates need to cross when transitioning from higher education to the world of work. The individual papers comprising the dissertation focus on several steps of this border-crossing process: firstly, the career-relevant skills that LAE students learn during their bachelor's studies; secondly, adapting to and performing well in a specialized master's programme; thirdly, the challenge of passing the job selection and finding employment; finally, performing well in their jobs.

### Findings and Takeaways

Milan's research yielded several key findings. Firstly, when it comes to the development of career-relevant skills, the gains of LAE students in creativity and personal initiative particularly stand out, reflecting the differences between interdisciplinary and mono-disciplinary learning, and self-tailored and fixed curriculum structures. Secondly, despite having less subject-specific knowledge, university college graduates proved to be prepared equally well for specialized

master's studies as their counterparts with a matching disciplinary background. Thirdly, employers seem to be generally unfamiliar with the LAE model, and the signaling effect of a LAE degree in the job selection process is largely neutral. Lastly, in terms of labour market outcomes, holding a university college degree is not associated with any distinct advantages or disadvantages. The only negative result was found in the STEM sector, where holding a LAE degree seems to adversely impact one's chances of attaining employment. Altogether, this points to the overall conclusion that LAE programmes do not lack the capacity to prepare students for the world of work.



*The true value of exploration and discovery lies in the potential to improve the lives of individuals, communities, and society as a whole.*





Alina Shirshikova

**Alina's Shirshikova's primary research interests lie in the fields of labor, education, and migration economics. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from Lomonosov Moscow State University and a Master's degree in Economics from the University of Bonn. Prior to embarking on her PhD journey, she worked as a research assistant, providing support for empirical labor market research at the Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), Bonn.**

### **Research Focus and Methodology**

Alina's research focuses on the role of borders and geographical mobility in education. She investigates obstacles to cross-border mobility and studies their effects on the education and labor market outcomes of individuals. Her research delves into the institutional

barriers associated with mobility for education and work, addressing topics such as social norms, labor market discrimination, information gaps, and immigration policies.

In her research, Alina employs various quantitative methods, combining analyses of natural experiments and administrative data with applied theory and innovative survey evidence. She has established a close collaboration with the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) during her data collection efforts.

### **Relation to Borders**

Research on the effects of borders and geographical mobility in education plays a crucial role in understanding how the presence of borders and the movement of



*Project management is the compass that guided me through the complex terrain of my studies ensuring that the journey is as organized and productive as possible.*

individuals across them can affect educational opportunities. Borders, whether they are national, regional, local, or even cultural, can have significant implications for educational access, equity, and quality. They can serve as barriers that limit access to education for certain populations and, as a result, hinder their future labor outcomes. Alina's research examines how the presence of borders can create obstacles for students from marginalized communities and migrants. It also investigates the consequences of making borders more open for the local population. This research helps policymakers comprehend the obstacles that hinder these groups from pursuing education and guides the development of interventions to address these challenges.

### **Findings and Takeaways**

Alina's research yields several valuable insights. In her first article, she illuminates the significant role that geographic distance

and regional borders play in shaping decisions regarding higher education. Facilitating access to local universities significantly improves individuals' education, labor force participation, and job quality, especially among women.

In Alina's second paper, she delves into the intricate topic of ethnic discrimination within the vocational education and training system and the factors that can potentially mitigate the adverse effects of discrimination. The findings underscore the effectiveness of investing in social skills as a viable strategy to alleviate ethnic disparities, but also shed light on the fact that, for certain ethnic groups, the acquisition of skills alone cannot fully compensate for the unjust treatment they face.

Her further research sheds light on the consequences of enhancing cross-border mobility and simplifying the process of attracting foreign workers by local companies. While these changes may initially seem advantageous, the investigation reveals potential adverse consequences for the supply of apprenticeship training opportunities by the affected companies.





Timo Walz

**Timo Walz pursued an education in International Business Administration at Maastricht University, and in parallel developed an interest in the individual and psychological well-being of people working at organizations. He continued this focus on well-being at work during his PhD employment at the Organisation, Strategy and Entrepreneurship (OSE) Department of Maastricht University School of Business and Economics.**

### Research Focus and Methodology

Timo's research focuses on how individuals at work deal with workplace loneliness, an issue that is both increasing in its prevalence and relevancy. His dissertation is split into three different research projects and papers. The first paper investigates how demands from the work and home domain can lead to

workplace loneliness during remote work. His second paper focuses on a longitudinal analysis of workplace loneliness levels over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. The final paper deals with workplace loneliness on a more individual level and looks at how segmentation preferences (i.e., how employees differentiate their personalities between private and work life) relate to workplace loneliness.

Timo's primary research method has been quantitative, using survey data of European employees. He designed most surveys for the studies himself and used external panel services to get access to between 200 and 600 white-collar working individuals from Europe in different sectors. Timo also collaborated with the "future of work" lab at Konstanz University for the data collection.

Traditional statistical techniques and more advanced ones, such as latent growth curve modelling were then used to get unique insights into the issue of workplace loneliness in the current work climate.

### Relation to Borders

The LIMEs overarching topic of 'borders' has been important throughout Timo's research. Workplace loneliness itself creates borders between employees and is detrimental to employee well-being. Indeed, loneliness has been referred to as a modern day mental "pandemic" even before the recent health crisis. In addition, the context of the research was remote work during or directly after the COVID-19 pandemic. As employee preferences and employer practices towards remote work and virtuality have permanently shifted as a result, this can potentially create additional mental borders between employees that were not there previously.

### Findings and Takeaways

In his research, Timo finds that overall, workplace loneliness is a pressing and urgent issue for organizations, especially during remote work. This first study shows that when organizations place high demands on



*The secondment, workshops, talks with my fellow PhDs, and the constant focus on interdisciplinarity and dissemination prepared me well for whatever comes after.*

employees during remote work, employees suffer from higher levels of workplace loneliness. In addition, even demands from the home environment can negatively influence loneliness in the workplace. By increasing support, organisations can decrease levels of workplace loneliness. The second study shows that although loneliness levels decreased starting from relatively high levels throughout the pandemic, virtuality (how much someone worked remotely) negatively influenced workplace loneliness, showing the importance of at least some face-to-face contact in the office. In addition, leadership behavior is an important factor.

The third paper (results and analysis are still tentative at the time of writing) shows the importance of segmentation preference of employees on an individual level. In addition to how the organization and leaders behave, a further important factor is how employees themselves differentiate their personalities and attitudes between work and private life.

# Embodying Borders

Borders manifest in various ways within the daily experiences of children and youth. Simultaneously, they also become integral components of the fieldwork journeys undertaken by ethnographic researchers with an interest in exploring these boundaries. The 'Embodying Borders' cluster brings together three researchers who examine the meanings and consequences of borders in childhood and youth through an ethnographic perspective. They emphasize that every-day acts of 'doing border' become intricately intertwined with experiences of mobility, engagement with linguistic diversity, and exposure to migration campaigns. The individual research processes highlight the matter of researcher positionality as a valuable lens for comprehending the multifaceted nature of borders.



Maha Naami

**Maha Naami holds a Master's degree in media and migration, and a Bachelor in Journalism and Communication. Her scholarly journey began by immersing herself in the challenges faced by the unaccompanied minors in Morocco. She pursued the PhD project after she recognized the potential contribution she could make in advancing this critical research subject.**

### Research Focus and Methodology

Maha's research examines the experiences of North African unaccompanied minors (NAUM) in the Netherlands, with a focus on their mobilities. Her dissertation comprises three articles that shed light on distinct aspects of this subject. The first article delves into the temporal experiences of these minors, dissecting the tensions

between waiting and excessive mobility and elucidating how these temporalities shape the youths' experiences.

The second article delves into the complexities of the asylum system and the challenges faced by caregivers. It underscores caregiving practices and the implementation of policies, revealing caregivers' efforts into creating personalized care approaches.

The third article takes a youth-centric perspective on care, elucidating how NAUM perceive and receive care within the system, while also exploring the reasons why existing care fails to meet their needs. Maha's research is grounded in 16 months of fieldwork, involving 22 NAUM and 50 professionals from various care institutions. In



*Communicating the research outcomes to different audiences does not only benefit the researcher, it is a gain of knowledge and deeper understanding of a specific question for society.*

addition to observation, interviews and active participation, she was able to gain deep insight into their lives and build trust by spending extended periods hanging out with these youths.

### Relation to Borders

Borders are inherent in Maha's research. Initially, they manifest as international boundaries when studying North African Unaccompanied Minors (NAUM) who have crossed them. Yet, the fieldwork progression unveiled subtler borders. The divide between the researcher and the participants, marked by differences in education, origin, city, and dialect, required special attention to overcome. Additionally, cultural and linguistic borders further complicate matters between minors and Dutch society, including care-

givers, hindering communication and understanding of codes and cultural significance. In this intricate web of borders, Maha's research unravels the complex dynamics at play.

### Findings and Takeaways

The rich data collected in Maha's research reveal a nuanced reality amplified by the inherent diversity within the youth group she studies. These youth encompass a wide spectrum of backgrounds and their motives for moving to the Netherlands are equally diverse.

Despite the commendable efforts of dedicated professionals within care institutions, the care provided to these youth appears inadequate. Professionals grapple with tools ill-suited for the needs of the youth, and the youth often perceive that their caregivers fail to truly understand what is needed. Consequently, their time under the care system becomes a cycle of waiting and frantic attempts at mobility to escape this limbo. Both experiences of waiting and mobility result in the accumulation of traumatic scars, both psychological and physical, among these vulnerable youth.



Marie Rickert

**Marie Rickert is a linguistic anthropologist specialized in linguistic diversity. Her research is placed at the intersection of language and culture. More concretely, Marie is interested in the ways in which language practices take shape in educational settings, with a specific emphasis on social interactions, multilingualism, and the role of language in shaping identifications.**



*Conducting ethical research is an ongoing process that extends beyond ethical clearance.*

### Research and Methodology

Marie's PhD project delves into the dynamics of participation among children and teachers in the context of linguistic diversity in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). It is based on linguistic ethnographic fieldwork in two ECEC centers situated on either side of the German-Dutch border. The ECEC centers each have their own linguistically diverse character with different family languages, the national languages German or Dutch and, in the Dutch case, the regional language Limburgish all being present. During her research, Marie generated audio- and video recordings of naturally occurring interaction and complemented these with participant observation to gain a holistic understanding of children's participation. The main focus of the analysis was on language education policy and the ways in

which children used language creatively and agentively in shaping interactions.

### Relation to Borders

The choice of two field sites on either side of the German-Dutch border provided an interesting lens on children's participation through language practices in ECEC. Throughout the project, it became clear that childhood experiences, daily interactions, and language socialization at ECEC can unfold in very different ways, depending on the side of the border where a child grows up. Taking a slightly broader approach to borders, the project also dealt with questions of borders emerging when co-constructing knowledge with children as an adult researcher.

### Findings and Takeaways

The project's findings underscore the complex and dynamic nature of children's participation in linguistically diverse ECEC environments on both sides of the German-Dutch border. Participation unfolds relationally linked to other children's and teachers' actions and the material and ideological environment of the ECEC center. As such, it interweaves with evolving language education policies.

These language education policies are constantly shaped in every-day interaction, leading to different forms of children's participation. For example, children in Dutch Limburg understand when their teachers use the regional minority language Limburgish to mark a personal chat between teachers. The children might then, e.g., initiate other interactions. Conversely, when teachers intend their remarks to be overheard by the children, particularly when praising the children, they switch to the national language Dutch, indicating collective significance. Children may orient to this cueing through active listening and silent participation. In addition, children also actively engage with different social meanings of languages through negotiating them in interaction with peers and, notably, with Marie as a researcher during the study.





Cecilia Schenetti

**Cecilia Schenetti studied Arts and Culture in her undergraduate and Globalization and Development Studies as master programme at Maastricht University. Before starting her PhD, she worked for one year in the development sector.**

### Research Focus and Methodology

In her research, Cecilia investigates the production, implementation, and reception of migration information campaigns that European states fund in Senegal to discourage African youth from migrating irregularly to Europe. The first article of her thesis examines why and how Senegalese citizens help to implement campaigns in Senegal when such campaigns try to curb the very mobility they aspire to themselves. The second article looks at how European policy

makers justify the need for migration campaigns allowing to better understand the imaginaries of people who develop migration governance measures. The third article analyses the perceptions of Senegalese youth who are the audience of deterring messages circulated through the campaigns.

Cecilia conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Senegal for 15 months during which she followed the making, the performing and the reception of migration information campaigns, by participating in campaign activities that took place across the country. She also conducted online semi-structured interviews with European policy makers based in the Netherlands and in Senegal who contributed to initiate and design campaign interventions.

### Relation to Borders

The proliferation and changing nature of borders is a characteristic of current border regimes and migration management. Borders expand beyond national territorial borders and emerge within territories in various forms. In Cecilia's thesis, migration campaigns are conceptualized as 'soft borders' that Europe implements in countries of origin as a new form of delocalized migration control, free from coercion, to immobilize so-called 'potential migrants'.

### Findings and Takeaways

In her research, Cecilia finds that EU-funded migration campaigns are ambiguous measures of migration governance whose implementation concurrently legitimizes restrictive migration policy and responds to the humanitarian objective to save lives. Different actors involved in the production and implementation of the campaigns find themselves navigating contradictory objectives of care and security. Local campaign staff are brokers who implement migration control in their work of translating policy into practice. Simultaneously, in performing their tasks of implementers, they find fissures to subtly contest a campaign's

dominant message, allowing for other discourses to emerge. In funding migration campaigns, European states act as 'humanitarian government' driven by moral sentiments that legitimize its practice of border control. While showing compassion for distant subjects, the humanitarian government normalizes migration regimes reinforcing power imbalances. Senegalese youth to whom campaigns are addressed, apparently sustain the campaign goal to fight irregular migration. Yet, they do so by advocating for mobility justice and the right to move safely. In this way they re-appropriate voice and space and resist the paternalistic character of campaign intervention.



*Being able to manage one's own time and tasks is the first step to feel grounded into one's work and it is essential for the success of the research project.*

# The EU Crisis of Values

This cluster explores the hardening of the EU's borders, externally and internally along the scars of the old 'East-West divide'. It discusses the 'Fortress Europe' model of migration management, the rule of law crisis, and the ongoing contestation of human rights in the EU. Researchers in this cluster explore how the current migration management model came to define the EU's external borders and how the rule of law crisis affects civil society, while also reviewing how policy-makers have addressed these crises in a variety of ways (e.g., through delegation to EU agencies and externalization through financing) and what role academics play in the midst of it all.



Andreina De Leo



*My secondment at the European Policy Centre in Brussels was one of the best parts of my PhD and allowed me to develop non-academic research skills which will be useful for whatever comes after.*

**Originally from Italy, Andreina De Leo pursued an education in International Relations and European Law and specialized in immigration law with an LL.M at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). During her PhD research, she concluded a secondment in the European Migration and Diversity Programme at the European Policy Centre (EPC) in Brussels, where she worked as junior policy analyst.**

### **Research Focus and Methodology**

Andreina's thesis deals with EU cooperation with third countries in the field of migration. She focuses on the legal issues relating to the provision of EU emergency external aid for border management projects in third countries. More specifically, she analyzes three main problems: a) is the use of devel-

opment aid to prevent irregular migration in line with the objectives and principles of EU development cooperation law?; b) is EU migration cooperation with third countries that commits systematic violations of fundamental rights consistent with binding fundamental rights norms?; and c) is there sufficient democratic oversight of the management of EU funds, given the limited role of the European Parliament in the scrutiny of emergency funds? She also assesses the availability of judicial and non-judicial mechanisms at the EU level to contest the manner in which EU funds are allocated in this area.

She employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining desk-based research with semi-structured interviews with EU officials who manage EU funds or control how they are spent, with practitioners, and NGOs.

### **Relation to Borders**

The overarching topic of 'borders' is very much present in Andreina's research. As she examines the European Union's border management and cooperation with third countries to prevent protection seekers to enter EU territory, she deals with how EU

border controls are 'shifted' beyond the EU territory to obstruct mobility, and the resulting accountability gaps of this phenomenon.

### **Findings and Takeaways**

Andreina's desk-based research shows that EU money is not necessarily used in an unlawful manner even if there is substantial evidence of serious violations of fundamental rights by border authorities in third countries that are benefitting from EU assistance. Demonstrating breaches of the norms regulating EU development cooperation policy or the competences of the European Parliament in the management of EU funds is likewise not a simple task. On top of this, there are limited possibilities of bringing cases to the attention of the European Court of Justice, given the strict criteria for applicants to access the Court. While non-judicial remedies may offer a more promising avenue, their non-binding character could make them less effective in bringing about change. Overall, it seems that a clearer legal framework is needed to ensure that EU money is spent in accordance with EU founding values and principles.





Aida Halilovic

**Aida Halilovic studied Public Administration and Political Sciences at the University of Padua (Bachelor) and completed her Master in European and International Studies at the University of Trento, before starting her double degree PhD at Maastricht University, Faculty of Law, and Roskilde University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Business.**

### Research Focus and Methodology

Aida researches how EU agencies foster administrative integration in the EU Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Her research tests the hypothesis that EU agencies, as institutionalized structures that coordinate administrative cooperation, can transform the EU political-administrative order to the benefit of an increasingly integrated administration. The emerge of such integrated

administration in sensitive policy areas such as security and migration has direct consequences vis-à-vis the end-users of border policies (virtually all people on EU soil and all people wishing to reach it), but also in regard to the democratic fundamentals (balance of powers, accountability and legitimacy of public power, etc.) on which the Union is based. Methodologically, the research combines literature research, legal and document analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews with EU and national staff working in or in connection with the EU agencies under consideration. In dialogue with EU law, specialized administrative law, political science, and public administration scholarship, Aida's monograph investigates the effects of agencification dynamics on EU governance models.



*As in life, so in research, observing the world from different viewpoints allows not only to speak of it in different languages, but also to speak to it through different voices.*

### Relation to Borders

European frontiers have constituted a major challenge for border studies scholars since the introduction of the ideas of free movement and a borderless Europe. The conception of borders itself evolved from plain physical limits -in Westphalian/geopolitical terms-, to complex post-national and all too often immaterial concepts. The actual guarding of traditional frontiers represents only a tiny portion of today's border management machinery, along with activities addressing transnational crime, migration flows, trade, security issues, etc. Next to states as the (historically) principal agents, inter-, supra-, and sub-national entities substantially contribute to the tangible and intangible molding of European borders. Aida researches how these new actors and modes of governance shape EU frontiers and their management.

### Findings and Takeaways

Disparate conceptualizations of shared administration hinder understanding across

disciplines and make it difficult to establish a common theoretical baseline for studying administrative integration in the EU. In her monograph, Aida differentiates between two models of shared administration in the EU, capturing the main differences found in existing scholarly analyses. She finds that EU agencies provide the impetus and coordination needed to depart from a simple shared administration based on partition of tasks and powers, to the path towards an integrated administration.

Even in intergovernmental areas, the progressive empowerment of agencies allows not only for more and more policies being discharged by means of composite procedures, but also for deep administrative integration such as joint generation of information and joint policy execution *stricto sensu*. However, each policy area displays different degrees of both political-administrative morphologies: the actual configuration of the administration results from a compromise between separation and integration incentives, whereby the EU and its Member States continuously negotiate the confines of common border and migration policies.



Akudo Kyoshia McGee

**Akudo Kyoshia McGee is based in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and at the centre of excellence for research on Europe, Studio Europa Maastricht. She holds a BA from the University of Pittsburgh in German Language and Cultural Studies and an MA from the University of Amsterdam in European Studies.**

### Research Focus and Methodology

Akudo's research focuses on how Poland's civil society responded to threats to the rule of law and human rights from 2015-2022. She demonstrates how civil society organisations (CSOs) employ diverse but consistent strategies to stop backsliding, mobilising EU institutions, supranational courts, international civil society and more. However, she argues that civil society is no guarantee of

democratic stability and that CSOs can work with illiberal governments, not just against them.

Akudo's project used a combination of document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Her document analysis included over 797 documents including newspaper articles, reports from think tanks and policy organisations, reports commissioned by EU and other international institutions, judgments from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), and information published on CSOs' websites and social media. In addition, she conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with 21 Polish CSOs. In total, she has examined the interventions of 206 organisations.

### Relation to Borders

Borders play out in Akudo's work in a number of ways. Firstly, EU observers will note that significant threats to her norms of focus, the rule of law and human rights, are occurring at an unprecedented rate in the EU's Central and Eastern European member states, even reinvigorating concerns about the re-emergence of the so-called 'East-West divide.' In addition, standards for the rule of law and human rights appear to be uneven across member states, within member states, and across EU institutions, raising concerns that invisible borders or 'faultlines' are forming across the EU which affect the extent to which EU citizens can expect that the norms enshrined in the Union's own treaties are respected and defended. The EU's norms are not respected evenly across member states, as states like Hungary and Poland openly defy them. Similarly, not all EU institutions defend these norms evenly, with clear faultlines appearing between the European Commission, whose response has been abysmal towards threats to EU norms and the European Parliament, which has been active and pushing for harsher penalties for threatening these norms. It appears as if uneven standards for EU norms are

widening amongst member states and institutions.

### Findings and Takeaways

In her research, Akudo finds that liberal Polish CSOs employed 22 unique strategies in efforts to counter rule of law and human rights backsliding in Poland. These strategies are buttressed by liberal CSOs' relationships with each other and even bring together organisations with diverse missions, foci, and countries of operation. They also aim both at immediate remedies to backsliding and longer-term societal change and knowledge creation. In addition, CSOs learn how to appeal to a variety of audiences, from Polish citizens to EU institutions to bring attention to their causes and the state of the rule of law and human rights in the country and work through various pathways to further their causes.



*Disseminating the results of our research is not just our duty to our funders; it sits at the heart of academia.*

# Societal Transitions and Knowledge Exchange

Over the past century, human lives have been affected by technological and industrial developments and their societal and environmental consequences. The ensuing transitions and challenges are not only reflected in, but also driven by shared cultural knowledge and experiences which travel across borders. Researchers in this cluster explore how societal changes impact communities and how important actors – be it businesses, governments, writers, artists or archivists – shape them. This is evidenced by new knowledge creation and dissemination within such diverse phenomena as humorous cultural performances, evolving business philosophies and stained-glass artistic production.

A portrait of Sara Atwater, a woman with curly brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark blazer over a purple top. The background is a red, tufted surface.

## Sara Atwater

**Sara Atwater completed a BA from the University of California, Berkeley in English and German Studies. Her Master's thesis at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom focused on children's humour acquisition and employed ethnographic methods.**



*The flexibility and scope of the LIMES project made it possible to see the links between macro and micro-level social processes at work in each of our projects.*

### Research Focus and Methodology

Sara's research explores how in the multi-ethnic community of the post-industrial Ruhr valley in Germany, women's cabaret reinvents the area's industrial past. She more particularly examines how women's humorous cultural performances simultaneously construct, reframe and challenge social hierarchies in communities that have been historically defined by male-dominated labor.

Her study is informed by qualitative ethnographic methods but primarily makes use of in-depth interviews and an interactionist focus group interview. During her fieldwork, she visited locally produced cabaret acts which featured parodic characters that dramatized women's traditional roles as

miner's wives and domestics or the working-class area's unemployed or pensioned inhabitants. Staging working class identities associated with female social reproductive labour in the Ruhr Area, these performers highlight the social marginality associated with these women and the Ruhr Area itself, allowing them to "punch up" to power, that is, to use humour to target someone or a group that is privileged, entitled or grossly overempowered.

### Relation to Borders

The study has elements of a mobile multi-sited ethnography as it initially followed performances deemed relevant to examine its central research question. By following Ruhr area female cabaret performers as they traversed the region, it was possible to see how they were re-constructing and challenging gender roles that were historically laid out for them and how their audiences engaged in this process.

Since the study sought to investigate boundary and place-making through humorous cultural events, borders in the research appeared porous, never fixed or static. Knowledge exchange between audience

members and performers occurred during the dynamic process of humorous performances as well as through the marketing and dissemination preceding them.

### Findings and Takeaways

Sara's research produced a rich and multifaceted description of a comedyscape of artists and audience members who are actively engaged in changing static gender roles that persist in their regional cultural landscape. Interviews with performers and audience members vividly detail the fun and excitement that occurs as women enact spaces where they are able to redefine themselves within their communities. Hardship and marginalization also reoccur as topics, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic caused many performances to be cancelled, threatening the livelihood of cabaret performers, especially female ones, and causing many audience members to live in social isolation. The results of the study show that further research employing qualitative and ethnographic methods should be done which focuses on humour performance and gender identity in post-industrial communities where cabaret, stand-up or hybrid forms of comedy are popular forms of entertainment.





Tereza Bauer

**Originally from Slovakia, Tereza Bauer pursued an education in Modern Languages, Political Science and Finance, as well as a career in benchmarking consulting in various countries, before embarking on her PhD at the Finance Department of Maastricht University School of Business and Economics.**

### Research Focus and Methodology

Tereza's research is focused on how businesses and investors approach the issue of sustainability – incorporating environmental and social issues into their strategies and practices. The first paper of her dissertation examines how company CEOs frame sustainability and make it actionable for their companies. Her second article discusses how companies experience sustainability-focused engagement by their shareholders, and to

what extent it changes their practices. Her final paper switches to the perspective of investors, studying how pension fund board members describe the objectives and evaluate the outcomes of responsible investing.

Tereza's primary research method has been qualitative interviewing of professionals regarding their knowledge and experiences. She interviewed 95 representatives of 35 Dutch listed companies on topics such as sustainability governance, strategy, corporate culture, and external stakeholders. In her data collection efforts, Tereza has collaborated with institutions such as Eumedion Corporate Governance Forum and International Center for Pension Management (ICPM).

### Relation to Borders

The LIMES overarching topic of 'borders' has been present throughout Tereza's research. On the one hand, the practices of sustainability management are transferred across country borders within multinational companies, while on the other hand, attitudes and approaches to sustainability vary across institutions depending on their geographic locations – this is particularly true for investment organizations. Their sustainable investing approaches are shaped not only by their legal context, but also by the culture and expectations of the societies around them.

### Findings and Takeaways

In her research, Tereza finds that the topic of sustainability has gained prominence in company strategies, but that implementing solutions is often riddled with constraints to be handled by the management. In their quest to grasp and operationalize sustainability, CEOs are driven by considerations of finding a business case, fulfilling stakeholder expectations, pursuing external impact-orientation or internal self-improvement ambitions. Furthermore, managers perceive shareholders as having an affirmative, but



*As human lives and work are increasingly interlinked and interdependent, I believe academic researchers also have a responsibility to stay connected to the 'real world'.*

rarely a transformative role in driving sustainability. Shareholders' suggestions revolve around clarification of plans and increasing reporting rather than substantial changes. Nevertheless, companies still see investor support as essential for their sustainability efforts and identify possibilities how engagement can be improved. Overall, a theme of reciprocity emerges: responsibility for sustainability-oriented changes needs to be taken by companies, but also their investors. Investors could increase their expertise and the relevance of their questions and feedback, in order to make dialogue with companies more value-adding.



## Judith Van Puyvelde



*During my secondment at Sociaal Historisch Centrum voor Limburg, I was able to build skills and learn new software, which will help me in my career beyond the PhD.*

**Judith Van Puyvelde studied Art History at KU Leuven, where she obtained her bachelor's and master's degree. An internship during her master's at the archives of a local tapestry school spiked her interest in monumental art. This encouraged her to pursue her current PhD research on the stained-glass workshop Atelier Nicolas.**

### Research and Methodology

Judith's research focuses on the 'Atelier Glasschilderkunst F. Nicolas en Zonen' te Roermond (1855-1940/1968). Frans Nicolas Sr. established his stained-glass workshop around 1855, and Atelier Nicolas quickly became one of the most important stained-glass manufacturers in the Netherlands meeting the increasing local, national, and international need for stained-glass win-

dows. Her research looked into the resources Atelier Nicolas mobilised to obtain this successful position, leading the research through the commission process of a stained-glass window from idea to finished product.

Judith has done mainly archival research, looking into the activities and networks of Atelier Nicolas throughout three generations. The main source was the Nicolas archive, containing correspondence with customers, financial documents, and a large collection of cartoons, the life-sized drawings used during the production process of a stained-glass window and - in some cases - during the restoration process.

### Relation to Borders

Borders have been present in Judith's research quite literally as the need for stained-glass windows was a local, national, and international trend, and Atelier Nicolas catered commissioners all over the world. Her research not only looked at the travels of Atelier Nicolas' windows, but also at the (cross-border) exchange of knowledge, expertise, materials, and people. Her research fitted borders more themati-

cally as well. Atelier Nicolas was a family business for three generations. In the third generation, Joep Nicolas dared to question the borders, the boundaries of the stained-glass craft, dictated by long-standing traditions, and innovated the craft in doing so.

### Findings and Takeaways

Atelier Nicolas was established in the mid-nineteenth century, during a period of international contact and innovation, in the wake of the neo-gothic movement. It restored knowledge on stained-glass techniques and medieval gothic style and innovated it. The commissions of Atelier Nicolas demonstrated the close relation between stained glass and the catholic building activity in the nineteenth and twentieth century, as well as the network of architects Atelier Nicolas repeatedly worked with. Especially the network of architect Pierre Cuypers and his students proved fruitful.







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