

Bern, 1 September 2026

Multiple Border Changes and Biographical Trajectories: The East Central European Borderlands in the Age of Territorial Revisionism, 1918–1941

Between 1918 and 1941, East Central Europe was marked by continuous border disputes and conflicts. This posed a particular challenge to the people living in these mostly poly-ethnic and multilingual regions, who were forced to constantly adapt and re-adapt to rapidly changing political contexts. This conference focuses on the reciprocal relationship between people and borders which encompasses the question of how people's lives were shaped by borders and border shifts, but also how people themselves contributed to the shaping of these borders.

Geographically, the conference focuses on the post-Habsburg borderlands with particular interest in the post-Trianon nation states along the Carpathian arc (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine). However, it is also open to submissions from other Eastern European regions that offer a comparative perspective. All submissions should address at least two of the following aspects:

Living with the Border(s)

The main focus of this conference lies on the phenomenon of “living with the border(s)” which includes both the micro- and macro-dynamics of borders, as the term covers a broad spectrum of possible interactions between people and borders and vice versa. They range from the impact of border shifts on everyday life, over different strategies of dealing with borders, to the political processes of bordering, de-bordering, and rebordering, as well as the enforcement of a border regime. This focus on human-border interactions is linked to the question of agency: What exactly turns people into historical agents as opposed to political leverage, and can these categories overlap and occur simultaneously?



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Coexistence or Co-existence?

Local communities in the above mentioned borderlands were ethnically and linguistically diverse. This raises the question of coexistence vs. co-existence, i.e. whether the local population formed tightly-knit polyethnic and multilingual communities, or whether these various groups lived side-by-side and only rarely interacted with one another, even triggering incidents of violence. Asked more generally: to what extent did shifting borders influence the micro-dynamics of this coexistence / co-existence?

Self-Identification and Belonging

The establishment of new territorial borders create a rupture in the existing political landscape, which calls for a recalibration of the relationship between centre and periphery. In this process, different actors relied on different strategies to cope with the challenges they were facing. How did people navigate through these rapidly changing circumstances and to what extent did this process affect and (re-)shape their personal identification and their sense of belonging? What policies did both the new and the old rulers adopt and how did the local population respond to these often very different outlooks on their homeland?

Border Biographies

We are especially interested in contributions that focus on people who remained in place while the state borders shifted around them, and how these changing borders significantly altered their further biographical trajectories. The proposed concept of Border Biographies (Richers, 2026) ties together the previously raised points on the micro-level of everyday life: how was the individual experience in these borderlands marked by constantly shifting borders, and to what extent can these repeated ruptures in the political landscape and the social fabric be traced in individual biographies?

On a broader scale, this biographic approach raises the question whether these individual trajectories are representative of a group and a shared experience of 'living with the border(s)', 'coexistence or co-existence', 'self-identification and belonging'?

Submission of Proposals

Applicants are invited to send their proposal of maximum 350 words, outlining their presentation and its relevance to the conference theme as well as a short CV (max. 1 page). All proposals should be submitted to carpathians.hist@unibe.ch with the subject line "Proposal CfP Territorial Revisionism". The deadline for submissions is 8 November 2026. Notification will be given at the latest by 18 December 2026. A selection of papers is planned for publication in a special issue.



Organisation

The conference will be held from 30 June to 2 July 2027 at the University of Bern, Switzerland. The conference language is English. Accommodation will be arranged by the organisers. Travel costs can be refunded up to a maximum amount and upon prior consultation with the organisers.

If you have any questions regarding the conference, please contact carpathians.hist@unibe.ch.

Organisers:

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M.A. Andrea Lisa Erny
M.A. Michèle Häfliger
M.A. Philippe Thomet
M.A. Berenika Zeller

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SNSF Project „Epicentre of Territorial Revisionism: The Carpatho-Ukraine under Multiple Border and State Control Changes, 1914–1946“