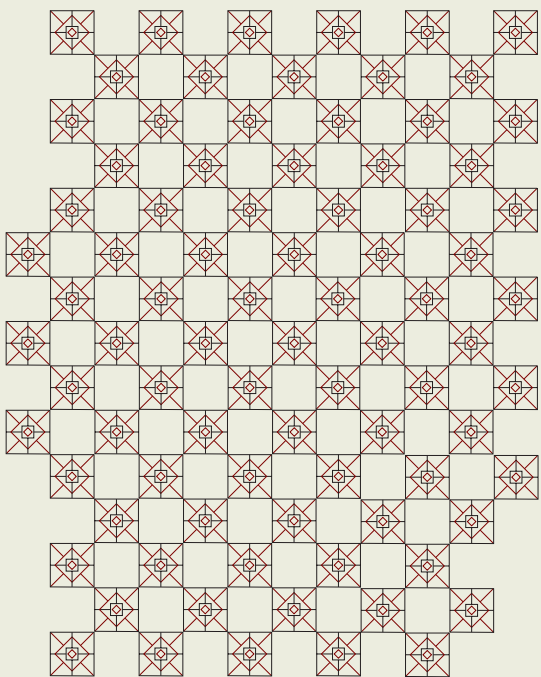
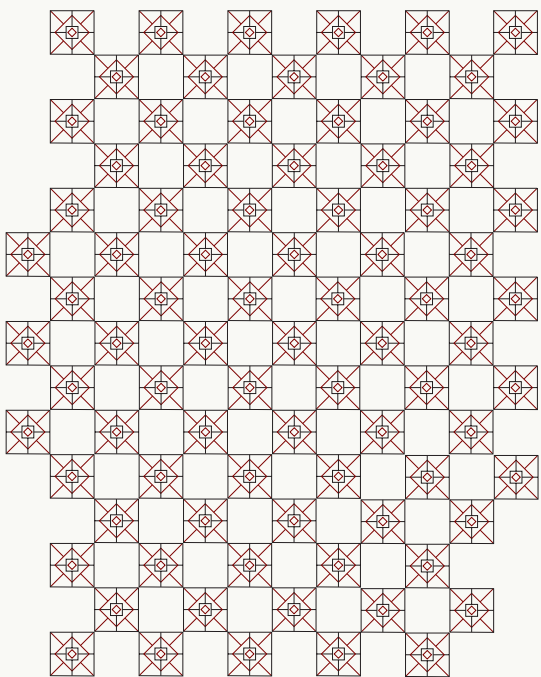




Retro **SPEKTIVE**

*Znanstvena revija za
zgodovinske in
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IX/1



Retro **SPEKTIVE**

*Znanstvena revija za
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Naslovnica:	Tjaša Krivec
Oblikovanje in oprema:	Jure Stušek
Prelom in tisk:	PODOBA d.o.o., Celjska cesta 7, SI-3250 Rogaška Slatina
Naklada:	100 izvodov
Cena izvoda:	20 €
Letna naročnina:	30 €
Izdaja:	Združenje za promocijo kulturne dediščine, raziskav in novih tehnologij – Retrospektive Slovenska cesta 9b, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija info@retrospektive-journal.org www.retrospektive-journal.org
ISSN:	2630-3426 (tiskana izdaja) 2670-4013 (spletna izdaja)

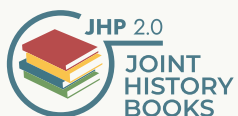
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*Izdajo znanstvene revije Retrospektive sofinancira
Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost
Republike Slovenije (ARIS).*



Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno
in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije



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Retro **SPEKTIVE**

Editorial Introduction



Foreword

Zvezdana Kovač

Director, Joint History Project (JHP 2.0)



The question of borders has long shaped the history of Southeast Europe—not only as lines on maps, but as powerful constructs that define identities, influence political decisions, and frame collective memory. The international conference *“Borders in Southeast Europe: Geography or Imagination?”*, held in Podgorica from 16 to 18 May 2025, invited scholars and practitioners to revisit this question at a time when borders—both real and imagined—are once again at the centre of political and societal debates.

This special issue of *Retrospektive* brings together selected contributions presented at the conference, organized within the framework of the Joint History Project (JHP). It reflects our ongoing commitment to fostering critical, multiperspective approaches to history, encouraging dialogue across divides, and promoting a deeper understanding of the past as a shared and contested space.

The JHP has, since its inception, sought to challenge rigid and exclusive historical narratives by offering alternative ways of teaching and understanding history in Southeast Europe. At its core lies the belief that history is not a fixed account of the past, but a dynamic process shaped by interpretation, context, and dialogue. In that sense, borders are not merely geographical realities—they are also products of imagination, negotiation, and power.

The contributions in this special issue vividly illustrate this complexity. Some authors explore the historical formation of borders and their contested nature. The study of the Austro-Hungarian border after the First World War, for example, demonstrates how borders emerge through a combination of geopolitical decisions and local dynamics, often remaining fluid and unstable long after they are formally established. Similarly, the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina reveals how borders, even when short-lived, continue to shape political perceptions and realities decades later, particularly during times of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction.

Other contributions shift the focus from physical borders to symbolic and imagined ones. The analysis of memory wars in Southeast Europe highlights how national narratives attempt to “claim” historical figures by projecting contemporary borders onto past lives that were often transnational in nature. This process not only simplifies complex histories but also reinforces divisions that transcend time and space.

The role of borders in contemporary political discourse is another key theme addressed in this special issue. As shown in the analysis of nationalist narratives in Montenegro and Serbia, the past continues to be instrumentalized to shape present-day politics, often reinforcing exclusionary identities and undermining democratic values. In a broader European context, the resurgence of authoritarian tendencies further underscores the relevance of border-making processes, where the idea of homogeneous communities is closely linked to practices of exclusion and, ultimately, violence.

Importantly, this special issue also engages with the ways in which borders are reproduced and challenged through education and public discourse. The case of history education in Greece reveals the persistence of conservative, often ethnocentric curricula, but also the potential of bottom-up initiatives to introduce more inclusive and multiperspective approaches. At the same time, new forms of digital expression—such as amateur cartography—demonstrate how borders continue to be imagined and reimagined in contemporary public space, often reinforcing ethno-territorial narratives.

Taken together, these contributions highlight a central insight: borders are not static. They are constantly negotiated, contested, and redefined—through politics, education, media, and everyday practices. Understanding borders, therefore, requires moving beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries and embracing interdisciplinary and transnational perspectives.

This special issue is not only an academic contribution but also a reflection of the broader mission of the Joint History Project. By bringing together scholars from across the region and beyond, we aim to create a

space for dialogue that challenges dominant narratives and opens new avenues for understanding the past. In doing so, we hope to contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive approach to history—one that recognizes complexity, embraces diversity, and resists simplistic divisions.

In a region where borders have too often been associated with conflict and exclusion, rethinking their meaning is both an intellectual and a societal necessity. This special issue is a step in that direction

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