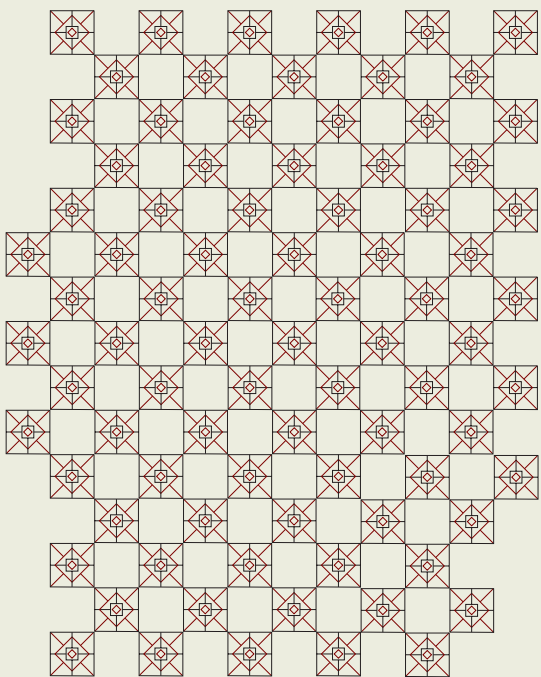
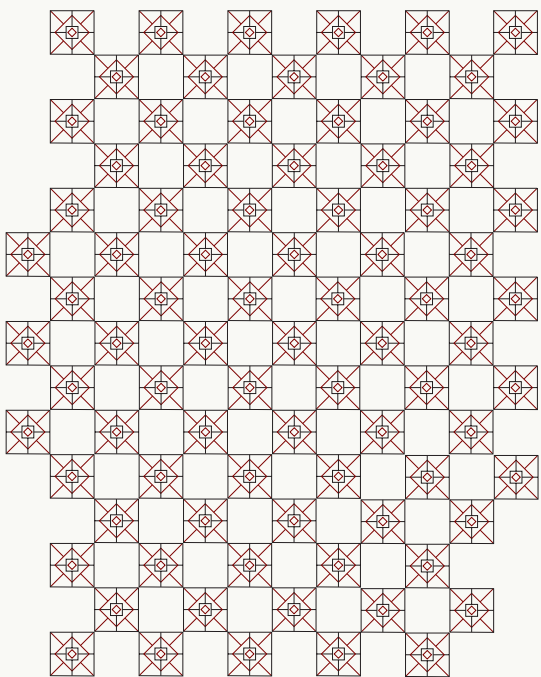




Retro **SPEKTIVE**

*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)

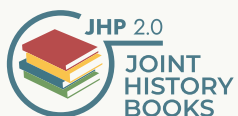
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*Izdajo znanstvene revije Retrospektive sofinancira
Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost
Republike Slovenije (ARIS).*



Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno
in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije



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Retro **SPEKTIVE**

Editorial Introduction



Borders as Historical Practices

Editorial Introduction

Kornelija Ajlec & Božo Repe

17

Borders are among the most persistent and powerful categories through which the history of Southeast Europe has been written, taught, remembered, and contested. They appear as diplomatic outcomes, military realities, administrative divisions, cartographic claims, symbolic markers, and educational narratives. Yet borders are never merely lines separating one territory from another. They are historical practices: they are produced, justified, naturalized, challenged, and remembered through institutions, maps, textbooks, public discourse, and everyday life.

This special issue of *Retrospektive* brings together selected contributions that approach borders not as fixed geographical facts, but as historically constructed and politically meaningful phenomena. The issue grew out of the international conference “*Borders in Southeast Europe: Geography or Imagination?*”, as noted by Zvezdana Kovač, Director of the Joint History Project, in the preceding foreword. Its publication in *Retrospektive* reflects the journal’s commitment to critical historical scholarship, public history, and the examination of how the past is interpreted, represented, and transmitted in different social contexts.

The articles collected here move across different periods, regions, and disciplinary approaches. Some examine the historical and cartographic production of space, showing how maps, ethnic categories, and territorial claims have shaped the political imagination of Southeast Europe. Others address borders as sites of historical violence and contemporary political contestation from the violent reordering of territory during the Second World War to the persistence of border questions in contemporary media and political discourse. A further group of contributions turns to history education, curricula, and textbooks, asking how borders, neighbours, national narratives, and civilizational imaginaries are reproduced or challenged through teaching.

The order of the issue follows this analytical movement from the production of space, through concrete historical and contemporary border practices, to the classroom and the curriculum. This structure reflects the conviction that borders are not only political or geographical phenomena,

but also historical categories that are represented, narrated, taught, and internalized.

In this sense, the special issue is concerned not only with borders themselves, but also with the work that borders perform. They organize space, but they also organize historical meaning. They separate territories, but they also structure identities. They may appear as natural or self-evident, yet they are continuously made and remade through language, education, political practice, and public memory.

For a journal such as *Retrospektive*, this theme is particularly relevant. The study of borders opens a productive space between academic history, public history, and history education. It invites historians to think beyond national narratives without ignoring the power that such narratives still hold. It also reminds us that the teaching and public communication of history are not secondary to scholarly work, but central to the ways societies understand themselves and their neighbours.

By publishing this special issue, *Retrospektive* seeks to contribute to a more nuanced discussion of Southeast European history—one that recognizes borders as both material and imagined, both imposed and negotiated, both inherited and contested. The contributions gathered here do not offer a single interpretation of borders. Rather, they demonstrate why borders remain such a productive object of historical inquiry: because they reveal how power, space, memory, and identity intersect.

At a moment when borders are again at the centre of political and public debates across Europe and beyond, rethinking their history is not simply an academic exercise. It is also a way of understanding how societies draw lines between states, communities, memories, and futures, and how those lines might be examined critically rather than merely reproduced.

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