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BRIT XIV: The Border: A Source of Innovation (Nov 4 – 7, 2014)

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In 2004, at Mons, Belgium, scientific teams and professionals from France and Belgium met and debated ideas of an open border, cross-border governance, and cross borderland development. Following these discussions, in 2011, the Franco-Belgian “Institute of Borders and Discontinuities” (Institut des Frontières et Discontinuités, IFD) was created. It emerged from the combination of research centres from the University of Littoral-Côte d’Opale; the University of Artois; University of Lille (all in France); and the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. The IFD’s members are active in networks of geographers, regional and political scientists, and for many years have been regular attendees at ABS and BRIT conferences.

The Franco-Belgian border was created in 1830 to isolate France; became a front in the First World War; and it is now a testing ground for European regional policies and a crossroads between Paris, Brussels and London. If it once represented a split between two territories, the border has now come to represent an element binding this area together. The decision to set Border Regions in Transition (BRIT) here in 2014 is highly symbolic. Exactly a century after the declaration of the Great War (1914), the aim is to trace the evolution of the border between France and Belgium over the last one hundred years towards today’s dynamic border.

BRIT consists of an international network of researchers and practitioners dealing with issues on borders. Every year or two, this network organises a large international conference at academic institutes established on both sides of a border. The first BRIT symposium was held in 1994 on the German-Polish border and, most recently, was coordinated by Professor Akihiro Iwashita (Hokkaido University) and hosted in Fukuoka (Japan) and Busan (South Korea). BRIT gathers geographers, political scientists, economists, historians, sociologists, and others from the humanities in order to further the understandings of the border. The organization at the same time maintains close links and collaboration with other large networks or associations such as the Association of Borderlands Studies and the *Journal of Borderlands Studies*.

BRIT XIV aims at contributing to a collective reflection on innovations related to border and cross-border dynamics. The theme is “The Border: A Source of Innovation”; and the goal is to demonstrate how the border, both as a concept and as an object – modified by the implementation of regional strategies – can be understood in all its forms, within different societies. The Westphalian model of the territorial nation-state was characterized by the existence of a demarcated world separating the recognized sovereign powers in contiguous territories. This is now called into question by multifaceted globalization that bolsters both confrontation and interdependence. The influence of

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private enterprise and the increased responsibilities assumed by citizens is transforming the collective decision-making process; new forms of governance emerge at the local as well as supranational levels. Innovation is evident in the world of politics as it is in other fields of activity. Questions of regional integration, as well as security policies and control; mobility and regionalism; global financial flows and cross-border cooperation policies all need to be taken into consideration. Another direction is strategies for changing and contesting the physical border by non-public authorities and the increasing importance of maritime areas in border studies. A list of sessions proposed for BRIT XIV is available at <http://www.brit2014.org/index.php/sessions/?lang=en>.

The symposium also welcomes ideas from outside this list and aims to be as open as possible in order to allow the emergence of new theoretical as well as empirical and methodological works. It encourages communications coming from all the parts of the world in order to produce innovative comparisons. The aim is to profit from the multi-disciplinary scope of border studies in order to produce a cumulative and collective reflection on the border as a source of innovation.

Aside from the academic events at BRIT XIV, there will also be a field trip in France and Belgium (Kortrijk). Beginning at a War Memorial, it will illustrate the evolution of a border: from a divisive military front to an area knitting two regions together.

BRIT XIV takes place in the north of France and Belgium, from November 4, 2014, to November 7, 2014. More details may be found at www.brit2014.org.