



The Architecture Of The Border

An Investigation Of The Trinational Metropolis Of Basel

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Figure [1]

(Cover photo, previous page) Dreiländerbrücke between Weil am Rhein and Huningue.

Unknown, Dreiländerbrücke, 2018, Photography, 2018, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:-Weil_am_Rhein_-_Dreil%C3%A4nderbr%C3%BCcke_Bild_1.jpg.

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Figure [2]
Perimetre of the 3land masterplan, and equily the study area of this thesis. The thin red line demarcates the national borders.
LIN Architects, 3land Perimetre, 2015, 2015, <https://3-land.net/start/en/idee/>.

1. Introduction

Since the creation of the European Union, the nature of the European borders has undergone significant change. From having been contested areas, with a heavy military presence during the first half of the 20th century, the borders zones have gradually shifted into becoming zones of transition and opportunity. ¹ The European union has actively supported the cultural and economic connection of transboundary regions across the continent through the INTERREG programme, in order to transform zones of conflict into zones of peace and economic prosperity. ² One of the historically most contested borders in Europe can be found between France and Germany. It is therefore no surprise that this border has received special attention during the process of European unification. Different kinds of projects have been started to promote the integration of urban border regions such as Luxemburg, Saarbrücken, Strasbourg and Basel. ³

The Metropolitan area of Basel sits at the intersection of two cross-border force fields, and forms one of the most international metropolises in Europe. On the one hand it marks the southernmost point of the historically violent border between France and Germany. On the other hand it has in the post-war years seen a radical shift in economic potential between the EU suburbs and the Swiss centre. As a new step in the development of the region, the canton of Basel Stadt, The French town Huningue and the German town of Weil am Rhein are planning a joint development named 3land of a site that is intersected by the trinational boarder as well as by the river Rhine. The site has a complex and multi-layered history as well as a highly interesting planned future and is well suited for this study, due to its position at a trinational border. The trinational border presents a transition between different international relationships, making an analysis of urban border structures more distinct since three different border relations can be compared.

This paper will investigate the architectural meaning and importance of borders in the context of increased European cooperation. How has the idea of the border changed over time in the three countries, and how has this effected the architecture of the 3land site? The research provides an insight into how the abstract ideas of borders and nations are translated into urban form, and how this architecture in return impacts the image of the border. This is done by tracing the history of the idea of the border in the three countries and examining the connections to built form on the site. It should be noted that a considerable amount of research exists on transnational metropolises, including Basel. In this context the work of Christoph Sohn and Bernard Reitel should be mentioned in particular. The amount of publication on the architectural implications of the borders in Basel is however limited, with the exception of a 1990 publication by Herzog & de Meuron. This paper intends to improve the understanding of how the architecture of borders is constituted and in turn constitutes.

The paper is structured in four chapters. Following this introductory chapter, a theoretical framework of border studies and urban form is established. In the third main chapter, the Basel borderland is analysed in the light of this theory in four subchapters. These subchapters describe critical phases in the development of the Basel borderland which chronologically overlap each other. The structure of the main chapter is thus not strictly chronological, but thematic. The final chapter presents the conclusions of this analysis and places them in a broader European context.

¹ Newman, 'The Lines That Continue to Separate Us'.

² European Commission, 'Interreg A - Cross-Border Cooperation'.

³ Beyer and Reitel, 'Transport Networks and Cross-Border Integration in Saarbrücken, Strasbourg and Basel'.



Figure [3]
Hager Landschaftarchitektur, Rhine River Promenade, Basel, 2016, Photography, 2016, https://www.hager-ag.ch/en/project/jor707_zzw883_bwe568/.

2. The Translation Of Border Studies Into Architecture

This chapter will seek to establish a vocabulary that will allow for an effective discussion of the architecture of borderlands. Border scholar David Newman noted that there exists a multitude of different vocabularies to describe the field of border studies, each one depending on the disciplinary origins of the author. Geographers, lawyers, militaries sociologists have all described the phenomena of the national border in different ways. For example, a sociologist like Bernard Reitel says that borders are first and foremost political objects, that they are imposed by nations in order to control the flux of people and goods into their country.⁴ In the context of this paper we will take a less rigid approach, considering the border a social construct which is constantly recreated and maintained in the collective consciousness. Borders will be considered as powerful producers of urban form, as powerful urban artifacts, as primary elements in the Rossian sense.⁵

Nations and borders have been a field of interest for researchers and scholars since at least the 19th century. The nation state, defined by the Encyclopaedia Britannica as “a territorially bounded sovereign state—that is ruled in the name of a community of citizens who identify themselves as a nation”, began to develop in continental Europe with the French revolution and proceeded to become the dominant form of governance over the course of the 19th century.⁶ At the time, the European nations, and especially the newly founded German Kaiserreich, started to develop nationalist theories to support their fragile existence, claiming that factors such as a common ethnicity, language, geography and religion were legitimate “*raisons d’être*” for the nation.⁷ The French scholar Ernest Renan provided a different and highly influential theory in his 1842 lecture *What is a Nation?*. He argued that the essential component of a nation is “the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received”. Renan put an emphasis on the national narratives that he considered to be crucial for the existence of the nation.

The Renanian definition of the nation has since become well-accepted within politicological discourse. In his book *European Union: the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*, professor of political science Michael Loriaux makes frequent use of Jacques Derrida’s term *ontopology*, a combination of the word ontology meaning the study of being and existence and topology, the study of place. Loriaux defines *ontopology* as “*myth of place*”,⁸ linking the Renanian definition of the nation to territory. The *ontopology* of a place needs to have a mythical character since the cohesion it advocates for usually has little historical foundation. Over the course of history, peoples and groups have blended in a great variety of different ways that seldomly correspond to the narratives that now lie at the foundation of the creational stories of nations states. One key concept that Renan mentions in his lecture is therefore *selective forgetfulness*. In order to build a cohesive nation, it is necessary to erase certain ideas from the collective memory, so that a clear storyline can emerge out of the confused chaos of historical events.

⁴ Reitel, ‘Border Temporality and Space Integration in the European Transborder Agglomeration of Basel’.

⁵ Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*.

⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica, ‘Nation-State | Definition, Characteristics, & Facts’.

⁷ Renan, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’

⁸ Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*.

At the border, ontologies are juxtaposed. It is the place where the meeting of two of the social constructions as Renan described them, meet in physical space. Given this definition of the nation state one may ask the following question: What is a border? Or more accurately put: What does a border do? In recent time, border scholars have started to view the transitional space as zones where a process takes place; a bordering process. David Newman writes, in line with Renan's argument of the nation, that a border needs to be constantly reaccepted by its users in order to retain its legitimacy. The bordering process is a process of categorization, division into "us and them". The border itself is the institution that actualizes the bordering process. Formally the border is the edge of a state where access to another state is granted or denied. The crucial point is however that this exertion of control is legitimized by the ontology of the nation. Seen from this perspective, the national border is very similar to other social constructs that organise society, such as access to religious groups, universities or private spheres.⁹

Borders are the product of but also produce collective mental categorizations of space. The image of a border and of its two sides can vary greatly depending on its permeability. Depending on this permeability, the border space surrounding the legal border line can express itself in many different ways. Border space or "grenzraum" was defined by geographer Friedrich Ratzel as the transitional space where the presence of "the other" is felt.¹⁰ Sealed borders can create strong animosity but also instigate a feeling of longing and curiosity to the unknown world on the other side. The border space is limited to the non-presence of "the other". At highly permeable borders, the border space is much clearly expressed, due to the physical encounters with the neighbouring people and culture. Sometimes these encounters lead to the amplification of suspicion, but in some cases they also become places of increased creativity and possibility, propelled by difference.¹¹

⁹ Newman, 'The Lines That Continue to Separate Us'.

¹⁰ Ratzel and Oberhummer, *Politische geographie*.

¹¹ Newman, 'The Lines That Continue to Separate Us'.



Figure [4]
Fred Romaro, Hafenstrasse Basel, 2015, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/129231073@N06/27530330442>.

3. Analysis Of The Basel Borderland

The site we will be studying in this paper is located on the banks of the Rhine, in a region that has been of great political and economic importance for the European continent over the last 2000 years. The main reason for this important position is the presence of the river. The Rhine, has a distinctive feature compared to other west European rivers, in that it connects the Alpine passes with the north sea. No other Alpine river makes this connection to the North-western European delta's. Historically, this crucial connection between the economical centres of northern Italy and the Rhine delta, extending to the south of modern day England, has been of great importance.¹² Basel sits at the uppermost navigable part of the Rhine, separated from the Swiss plateau by a hill ridge. It is situated at the place where the Rhine deviates from its East-West axis and turns north towards the low countries.

3.1 Creation Myths and Forgetfulness

The first civilisation that fully understood the strategical importance of the Rhine was the Roman empire. After having crossed the alps, the romans quickly identified the importance of the Rhine for North-South communication, and over the course of the roman age it developed into the major north-south artery of the empire, and was heavily fortified for this reason. Michael Loriaux argues that it was Julius Caesar that was the first to make a differentiation between the west and the East banks of the Rhine, that he claimed in his diaries were inhabited by Gauls and Germans respectively. Even though there is no other historical evidence to suggest that the cultural differences and conflicts were greater across the Rhine than between the tribes on the respective sides, the myth of division can be said to have started here.¹³ The power of Caesars words can be recognized in the fact that a century after the formulation of this mental image of Europe, the romans had made the Rhine their northern border. A fortified town, Augusta Raurica was founded close to modern day Basel,¹⁴ along with many other roman colonies along the Rhine, such as modern day Cologne and Utrecht. Despite the consolidation of the border, it would be inaccurate to think of roman Gallia and antique Germania as two homogenous entities, or anything close to what Renan would define as a nation. The roman commander Tacitus noted that the border was used as a means to control internal enemies: *"For if the romans are driven out ... what will follow except universal war of all against all?"*¹⁵ The roman border was not fixed on the Rhine for the entirety, but shifted further into modern day Germany under the imperial era.¹⁶ The Caesarean has however been the dominant border that has been alluded to be subsequent nationalists.

After the collapse of the roman empire, the power balance in the Rhine valley shifted. The next influential empire was that of Charlemagne. Charlemagne's empire was different from the roman in that the Rhine was at the centre of it, with Aachen the seat of the emperor. Old allegiances between Italy and the Rhine valley were revitalized when Charlemagne was crowned holy roman emperor.¹⁷

¹² Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*. P.8

¹³ Loriaux.

¹⁴ Kanton Basel Stadt, 'History of Basel'.

¹⁵ Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*.

¹⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Roman Empire | Definition, History, Time Period, Map, & Facts'.

¹⁷ Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*.

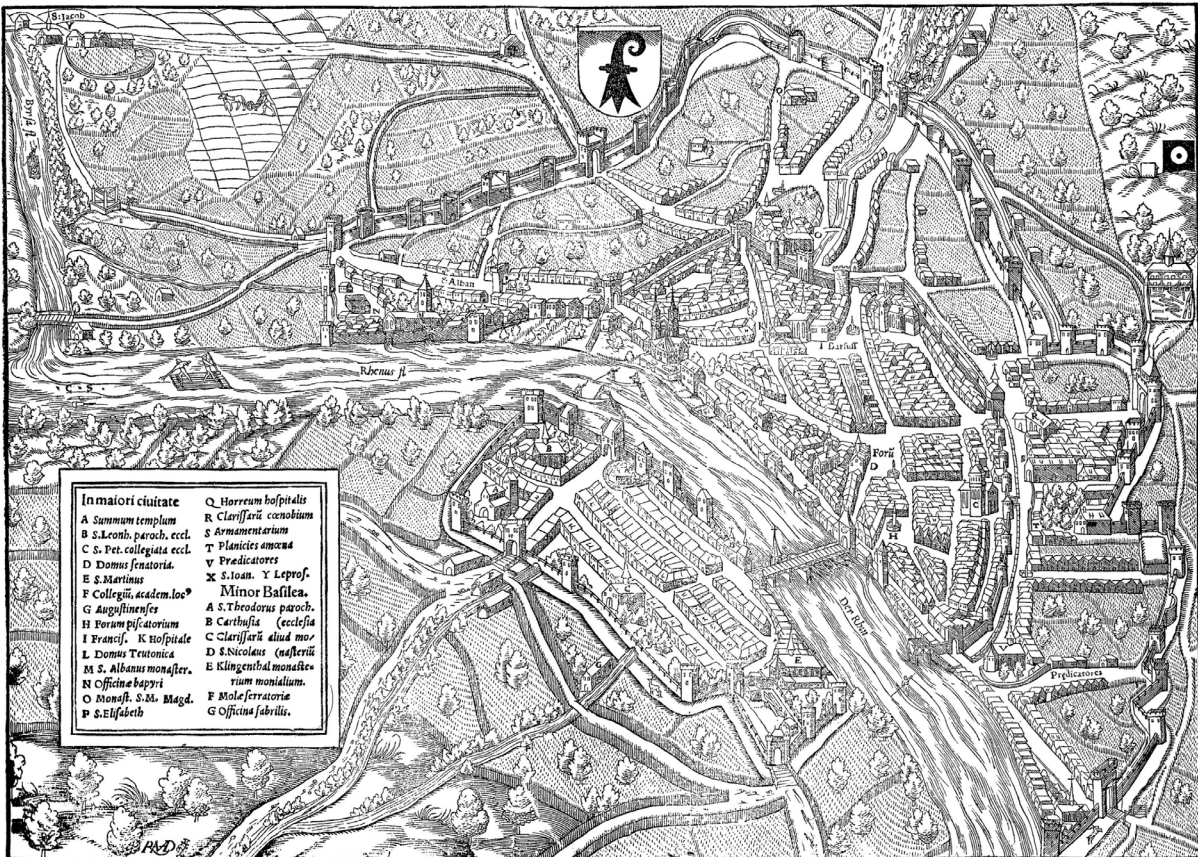


Figure [5]
 One of the first maps that exist of the city of Basel shows an independent, yet well connected city. Rudolf Manuel Deutsch, Gesamtansicht von Gross- und Kleinbasel von Norden, 1550, Wooden print, 1550, <https://query.staatsarchiv.bs.ch/query/detail.aspx?ID=514191>.

The era of Carolingian power in Europe was brief but was to leave a big mark on the ontological future of the continent, as it was the first exclusively European empire. It has continued to be a point of reference for any thought of European unity to this day.

Following the decline of Carolingian rule, the upper Rhine valley transitioned into a patchwork of city states and duchies that formed the central economic core of feudal Europe. Basel grew from a small settlement to a town of significant importance. In the political landscape of medieval Europe, Michel Loriaux observes a distinction between the diverse and trade dominated Rhineland and the emerging monarchies such as France, England and Denmark on the periphery of it. ¹⁸ Loriaux writes:

“Disinterest in the hinterland distinguished the Rhineland commercial town from the self-sufficient agricultural market towns of the periphery. The Rhineland towns bound themselves by ties of interdependence with one another in an extendable network.” ¹⁹

Despite their functional interdependence, the Rhine towns did not have a perception of themselves as a collective. Depending on the needs of the day, they entered into various political allegiances. These alliances did however not carry any deeper affiliation from any of the members, and were kept in place because they were beneficial to each of the individual members.

Towards the end of the middle ages, larger centres of power began to form in Europe. One case of particular interest is that of the duchy of Burgundy, which came close to laying the foundations to a Rhineland nation. Over the course of the late middle ages, the dukes of Burgundy had through marriage and military conquest gained control over the lower part of the Rhine in modern day Netherlands and Belgium. Only a failed negotiation with the Habsburg empire and a catastrophic military campaign against the Swiss confederation, at this time not yet encompassing Basel, withheld the Burgundian duke Charles the Brave from founding a monarchy that could have rivalled any of its contemporary counterparts. ²⁰ Basel and Strasbourg struck an allegiance in resistance against Charles, but following a Swiss victory at Nancy, where the duke himself got killed, Basel joined the Swiss confederacy instead in 1501. ²¹ Basel’s joining of the Swiss confederation must be seen in this light, as a political opportunity to assure military safety, that could equally well have been struck with the cities of the upper Rhine as with the Swiss.

Generally speaking, it is important to note that the political developments of the middle ages were of little importance to the average citizen. The wars waged by warlords like the dukes of Burgundy were fought by mercenaries that had their origins all across Europe. To clarify this important point, Loriaux quotes Bernard Guénnée:

“Until the sixteenth century, one’s ‘country’ or ‘pays’ was “for the monk his monastery, for a peasant his village, for a bourgeois his town” ” ²²

¹⁸ Loriaux. P.90-99

¹⁹ Loriaux. P.97

²⁰ van Loo, ‘De Bourgondiërs met Bart van Loo’; Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*.

²¹ Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*.

²² Loriaux. P. 120



Figure [6]

This 1666 map, made by a cartographer employed by Louis XIV shows the Rhineland after the middle ages. The significant geographical location of Basel below a mountain ridge and facing the Rhine valley is clearly visible. Despite borders that have been drawn in, the map still reads as depicting a trade network rather than national struggles.

Guillaume Sanson, *L'Alsace ou conquestes Du Roy En Allemagne tant deçà que delà le Rhein* (Paris, 1666), https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Histoire_de_l%27Alsace#/media/Fichier:L'Alsace_ou_conquestes_Du_Roy_En_Allemagne_tant_deçà_que_delà_le_Rhein.jpg.

The image that this quote portrays translates well into the earliest images and maps that exist of the Basel area. The city is well connected in all directions, but also gives equal priority to fortifications in all directions, suggesting that a military threat could be expected from any direction, and that Basel was preoccupied with the defence of the city, rather than with the defence of the Swiss confederacy. The border was not yet a primary urban element of importance.

The political developments of antiquity and the middle ages show that there are no natural causes for the borders as they were eventually drawn up between the nation states. It would have been perfectly possible for a Rhineland nation to spring up from the medieval turmoil instead of the power relations that we have come to accept in modern Europe. Another European river like the Loire or the Elbe could equally well have become the dominant political division line.²³ Medieval Europe was not preoccupied with the creation of nation states, as later romantic thinkers would argue, but was instead a patchwork of shifting powers where allegiance was motivated by opportunity rather than by a sense of belonging. The outcome of this tumultuous past, arbitrary as it may seem, has formed the basis of political tensions in the Basel region but also of Europe at large since.

²³ Renan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?'



Figure [7]

The drawing shows how the fortress at Huningue intruded into a landscape that until its construction had developed without the influence of states.

Emanuel Büchel, Lage von Klein Hüningen, 1749, 1749, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Si%C3%A8ges_de_Huningue_pendant_les_guerres_de_la_R%C3%A9volution_fran%C3%A7aise_et_du_Premier_Empire#/media/Fichier:B%C3%BCchel_Festung_H%C3%BCningen_1749.jpg.

3.2 The Nation State and its influence on Border Architecture

Coming out of the middle ages, Basel was situated in a landscape of merchant towns that were spread throughout the Rhineland. By the 20th century, the perception of this same place had totally changed in favour of a land dominated by borders. In this chapter we will trace the emergence of the nation states that lay at the core of this drastic change.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the nature of European politics and warfare changed. The religious revolution sparked by Martin Luther meant that there were more distinct sides to conflicts, and that the population was more involved in the political conflicts that were fought out by elites. Religious wars such as the 30 year war in Germany and massacres such as St. Bartholomew's Day in France dispersed large groups of refugees across the continent. The Rhineland proved to be a safe haven of relative religious tolerance in Europe, that became attractive to protestant refugees from France, Portugal and Italy ²⁴. Basel welcomed a large group of silk traders, making Basel a centre for silk production and trade ²⁵, as well as several intellectuals like the Bernoulli family, making the city a melting pot for different cultures and ideas. ²⁶ The Peace of Westphalia that concluded the 30 year war in 1648 has been seen by many historians as one of the foundational moments of the system of sovereign states in Europe. ²⁷ In Westphalia, the right of states to govern their territories without external interference was recognised for the first time. ²⁸ Basel's mayor Johann Rudolf Wettstein negotiated Swiss independence from the Habsburg empire. ²⁹ The French King Louis XIV had one of the more favourable outcomes and expanded his reign Eastwards, claiming that he, being the king of France, was the legitimate heir to the throne of Charlemagne. ³⁰ French territory now extended to the fishing village of Hüningen on the current 3land site, just north of Basel.

Hüningen was situated on the river Rhine like most of the settlements in the area. ³¹ Previous to the entry of the French, access to water and waterways seems to have been the main factor in the development of the early urban structures of the site. France was however to radically alter the local conditions by introducing an important urban artifact. Hüningen was known to be a good place for crossing the Rhine and had been used for this purpose by several armies over the course of 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. Louis XIV recognised this military liability, and in 1678 commissioned his chief military engineer Vauban to construct the fortress and bridge of Huningue, securing French authority over this important military point. ³² Vauban designed a starshaped ring of bastions, including a bridge over the Rhine and bridgehead fortifications on the German side. ³³ At the centre of the fortress was a square which was designed according to the French Parisian baroque fashion of the time.

²⁴ Kelley, 'Martyrs, Myths, and the Massacre'.

²⁵ Kanton Basel Stadt, 'History of Basel'.

²⁶ Dictionnaire Historique de la Suisse, 'Bernoulli'.

²⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Nation-State | Definition, Characteristics, & Facts'.

²⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica.

²⁹ Kanton Basel Stadt, 'History of Basel'.

³⁰ Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*. P. 140-141

³¹ Büchel, *Lage von Klein Hüningen*.

³² Ville de Huningue, 'Les Ponts Entre Huningue et Weil'.

³³ LIN, '3land Space use concept'.

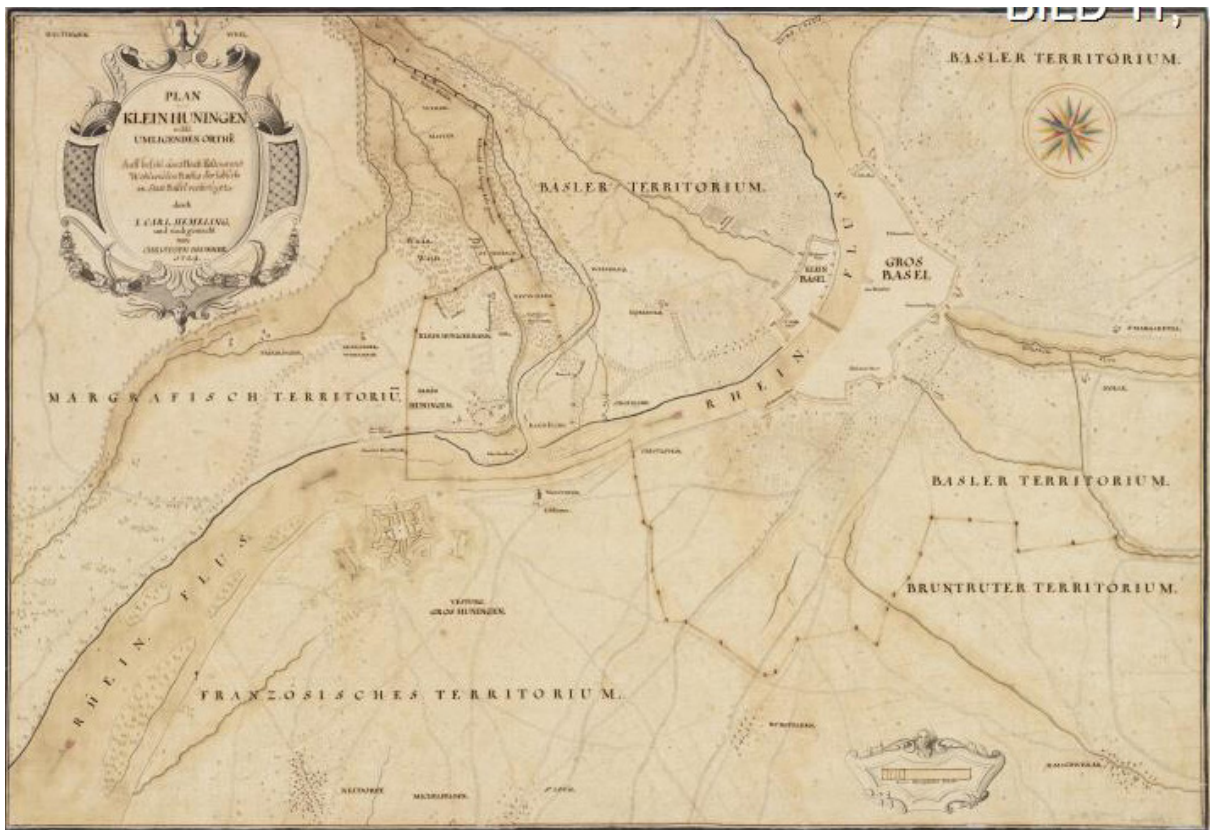


Figure [8]
The Hemeling map depicts the demarcation of the border following the conflicts over fishing rights at the mouth of the Wiese.
Carl Hemeling, Plan von Kleinhuningen nebst umliegenden Orthen (Basel, 1729), <http://query.sta-atsarchiv.bs.ch/query/>.

The construction of the fortress made a big difference for the local urban structure. The fortress that came in place of the old village forced the villagers to settle in the new village of Village-Neuf.³⁴ Interestingly this village was set back from the river, starting a retreat of the urban fabric from the river which would continue until the mid-20th century. The idea of the Rhine as a limit had found traction, at least within the urban planning of Vauban and his associates. Vauban represents a stream of thought in France at the time of the expansion wars of Louis XIV, that asserted that the Rhine was a natural border of the French state, similarly to the Atlantic ocean, the Pyrenees, the Mediterranean and the Alps.³⁵ From this point of view, it was logical to position new villages on a distance from the edge of the state since interaction with the other side was becoming increasingly unlikely. We can here see a clear sign of an urban bordering process.

The presence of the French and their large fortified bastion was not appreciated by the city of Basel, and the surrounding villages.³⁶ In the late 17th century, a conflict arose between French villagers from Huningue and Swiss villagers from Kleinhüningen over the fishing rights at the mouth of the Wiese stream. The conflict led to violent confrontations in 1682, 1725, 1726 and 1727.³⁷ It was at this time that it became necessary to demarcate the border more precisely than had traditionally been done. The commission was given to Carl Hemeling in 1729 by the Basel city council. Hemeling specified the local border line as it is known today.³⁸ The Hemeling map shows that the importance of a well-defined border began to play an increasingly important role at the level of local politics, extending beyond the occasional battle fought out by foreign mercenaries. For the first time, national politics were playing a significant role in local relations.

During the existence of the fort in Huningue, the bridge connecting the fort with the bridgehead on the other bank of the river was constructed and dismantled several times. The bridges always had a temporary lifespan in mind since they were seen as a military liability. They were mainly built using a ponton bridge technique, where floating pontoons were secured by a cable on both sides of the river. The fortress was involved in military action many times during its existence. The first action came during the expansion wars of Louis XIV. In 1702 a French army unsuccessfully attempted to invade Margravia, on the German side.³⁹ Following the French revolution, France once again started a series of military campaigns to the East, sparking German and Austrian reactions. The fortress of Huningue was besieged in 1797 by Austria, in 1814 by Bavaria, and in 1815 again by Austria. The bridgehead in Huningue was demolished by the Austrian army in 1797 following the defeat of the French revolutionary army.⁴⁰ When Napoleon was defeated in 1815, the fortress of Huningue was demolished on the request of Basel, who had always perceived the fortress as a threat.⁴¹ The siege of Huningue was the last military offense in which Swiss forces took part outside of Swiss territory.⁴²

³⁴ Baquol, *L'Alsace ancienne et moderne, ou Dictionnaire géographique, historique et statistique du Haut et du Bas-Rhin*.

³⁵ Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*. P. 180

³⁶ Kiechel, *Huningue : histoire d'une ancienne forteresse de Vauban / Lucien Kiechel*.

³⁷ Wieland, 'Der Kleinhüninger Lachsfangstreit 1736 - Basler Jahrbuch 1889'.

³⁸ Hemeling, 'Plan von Kleinhüningen nebst umliegenden Orthen'.

³⁹ Jacques, *Dictionary of Battles and Sieges: A Guide to 8,500 Battles from Antiquity through the Twenty-First Century, Volumes 1-3*.

⁴⁰ Juillerat, *Vue de La Demolition de La Tête de Pont a Huningue*.

⁴¹ Kiechel, *Huningue : histoire d'une ancienne forteresse de Vauban / Lucien Kiechel*.

⁴² Aeschmann, Bichet, and Margelist, *Swiss Neutrality*.



Figure [9]

Post card with the ponton bridge that was constructed in 1837.

Unknown, Huningue : le Rhin (frontière franco-allemande), 20th century, Photography, 9x14cm, 20th century, Archives Haut-Rhin, <http://www.archives.haut-rhin.fr/resource/a011443774814LG338i>.



Figure [10]

Airplane footage of the two bridges that were constructed between 1871 and 1914

BALAIR 3718, Rheinhafen von Süden, 210904, Photography, 13x18 cm, 210904, Basler Stadtarchiv, <https://query.staatsarchiv.bs.ch/query/detail.aspx?ID=84052>.

The local events mentioned above played out in the context of a changing Europe. Over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, the influence of the nation states grew stronger in Europe. The idea of the state underwent a significant change in both France and Germany. In both countries, the monarchic system had dominated the political scene for centuries, with the difference that Germany was made up of a long list of principalities and duchies, whereas France was already centralised earlier on in its history. The monarchy defined itself by its monarch. The French revolution overthrew this old conception and created the need for a new concept of what a state was. This concept was the nation state, a state that justifies itself by its people rather than through the monarch. The word nation itself which sprung up at this time derives etymologically from the Latin word for birth; *natio* or *natus*. The legitimacy of a nation state was thus derived by the people that are born within it. Following the revolution in France, Germany went through a process of formation during the 19th century. The romantic movement was strong in Germany and brought with it ideas of German unity. The German nationalist Johann Gottlieb Fichte was particularly fierce in his *Reden an die deutsche Nation* from 1808, where he advocated for a military conquests of French territories.⁴³ The Rhine was very much at the centre of the work of many of the early German nationalists. France had invaded German territory during the revolutionary wars as well as the Napoleonic wars, creating a strong sense of opposition in Germany. Nicolaus Becker's poem *Das Rheinlied* was intended as a lyric for a new German national anthem. It opens with a provocative lyric directed directly at the French:

*“Sie sollen Ihn nicht haben, den freien deutschen Rhein”*⁴⁴

The romantic movement put a large emphasis on national creation myths. In both France and Germany, stories of 3rd century warriors and bards began to flourish, and in that spirit, Caesars roman limes was again brought up as a natural boundary between the two countries.

Despite these growing tensions during the 19th century, the border experienced a relatively peaceful period between the Napoleonic wars and the start of the Franco-German war in 1870. The Prussian commander Otto van Bismarck was successful in organising a large majority of the German speaking states in the south against the French emperor Napoleon III. The Swiss confederation remained neutral, to the frustration of von Bismarck. The Prussian, well organised army won a crushing victory over the French army. The consequences of the war were far-reaching. Germany was united into a single empire, and took over Alsace and Lorraine from the French, shifting the border with France away from the Basel region.⁴⁵

With both sides of the Rhine being in German hands, a new era of bridgebuilding was started. A new more solid ponton bridge was built on the site of the demolished French fortress and a railway bridge was constructed at the current Palmrheinbrücke. The latter was part of a rail connection between the industrial zones that were emerging in Weil am Rhein and Hünigen and Saint Louis, that were called Hünigen and Sankt Ludwig at the time. The bridge was however primarily a military investment. It was of critical importance to the German Kaiserreich that troops could quickly cross the Rhine in order to defend the Elzass in case of French aggression. In 1870, the German military had not been allowed passage across the Swiss bridges over the Rhine, causing severe delays to their campaign. The military nature of the bridge can clearly be recognised in the design. The pylons had bastion-like proportions. Following the reinstatement of the Rhine border after the

⁴³ Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*.

⁴⁴ Becker, *Das Rheinlied*.

⁴⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Franco-German War | History, Causes, & Results'.

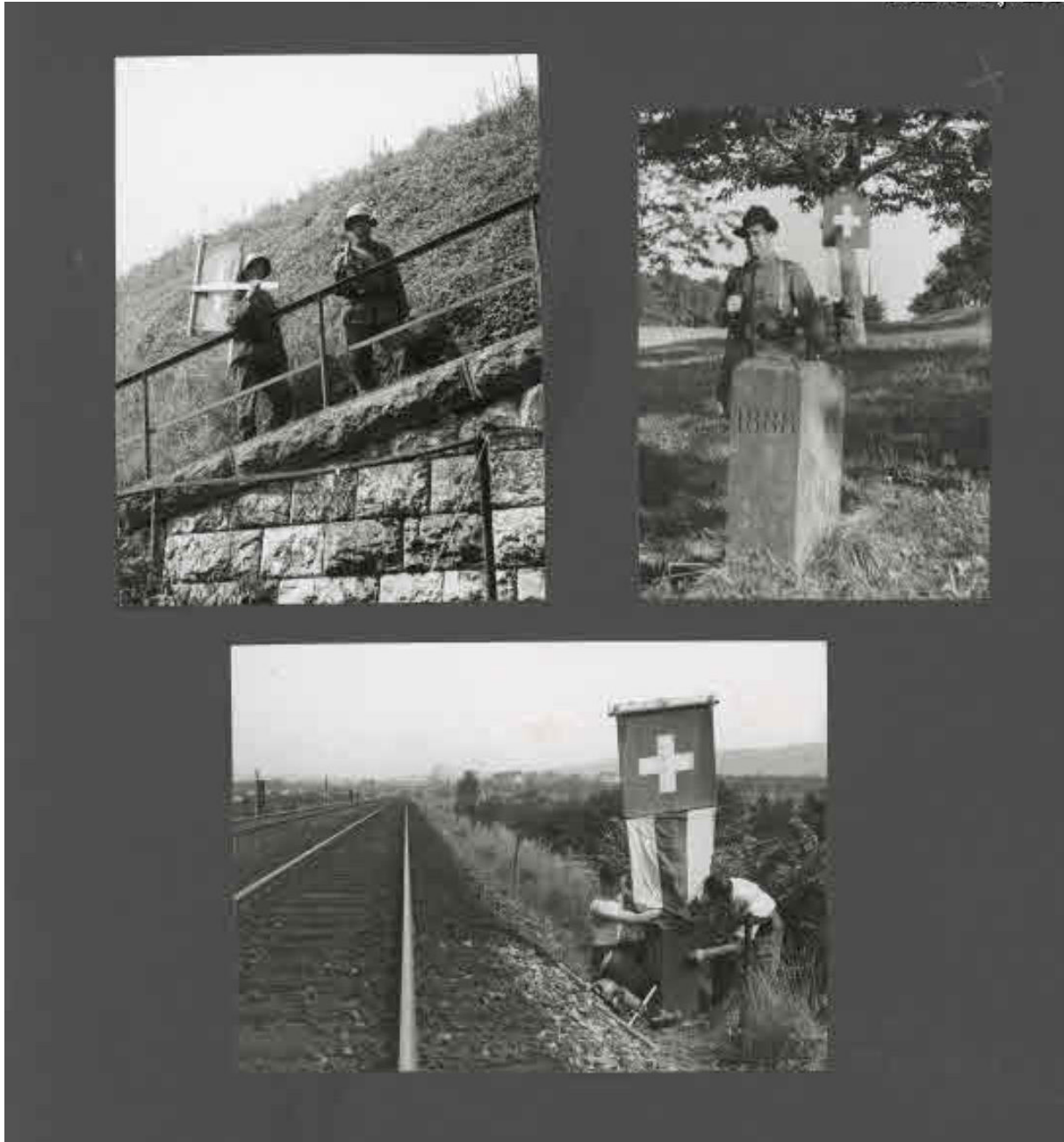


Figure [11]

Swiss soldiers demarcate the border in 1939, anticipating German aggression.

Walter Höflinger-Broger, Die Grenze wird markiert, 1939, Basler Stadtarchiv, <https://query.staatsarchiv.bs.ch/query/detail.aspx?ID=890267>.

first world war, the railway bridge fell in disuse. It was dismantled by the French when the Nazi party came to power in Germany, according to the French in line with the treaty of Versailles of 1919.⁴⁶

The two world wars were to become the culmination of hostilities on the Rhine border, and of nationalism in Europe. In France, the anti-German sentiment had grown stronger after the war of 1870/71 that had seen them lose the western bank of the Rhine. The first world war slaughter at the western front won them these territories at a high cost. Alsace and Lorraine, were again under German occupation during the second world war.⁴⁷ Both Huningue and Weil am Rhein were left in ruins after the second world war, whereas Basel was largely unscathed. Switzerland remained strictly neutral in both wars that played out right on its doorstep, and motivated this decision by referring to the tradition of Swiss neutrality. The Swiss responded to the hostilities by closing off the border with barricades, and by demarcating the border even more precisely.

Overall, we can see that the strengthening of the states in Europe and thereby of their borders came to have a great importance for the urban development in the Basel area. The presence of strong political forces motivated the demarcation of national borders and the construction of military architectures such as fortifications and military bridges. The fact that the Rhine was perceived as an edge rather than as a transition area led to the withdrawal of urban centres from the river banks. The ideas that originate from the 18th and 19th centuries became an important part of everyday life. Crucially, locals began to identify as, Swiss, French or German rather than as citizens of the Basel metropolis. The ideas from this time are permeating to this day.⁴⁸ They are in fact the essence of the border. It is around the 18th and 19th century that local architecture styles start to be distinguishable between the three countries, whereas medieval architecture gives no indication as to whether one is in Switzerland, Germany or France.

⁴⁶ Kraus, 'Die strategische Eisenbahn: Leopoldshöhe - St. Ludwig'; Renk, 'VILLAGE-NEUF. [Diaporama] Le pont du Palmrain a fêté ses 40 ans'.

⁴⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Alsace-Lorraine | Facts, Definition, & History'.

⁴⁸ Herzog et al., 'Ein Stadt im werden? / A Nascent City?'



Figure [12]

Basel in 1860, showing the locations of the three railwaystation serving one country each.
Friedrich Bruder, Karte Der Schweizerischen Centralbahn, I Te Section Basel-Sissach, 1:10000 (Basel, 1860), <https://query.staatsarchiv.bs.ch/query/detail.aspx?ID=801166>.

3.3 The Border Architecture of the Industrial Era

The left-behind border area between Switzerland, Germany and France was over the course of the industrial era covered by a dense ribbon of industrial buildings, harbour docks and silos that still form an inaccessible strip between the countries. Basel architects Herzog & de Meuron made the accurate observation of this phenomenon when they described it as a “*border erected in front of a border*”.⁴⁹ This chapter will analyse how the border was an important actor in the creation of this industrial no-man’s land.

The first reason that this territory is highly industrialized is because of the geography of Switzerland. Upstream from Basel there is a major height difference that marks the plateau of the Swiss highland. The Rhine cuts a path between these two levels that forms one of the main access routes to the highland, making Basel a bottleneck through which different modes of transport pass. Crucially for Basel, the Rhine becomes unnavigable for container barges upstream from the city, making Basel the only Swiss port with access to the world market. The first harbour to be built outside of the city centre was constructed in Sankt Johann on the left bank of the Rhine around the turn of the 19th century.⁵⁰ It was however soon overtaken in size by the harbour on the right bank. The Swiss village Kleinhüningen had originally been a picturesque fishing village on a meadow at the mouth of the Wiese, but was engulfed by the powerful expansion of harbour basins, that cut it off from both Basel and Weil. The first harbour basin, completed in 1922, was placed in the northernmost pocket of Swiss land with access to the Rhine. A second dock was connected to the first one in 1939.⁵¹ The function of these Basel harbours was always as a transit station from fluvial to rail transport. Goods are taken up along the Rhine to Basel and then transition to trains that take them further to Switzerland or Italy. As a consequence, railway tracks alone take up 10% of the area of the city of Basel.⁵² The construction of the railway system at the end of the 19th century was very much influenced by the national interests of the three countries. From the central station in Gros-Basel, one branch extends into each one of the countries. Originally, there were three head stations, one for each country. The harbours in Sankt Johann and Kleinhüningen connected to the French and German branches of the railway system respectively.

It is worth noting that the regional location of the transit harbour has a geographical explanation, but that the precise location within the city is very much a product of the demarcation of the border. The density of the harbour is quite extreme and it would have been simpler from a construction point of view to build the same transition hub further downstream where space is more readily available. Instead railway tracks, harbour docks and silos fight for space at the border and slice up the urban structures that preceded them. The function of the harbour makes it natural for the railway tracks to run in parallel with the river but this also creates urban islands that are caught between the tracks and the river, especially when this river is considered an edge rather than a transition line.

Aside from the harbour, the chemical and pharmaceutical industries are the other two main land occupiers at the border. Their location can also in part be explained by the hilly terrain south of Basel, where they could not easily expand.

⁴⁹ Herzog et al.

⁵⁰ Moll, ‘Between Countries’.

⁵¹ Spechtenhauser, ‘Ein Dorf wird Hafenstadt Kulturhistorischer Rückblick’.

⁵² Zaugg, ‘Geschichte des Eisenbahngeländes im Norden Basels’.



Figure [13]

Avenue de Bâle in Huningue has become a dead end at the back of the Novartis campus
Google, Screenshot, Google Maps, accessed 14 March 2021, https://www.google.nl/maps/@47.5775659,7.5810823,3a,75y,188.42h,88.35t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sYzMwGVRdLJ189fS-fZ_1niA!2e0!7i13312!8i6656.

A second and more important explanation for the presence of the industry is the economic imbalance caused by the destruction in France and Germany during the second world war. Switzerland has more cross border workers than any other European country and has some of its major urban centres situated along its border with the European union, including Basel, Geneva and Ticino. The situation after the war created an economic potential that is still one of the main drivers of the Basel and Swiss economy.⁵³ Swiss companies hire French and German blue collar workers that commute across the border to work for a swiss salary.⁵⁴ From a European point of view, the expansion of Swiss industries in the border zone was part of a post war strategy to rebuild society,⁵⁵ whereas the Swiss were able to build up industries that made big profits from the cheap cross-border labour.⁵⁶

One of the main examples of this mechanism is of that of Novartis. Over the course of the past one and a half centuries, large parts of the land on the left bank of the Rhine became property of Sandos, Ciba and other Basel pharmaceutical and chemical companies. They merged in 1997 into the Novartis pharmaceutical company.⁵⁷ The complex has entrances to the campus where scientists and office clerks work on the Swiss side for Swiss salaries.⁵⁸ The buildings are designed by well-known architects from all over the world. The industrial parts of the complex are located on the French side of the border, where blue collar workers work for significantly lower French salaries. The main gate for workers is located on this side of the border.⁵⁹ In this way, the border not only becomes national, but also social. Due to the confidential nature of the pharmaceutical industry, the complex is highly impermeable. It has become a closed-of site within the city. The campus cuts off major connections that existed between Huningue and Basel before the creation of the campus. For instance, the *Avenue de Bâle* in Huningue has become a dead end at the back of the Novartis campus. The border has here become physical due to the international market forces.

Generally speaking we can see that the border produced a new kind of architecture in the industrial age. The border is not intentionally defended in the same way as was the case in earlier eras, but the combination of nationalism and capitalism still produced a ribbon of impenetrable structures along the border which in its experienced effect is very similar. Legal and economic powers produced an architecture which cuts off connections and makes the presence of the border clearly felt.

⁵³ Dubois, 'Cross-Border Life in Europe: Daily Mobility in the Trinational Metropolis of Basel'.

⁵⁴ Atkins, 'Open Borders Key to Swiss Pharma's EU Success'; Dubois, 'Cross-Border Life in Europe: Daily Mobility in the Trinational Metropolis of Basel'.

⁵⁵ Ville de Huningue, 'Huningue d'hier à Aujourd'hui'.

⁵⁶ Atkins, 'Open Borders Key to Swiss Pharma's EU Success'.

⁵⁷ Novartis, 'Our Company'.

⁵⁸ Dubois, 'Cross-Border Life in Europe: Daily Mobility in the Trinational Metropolis of Basel'.

⁵⁹ Atkins, 'Open Borders Key to Swiss Pharma's EU Success'.



Figure [14]

The plan of the 3land development, produced by LIN architects in 2015 shows the ambitions to create an international district. Multiple bridges are to be built across the Rhine, and the industry is to be moved elsewhere or in behind the main space which is the Rhine riverfront.

LIN Architects, 'Plan Entwicklungsvision Ohne Legende', 2015, <https://3-land.net/start/en/medien/>.

3.4 Cross-border Architecture

The end of the second world war saw a change in attitudes across the Rhine. The horrors of the war had led both sides to the conclusion that the war could not be repeated. Michael Loriaux makes the following observation of the post war attitude: *“Neither state prevailed. The only solution found to diffuse the contest was to dismantle the frontier and put the nation state in question.”*⁶⁰ In this spirit, the European Union was founded in several steps in the post war years by the Rhineland states and Italy, with the exception of Switzerland. In this chapter we will see how this shift of attitude materializes into built architecture, and how there is a difference between the Franco-German projects and the Swiss-European projects from this contemporary era.

After the war, European collaboration became necessary and there was thus a need for a new ontology of Europe. The concept of the nation was no longer sufficient to explain the political reality that was being created. It was for this reason that the a Carolingian ontology was called back to life. Europe should once again form one unit, based on a Franco-German alliance. As recently as 2019, France and Germany signed a new treaty of cooperation and friendship in Aachen.⁶¹ The treaty was named a treaty of *“convergence, for the sake of greater European integration”*. The choice of location for this treaty clearly refers back to the Carolingian empire, once ruled by Charlemagne. Switzerland took a different position after the war. Neutrality was, and is still being considered as a key tool for internal cohesion. In a country of many languages, cultures and religions like Switzerland, taking a common stand on external conflicts could threaten the national stability. This external neutrality is being considered as one of the main aspects of Swiss identity.⁶²

In the Basel region, the new levels of international cooperation following the war also became the start of a period of transnational projects. Despite the neutral national policy, officials of the city of Basel were aware of the need for expansion across the border. In 1953 the Basel/Mulhouse/Freiburg airport was opened, accommodating travellers from all three countries.⁶³ Ten years later, the canton of Basel Stadt founded the Regio Basiliensis, an organisation that engages in international projects in the Basel region.⁶⁴ The cooperation between St Louis, Huningue, Weil am Rhein and Basel was further extended in 1995 when the trinational Eurodistrict Basel (TEB) was founded, a common foundation that funds projects in the borderland.⁶⁵ In 2012, the most significant project to date was started; the development of the trinational border site into a new urban district, 3land. The 3land masterplan envisions major changes in the urban fabric. The aim is to create a common neighbourhood across the Rhine, for which the dismantling of architectural barriers as well as the addition of new bridges are central themes.

The construction of new bridges is an important symbolic act of the new transnational era, especially considering the history of the bridges on the site that were often seen as a liability rather than an asset. In a final phase of this mindset, most bridges across the Rhine between France and Germany were destroyed during the second world war. This included the ponton bridge of Huningue.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*. P.10

⁶¹ Gouvernement de France, ‘Treaty of Aachen’.

⁶² Aeschimann, Bichet, and Margelist, *Swiss Neutrality*.

⁶³ LIN, ‘3land Space use concept’.

⁶⁴ Regio Basiliensis, ‘Home - Regio Basiliensis’; Reitel, ‘Border Temporality and Space Integration in the European Transborder Agglomeration of Basel’.

⁶⁵ TEB, ‘TEB - Trinationaler Eurodistrict Basel | TEB’; Reitel, ‘Border Temporality and Space Integration in the European Transborder Agglomeration of Basel’.

⁶⁶ Ville de Huningue, ‘Les Ponts Entre Huningue et Weil’.



Figure [15]

The opening of the new Palmrainbrücke in 1979

Unknown, Eröffnung Der Palmrainbrücke, 1979, Photography, 1979, Stadtarchiv Weil am Rhein,
<https://www.badische-zeitung.de/palmrainbruecke-heute-30-jahre-alt--20145407.html>.

The main means of transportation across the Rhine during the post war period was therefore a ferry connection between Huningue and Weil am Rhein. There was a great difference between the density of bridges in the inner city of Basel and the suburban border area situated just north of it. It was a major breakthrough when in 1979 a new Palmrainbrücke was constructed, which this time was designed for road traffic. The new concrete girder bridge was the first joint infrastructure project between Weil am Rhein and Huningue since the war, and a pioneering project for the future collaboration.⁶⁷ It was clearly distinct from its predecessor in that the main objective was to increase trade and international cooperation. The next bridge to be built was the Dreiländerbrücke footbridge, on the historical site of the Huningue fortress bridge. It spans the Rhine in one arch, making it a symbol of unity. The foundations of the fortress are carefully being surfaced without overshadowing the main message: that friendship and cooperation has overcome the animosities of the previous centuries.⁶⁸ This bridge was part of the pilot project *vis-à-vis*, a sub-project of the 3land development.⁶⁹ The 3land plan proposes further connections across the Rhine. Firstly, a new bridge for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians is planned to cross the Rhine from the docks of the current Rhine harbour, linking Kleinbasel to Huningue for the first time. Secondly, a footbridge is planned crossing the dock of Kleinhüningen, which will complete the pedestrication of the Rhine banks within the perimeter of the site. Lastly a new footbridge is envisaged to cross the Rhine at the Novartis campus.⁷⁰ The many bridges that are part of the plan show that there is willingness to better connect the three countries, and show that the new vision is one of a transition space rather than one of an edge.

A second aspect that has come under the attention in the transnational discussions in Basel is the problem of the industrial barriers in the borderland. The problem was identified in 1990 by Herzog & de Meuron and was addressed for the first time in an agreement between Novartis and the Kanton of Basel Stadt in 2005.⁷¹ Novartis reached an agreement with the Kanton of Basel Stadt to buy the port of St Johann as well as the remaining plots. In exchange, Novartis returned a narrow strip of land on the bank of the river to public ownership, opening up the left bank of the Rhine to the public for the first time in 150 years. The strip was converted into a public walkway which was seen as a major urban achievement.⁷² The walkway was a joint project between France and Switzerland from an urbanistic point of view, but both sides designed the walkway itself on their respective sides of the border. When walking along the walkway, the border line is very distinct. The Swiss walkway has an elaborate design of yellow limestone slates, organised in a wavelike pattern. Upon crossing the border, the path continues as a simple asphalt strip with narrow lawns on either side. Compared to the French part of the walkway, the Swiss part cost 20 times more per meter to realize, a cost that was partly paid by Novartis in return for the publicly owned land.⁷³ The result is a stark difference at the border which makes the division very clear. Despite the intentions of linking Basel with its suburbs, the project expresses difference rather than unity, and showcases an attitude to transnational urban planning that is still far less integrated than the example of the Dreiländerbrücke, one kilometre downstream. The walkway suggests that the Franco-Swiss relationship is far less integrated than the Franco-German one, and that thinking in terms of us and them is more predominant. If the rest of the 3land project were realized in a similar manner, the ambition of a common neighbourhood will hardly be achieved.

⁶⁷ Renk, 'VILLAGE-NEUF. [Diaporama] Le pont du Palmrain a fêté ses 40 ans'.

⁶⁸ Ville de Huningue, *echos du chantier vis-a-vis*.

⁶⁹ Ville de Huningue.

⁷⁰ LIN, '3land Space use concept'.

⁷¹ Herzog et al., 'Ein Stadt im werden? / A Nascent City?'; Moll, 'Between Countries'.

⁷² Moll, 'Between Countries'.

⁷³ Moll.



Figure [16]

The Dreiländerbrücke, seen from the French side.

Unknown, Dreiländerbrücke, 2008, Photography, 2008, <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Dreilaenderbruecke003.jpg>.

The overall aim of the dismantling of industrial barriers and the construction of bridges is to create a common trinational neighbourhood. In the brochure for the Franco-German vis-à-vis pilot project, the mayor of Huningue Jean-Marc Deichtmann voices this bold ambition:

*“The aim of the project is a trinational urban district that guarantees a high quality of life for the residents through cross-border mobility, spacious green areas and new living space.”*⁷⁴

This quote points at a crucial ontological change that has occurred between France and Germany in the post-war era: The aim is ONE district. An urban district has, according to the definition of Kevin Lynch, an identifiable character, that in this case would extend across national borders.⁷⁵ In this case the concept revolves around the Rhine as the central life source of the region.⁷⁶ This vision has translated well into the proposed urban plan. Many new connections across the Rhine create new possibilities for Weil am Rhein and Huningue to grow out of the isolation that marked the post-war years, and for Basel to take advantage of growth possibilities beyond its Swiss borders. In Kleinhüningen, a new dock is being proposed tucked away next to the railway tracks, so that the urban tissue of the neighbourhood can integrate with a larger urban gesture on the Rhine banks.⁷⁷ Having come from a situation where the Rhine was seen as a frontier that needed to be able to be transformed into a military stronghold at any given occasion, the new masterplan seeks to create a joint public space out of the waterfront. According to architect Pierre de Meuron, the Rhine itself is already the main public space of Basel, or as he puts it, its central park.⁷⁸ The 3land project clearly attempts to extend this urban space along the Rhine to also encompass Huningue and Weil am Rhein, signifying the same unity that made the Rhine a central public space in Basel.

Despite this common plan, there is a difference between how the different countries enter the 3land project. In Germany and France, the national ontology is increasingly being challenged by the idea of European unity. There is a political will to knit close ties with each other in order to continue to heal the sore wounds that the world wars left behind. The fact that these two countries are arguably the two most important EU members and that their peace is a fundamental condition for the continued existence of European collaboration only strengthens the need of both sides for cooperation. From a Swiss point of view, the ontology of Basel was never in question. The motivation has instead been of a much more practical kind. Basel lacks physical space for growth, and is therefore looking for opportunities through international cooperation. There is a desperate need for housing close to the centre of Basel, and the 3land site is an attractive location on the Rhine close to the city centre that Basel is more than willing to invest in.⁷⁹ While France and Germany are moving towards an abstraction of the border, Switzerland takes a more sovereign position.

The architectural character of the future 3land neighbourhood will largely be defined by the dominant ontologies of the region. If countries have close connections politically, this mainly translates into many physical meeting points, in the case of 3land clearly expressed by bridges. Close political ties can however also be traced to softer signs of kinship. Inversely, the lack of a common motivation for change can result in harsh architectural transitions. When the positions of the two parties are asymmetric, the border line tends to be clearly marked despite the best intentions.

⁷⁴ Schmidt et al., ‘Projektbrochüre vis-a-vis’. Translation from German by the author

⁷⁵ Lynch, *The Image of the City*.

⁷⁶ Lepage et al., ‘3land - Freiraum- Und Naturschutzkonzept | Stratégie Des Espaces Publics et Écologiques’.

⁷⁷ GBN, ‘Gateway Basel Nord - Das trimodale Umschlagterminal in Basel’.

⁷⁸ Gruntz, ‘Pierre de Meuron’.

⁷⁹ MVRDV, ‘Basel Rheincity’.



Figure [17]
Katsutoshi Seki, Dreiländereck (Basel), 2011, Photography, 2011, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tripoint_Monument_at_Basel.jpg

4. An international District

Over the course of history, the Basel region has seen many different systems of territorial division. The physical lines can be traced back to the roman era, but the widely accepted meaning of the border has varied greatly over the centuries. The border has produced different kinds of architecture depending on the way that it was interpreted by different people in different eras. The early history of the Basel region shows that many different border demarcations could have been the outcome of antiquity and the middle ages. It was only when the border line was widely accepted as a part of everyday life, through the increasing influence of monarchies and later on, the nation states, that the border gained in power as a primary urban element in Basel. This strong position was maintained by historiographical constructions that legitimized the location and importance of the border and made the border generally accepted by the public. This new kind of border initially produced military architecture and pushed away urban centres. When capitalism and industrialization gradually took over from the feudal monarchies, a second type of architecture started to emerge. The dense industrial "*border in front of the border*" was a consequence of the transition of legal apparatuses that took place at the border. Following the world wars, the ontopology of the Rhineland underwent a drastic change in the EU countries, promoting the idea of European unity. In combination with the post war economic prosperity, the deconstruction of the European borders has led to the discovery of vacant land in the middle of Basel. The discovery of the possibilities that transnational cooperation gives has laid the foundation for a new ambition: the international district.

In the future the borders in the Basel metropolitan area might evolve into divisions that more resemble municipal borders than national borders, especially between Weil am Rhein and Huningue. If the 3land project is successful the ontopological differences may crumble on a local level, so that all that remains is a legal transition, from one territory to another, but where continuity is far more predominant. On a larger level, projects such as the 3land, show that the idea of a united Europe is taking shape not only in political discourse, but also in the built environment. The success of such an urban endeavour is closely linked with the acceptance of the ontopological ideas that are carrying it.

The border situation in the Basel metropolitan region shares similarities to many other urban border regions. The themes of ontopological primary urban elements, ineffectively utilized border spaces in central locations and economic asymmetry are all unspecific to the Basel region. In this light the research in this thesis and the eventual outcome of the 3land project may be used for the understanding of other border regions across the continent.

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