

The myth of boundless nature: naturalizing otherness in transboundary spaces

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This article explores how animals and discourses of nature have been used to construct specific spatial discourses in transboundary spaces. Drawing on the example of transboundary protected areas – areas designed for purposes linked to nature conservation that span international borders – it explores how nature is mobilised to uphold certain political conceptions of space, seeking to denaturalise discourses presented as value-free. Two countervailing yet coexisting spatial myths are examined: on one hand the myth that nature is boundless and on the other that cultural differences are somehow expressed within nature. Using practical examples of discourses on boundaries within both conservation literature and in material gained during interviews, it suggests that the construction of transboundary protected areas is enabled by a set of discursive practices through which what counts as nature is made intelligible. In order to do this, invocations of goats, beetles, bison, wolves, fire-breathing dragons and a curious plant within Monsieur Adam's garden are examined as particular performances of space. Attempting to move beyond the nature / culture binary presented as self-evident by the people interviewed leads to a rethinking of power relations upholding spatial discourses, and the corresponding need for spatialised myths of hybridity.

Key words: Animal, boundary, Europe, hybridity, nature, otherness, protected area, spatial discourse.