

**TIME, FORWARDI. Summary****Olga Brednikova**

This text is part of a series of essays by Russian sociologists who took part in a two-week “fieldwork school” on both sides of the border between Russia and the breakaway republic of Abkhazia in the fall of 2005. They spent the first week in a village on the Russian side of the border, and the second in the Abkhazian resort town of Gagra. The school focused on transborder networks and the border as a social space, as well as social conditions specific to Abkhazia, such as civil society in a weak state and the tourism industry in an unrecognized republic. The authors reflect on their own experiences as outside observers in this region.

This essay discusses how the passage from Russia to Abkhazia affects the experience of time. The first impression is that in Abkhazia, time has stopped or ceased to exist. The city is half-ruined following the war and years of embargo, and nature is taking over semi-destroyed man-made structures, creating a sense of death and timelessness. However, this impression vanishes as soon as people enter the deserted scenery. The second perception is that of a time lag, created by the ubiquitous presence of “Soviet” objects and practices that Russian observers associate with a timeless past. Economic life characterized less by contractual relationships than by personal ties—landlords dropping in unannounced, ticket pricing based on sympathy—is initially perceived as a relic. Upon reflection, however, these turn out to be special types of contractual relations, which provide more scope for manipulation and reciprocal demands. The third factor is nation-building. References to a glorious national past and to the recent war structure perceptions of historical time. Russia and Georgia remain the most important temporal references, e.g. in the debate on whether to use daylight saving time, as in Russia, or remain on Georgian time.