

**BETWEEN ADLER AND GAGRA: THE BORDER MATRIX. *Summary*****Elena Nikiforova**

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 reflects on the multiplicity of borders to be crossed while working in the Russian-Abkhazian border zone. The state border between Russia and its (then) unrecognized neighbor is one of the few post-Soviet borders subject to manipulation by the Russian authorities. Passport controls on the Abkhazian side are often perfunctory or non-existent, yet travelers with Georgian surnames are considered suspect, creating the impression of an anti-Georgian border. The border has also become a zone of peculiar economic activity. Much cross-border transportation of goods is done using hand-drawn wheelbarrows, often by women, since many men lost their lives in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. However, the most significant border is between Abkhazia’s self-image as a peaceful tourist destination and the ubiquitous and increasingly institutionalized memory of the war. Visitors cross this border permanently, in both their physical movement around any Abkhazian town and their conversations with local hosts. Finally, unlike more solidified post-Soviet borders, Russians experience the Russian-Abkhazian borderland as an exotic territory where boundaries and rules are suspended.