

If boundaries are destined to be with us, we face again the question of permeability. The concept of the permeable boundary is hardly new, in recent years it has witnessed a remarkable resurgence in popularity. Indeed, the notion that boundaries need to be able to 'breathe' has now almost become axiomatic among boundary scholars. Yet despite being one of the most frequently-used buzzwords in boundary studies in the 1990s, permeability remains rather poorly-defined. Like obscenity, most of us know it when we see it - but what exactly do we mean when we talk about a permeable boundary? What factors affect permeability? Can they be quantified or does permeability involve qualitative elements that defy measurement? Is it possible to compare the permeability of different boundaries? And if so, what can be learned from doing so? Martin Pratt examined the value of, and the problems associated with, attempting to measure and classify the permeability of international boundaries around the world. He argued that, while a meaningful 'index of permeability' may be beyond our reach, subjecting a boundary to a rigorous geographical analysis is a far from futile exercise.

### **Emergency Planning, Response, and Technology**

Dr. William Wood<sup>22</sup>, The Geographer at the United States Department of State, examined problems with the accuracy and sufficiency of data and information in a situation with which many countries are becoming all too familiar – emergency response to conflict. His remarks derived from his experiences with the Kosovo emergency, but might well have been applied to the Balkans as a whole, and might also have been applicable to the situation in East Timor, which developed shortly after the Conference ended.

Complex emergency responses are invariably difficult, multi-faceted, and highly charged undertakings, with implications for international relations (and international law), and urgent lifesaving requirements. Accurate, relevant, and timely data can play a critical role in humanitarian missions, and yet a cohesive information plan has been largely absent from some multilateral emergency responses, such as those in the Balkans. Wood's paper explored the potential use of geographic information system (GIS)-linked data collection, organization, and dissemination prior to and during multilateral humanitarian operations. The multiple functions of international boundaries in such operations were discussed, and also the challenges of meeting crisis-response objectives. In Wood's view, the use of GIS tools in Kosovo provided a model for projecting informational requirements onto future complex emergency responses that will involve both peacekeepers and civilian agencies.

---

22 *Refugees and Kosovo*, Dr. William Wood, Director, Office of the Geographer, United States Department of State, Washington D.C., USA