



# FRONTIERS OF HUMANITY AND BEYOND

TOWARDS NEW CRITICAL  
UNDERSTANDINGS OF BORDERS

## P16 - THINKING COASTLINES AS FLUID FRONTIERS

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### ABSTRACT

Once, humans drew a line in the sand and called it a coastline. This imaginary border sets the divide between the daring ocean and people's domain. But, as human pressure increases on global shores and sea mean-level rises holding the line is becoming unsustainable. Long-term views and multi-trans-disciplinary approaches are needed to support critical thinking and knowledge-based solutions to address coasts as fluid frontiers and set new ways of living with them.

Sea and land, the two elements are frequently presented as opposite counterbalancing realities, as if they didn't touch. But, in the middle, there is a fringe of loose sand, pebbles or rocks, foam, watery, but still solid ground, whose limits are yet to define. Coasts are ecotones, transition and tension areas, dynamic flowing boundaries between two distinct ecosystems, with different biological and physicochemical features. Terrestrial-to-aquatic ecotones, coasts are highly complex frontier systems defined by their rich diversity and large productivity, privileged spaces of exchange of resources and energy and phenomena transfer. Human have been benefiting from these environments for millennia, to the point that coastal societies also have ecotone characteristics: the contacts, exchanges, resources and flows; the social, political, economic and cultural diversity; even the tensions and conflicts. Over time, all these phenomena have become so profoundly entangled, they are almost indistinguishable on today's hybrid coasts.

This panel aims to explore the ambiguity/hybridity of the borderline geographies, environments, species, people, activities and ideas that are common to coasts. The fact that this is an untidy messy natural-human world make it the perfect melting-pot to less familiar research and views, encouraging methodological, thematic and topical experimentation. Creating the right stage for open-minded scholars and practitioners, with different origins, experiences and purposes, to meet and come together, to discuss the past, present and future of local and global coasts.

**Joana Gaspar de Freitas** PhD in Contemporary History, researcher at the Center of History of the University of Lisbon, Joana is the Principal Investigator of DUNES. Sea, Sand and People, a project supported by a Starting Grant of the European Research Council. She is also co-editor of the journal Coastal Studies and Society, launched by SAG, in 2021. Her teaching and research interests lie in the environmental history of coastal zones, considering risks and vulnerabilities, extreme events, climate change adaptation, coastal management and ocean's cultural heritage. She has published widely on these topics. Between 2017 and 2019, she coordinated the Portuguese Branch of the BRASPOR Network – Interdisciplinary Studies on Coastal Systems in the Atlantic (Brazil-Portugal). She was a Rachel Carson Center Fellow (Munich), in 2015, and a Linda Hall Library Fellow (USA), in 2014.