

ANALYSING EUROPE'S BORDERS

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades the globalisation of economic and cultural life and the growth of trans-national governance have preoccupied mainstream social science (for overviews, see Held *et. al.*, 1999; Hutton and Giddens, 2000). One of the creeping assumptions in this literature is that borders (including state borders) are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the era of the internet and time-space compression. In debating globalisation with Anthony Giddens, for example, Will Hutton observes: “*all borders are coming down – economic, political and social. There is a new conception of time, risk and opportunity...*” (Hutton and Giddens, 2000: 3). For many observers, the EU is a harbinger of this new ‘borderless’ world – a trans-national polity that seems to pose the most advanced alternative to an inter-state system made up of discrete territorially delimited, ‘sovereign’ states.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BORDERS

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Many of the theoreticians of globalisation do admit that states still matter, often in asides (e.g., Hutton and Giddens, 2001 and Urry, 2000) but the central thrust of their analysis distracts attention from the empirical study of borders and border change. Although there is a rapidly expanding inter-disciplinary literature on borders,¹ it is largely ignored in general accounts of globalisation and European integration. It is as if notions of the geographical marginality of borders become translated into the idea that they are marginal in social life also.

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Yet, there are powerful *a priori* reasons for making borders central to social science analysis. In sociological terms, they are integral to behaviour; they are the ubiquitous product of the need for order, security and belonging in human life. They express our contending desires for sameness and difference, for differentiating between the ‘known’ and the ‘unknown’ and between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Borders not only constitute social units, they also depend on the nature of the reciprocity within the unit. The provision of mutual security and aid are among the most important forms of reciprocity and they reinforce boundaries already established. Territorial borders, such of those of states, both shape, and are shaped by, what they contain. The ‘container’ and the ‘contents’ are mutually formative. Borders, therefore, express two universalistic features of human society – social inclusiveness and exclusiveness.

Political borders are the inevitable outcome of the range and limits of power and coercion, social organisation, the division of labour and the promotion of a collective identity within a delimited territory. For as long as human beings demand a measure of autonomy and self-direction, they will seek to create, maintain and transcend borders. Modern state boundaries are no exception to this axiom.

Yet, some of the dominant metaphors used in the study of globalisation and trans-national governance discourage a focus on state borders. ‘Networks’, ‘network society’ and ‘flows’ (e.g., Castells, 1998 and Urry, 2000) are used to characterise increasingly global economic, cultural and political systems. In stressing or assuming the increased permeability of state borders, these metaphors run the risk of confusing permeability with irrelevance or even complete disappearance. The problem lies not in the use of metaphors as they

are necessary and pervasive tools of social science. Rather, their inappropriate use and overuse can distort our perceptions of social reality and change. This article suggests that we need to develop a more flexible and suggestive series of metaphors to bring borders back into the centre of social scientific analysis. Such metaphors must indicate the enduring importance of borders as well as their complex, ambiguous and often contradictory, nature.

In what follows, four metaphors for understanding borders – as barriers, bridges, resources and symbols of identity – are employed. They are used here as a means of understanding border change within the European Union since the 1980s. It is argued that these metaphors not only enable a more sustained empirical focus on state border and border regions, they also have the potential to enhance our understanding of the European project and the overall trajectory of the European integration process.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AS THE MANAGEMENT OF BORDERS

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From its inception, the protagonists of European integration have seen it as an antidote to the problem of state borders in Europe, in particular to the type of territorial expansionism that generated the two World Wars. In retrospect too, the European project may be seen as a response to the fragmentation of the great continental and overseas empires and the proliferation of national states on the continent. Europe has a long history of unsettled political borders, in terms of changes to the borders of existing states and the formation of new states (O'Dowd, 2001a, and 2001b). Twentieth century state borders have been particularly volatile. State borders have multiplied, culminating in the post-1989 collapse of the Soviet empire. Despite the rather misleading slogan of the Single European Market – a 'Europe without Frontiers' – in practice the process of European integration has been one of managing an ever-increasing number of national frontiers. We have a 'Europe of Borders' rather than a 'Borderless Europe'.

More accurately stated, what the European project has attempted is not the obliteration of borders but new, more democratic, and consensual ways of managing border change to replace the long European tradition of inter-state war, violence and coercion. It seeks to replace cross-border conflict with co-operation. As Weiler (1999: 341) rightly observes, the EU "*does not reject [state] boundaries: it guards them but it also guards against them.*" He sees the EU as an antidote to three historic forms of 'boundary abuse' in Europe:

1. Territorial aggression of one state against another;
2. The notion that the state is 'an end in itself' rather than an instrument for individuals and society to attain their potentials. An example might be an strident state nationalism which insists on allegiance to the state apparatus rather than on "*human affinity, empathy, loyalty, and a sense of shared fate with the people of the state*";
3. A movement from a sense of boundary which reflects a legitimate sense of belonging to one which involves a condescension or contempt for an "*inferior other*" (Weiler, 1999: 340).

The empirical evidence of state formation and European integration seems to support Weiler's argument that the EU is reconfiguring rather than obliterating state borders. One way of exploring this process of reconfiguration is to examine the changing role of borders as barriers, bridges, resources and symbols of identity. These metaphors mark analytical distinctions between four interrelated dimensions or functions of state borders. In practice, of course, all

borders serve simultaneously as barriers, bridges, resources and symbols of identity even if some dimensions appear more salient than others depending on the location of the border, or the issue or context involved. Borders are therefore multi-dimensional, complex, ambiguous and often contradictory. These same characteristics also make them at once flexible and durable.

Since the early 1980s, economic globalisation, the institutional transformation of the European Community (EC) into the European Union (EU), and the project of enlargement have accelerated the reconfiguration of state borders. This has been a period of rapid change which has exposed the multi-dimensional nature of borders, their increasing differentiation and variability. Increased permeability and flexibility, far from diminishing the significance of state borders, underlines their enduring significance in their own right, as well as their salience for the project of European integration as a whole.

BORDERS AS BARRIERS

The period between 1950 and the late 1980s marked the high point of stable, sharply demarcated borders in twentieth century Europe.

In the aftermath, of the two World Wars, it was apparent that the borders of individual western European states could no longer serve as protective security barriers for their respective populations. Under US hegemony, the new security barrier was the Cold War border which divided eastern and western Europe. The movement for European integration was predicated on ending inter-state war in the west and providing a bulwark against Soviet expansionism. The period between 1950 and the late 1980s marked the high point of stable, sharply demarcated borders in twentieth century Europe (in both east and west) within which states achieved an unprecedented degree of control over the economy, politics and culture of their citizens and a capacity to regulate cross-border flows. Despite the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) and European Free Trade Area (EFTA), for the most part state borders in western Europe were reconstructed as barriers behind which relatively inclusive welfare states were created. The scope and form of welfare states varied according to the economic, political and class dynamics of each state and its institutional history.

By the early 1980s, however, welfarism was in crisis. The return of mass unemployment, under the impact of global recessions triggered by rising oil prices, undermined the viability of national welfare systems shielded from the outside world by their territorial borders. The antidote to the crisis was now seen to lie in embracing 'markets' which transcended borders. States 'retreated' and neo-liberal orthodoxy began to dominate the politics and practice of European integration more thoroughly than before.

From the 1980s onwards, state borders were conceived not as barriers to political union in the EC, but as barriers to the completion of a European market.

The means and ends of the European project now became inverted. The founders of the EEC had emphasised political and security objectives while adopting market integration as the means to these ends. However, from the early 1980s, and more especially after the Maastricht Treaty (1992), economic integration appeared to become the overriding objective of European integration, in the form of the Single Market and European Monetary Union. The means were political but it was a politics that sought to enforce the dominance of economics over politics. As Boyer (2000: 5) recently observed, "*markets and democracy have been trading places – financial markets are monitoring national and European policy while politicians are seeking to promote economic efficiency.*" This neo-liberal shift was not merely a return to pre-1914 free trade, what was new was the primacy of global financial markets helped by revolutions in mass communications and information technology.

As a result, from the 1980s onwards, state borders were conceived not as barriers to political union in the EC, but as barriers to the completion of a

European market. The revival of neo-liberal economics now placed greater emphasis on state borders as barriers to the free flow of the capital, goods, services and persons deemed to be necessary to make the EC competitive in global markets. 'Negative' integration, the removal of barriers to the operation of market forces, was emphasised at the expense of positive integration, the development of supranational institutions and cultural identification with the EC. The Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties reflected the lack of inter-governmental consensus on the form that any positive integration should take.

Borders were seen in economics and economic geography as interrupting and distorting flows of trade, limiting the size of the market, and increasing transaction costs.

The post-war economic consensus on 'Keynesianism' at home, and 'free-trade' abroad was now shattered. The distinction between domestic and foreign economic policy collapsed as the more enthusiastic neo-liberals sought to utilise market disciplines as a way of reducing states' roles in their domestic economies. In their view, legal, administrative, political and cultural borders are market distortions. While few contemplated abolishing all these hindrances to the market, borders were seen in economics and economic geography as interrupting and distorting flows of trade, limiting the size of the market, and increasing transaction costs. The theory behind the Single Market was that EU member states suffered from a lack of competitiveness. Creating a 'borderless' single market would reduce transaction costs and increase competitiveness by creating an EC-wide division of labour that would benefit from economies of scale in competition with North America and Japan.

The abolition of internal border controls created a perceived need for enhancing the barrier functions of the external EU border.

The Single Market project focused attention firmly on the question of internal border controls with impetus being provided by the Commission identifying 282 measures necessary to removing such controls between 1986 and 1992 (Fligstein and Mara Drita, 1996). The impact was immediate and visible with an increase in intra-EU trade, a rise in the number of mergers and acquisitions in the business sector and the reduction of transaction, including transport, costs. However, the workings of the 'Single Market' also revealed that economic borders were not easily removed. Analysing the impact on business two years after the 'completion' of the Single Market, Butt and Porter (1995:1) observed: "*the struggle to establish and to maintain the single market is likely to continue indefinitely.*" In addition, the abolition of internal border controls created a perceived need for enhancing the barrier functions of the external EU border. Some of the strongest advocates of the neo-liberal, 'free market' were among those most keen to strengthen the external borders and control the free movement of labour across borders.² The price of enhancing the bridging role of internal EU borders seemed to be the strengthening of the barrier functions of the external border.

Borders were not merely economic barriers, they were simultaneously administrative, legal, political, cultural and even psychological barriers.

The introduction of the Single Market revealed the extent to which it benefited some sectors of business over others, notably the large European manufacturing multinationals (see Bornschier and Fielder, 1995). It also exposed the limitations of seeing state borders merely as economic barriers to the workings of an abstract 'market'. The implementation of the Single Market measures revealed the complex ways in which the existing 'economy' was embedded in the existing arrangements and practices of state administrations. In other words, borders were not merely economic barriers, they were simultaneously administrative, legal, political, cultural and even psychological barriers. Removing the obstacles to the free working of 'market forces' did not mean the end of regulation or the end of 'borders' – rather it involved different forms of regulation and re-regulation, often at EU and global levels. It also implied different ways of managing borders.

BORDERS AS BRIDGES

The Single Market thus marked an important modification of state borders as sharply defined territorial limits and brought the role of frontier zones spanning borders into clearer focus.

The Single Market programme provided the opportunity for the European Commission to develop new initiatives for border regions. For the Market to function properly the 'bridge' or 'gateway' dimensions of state borders had to be enhanced. The EU's support for emergent cross-border regions was part of its attempt to create an integrated economic space. At the same time, the resources accruing to border regions arising from their operation of non-tariff controls were no longer available. The initiatives taken by the Commission were therefore partly compensatory for border regions adversely affected by the Single Market. But, they also were aimed at furthering the wider objective of economic integration by building links between regions and not just between countries. The Single Market thus marked an important modification of state borders as sharply defined territorial limits and brought the role of frontier zones spanning borders into clearer focus.³ A report of the Council of Europe, even welcomed the emergent cross-border regions as representing "*the cornerstone of the future European political community*" (Mestre, 1992: 14).

Forms of local cross-border cooperation pioneered in the Rhine Basin since the late 1950s (Schelberg, 2001; Saalbach, 2001) were now adopted by the European Community as part of a wider trans-national strategy of cooperation and integration. Under the generic rubric, Euro-regions, cross-border regions addressed specific economic, social, and environmental problems in their own areas and created cross-border boards and secretariats to address them. After 1993, there was a striking proliferation of Euro-regions along the external border of the EU in Central and Eastern Europe, many of them instigated by the German government. Euro-regions involved the EU, national governments and local actors in establishing networks of cooperation and the groundwork for eventual membership of the EU. The Dutch-German model, for example, proved particularly influential on the German-Polish and German-Czech borders (Kirchner, 1998).

The EU's INTERREG funds helped stimulate regional cross-border networking along its internal and external borders. The scale of these funds was relatively limited, however. INTERREG, for example, constituted less than 1% of the EU Structural Fund expenditure (1994-1999) (Williams, 1996). The Structural Funds themselves count for less than half of the EU budget which itself is frozen at a level not above 1.3% of the GDP of member states. Nevertheless, they generated a considerable increase in cross-border activity. One study estimated that there were 116 operational cross-border regions in Europe in 1996 compared to only 65 before 1991 (Maskell and Tornqvist, 1999: 31).

Close analysis of existing cross-border cooperation shows clearly that the reality often falls short of the rhetoric.

However, in launching its INTERREG III programme, the Commission of the European Communities (2000: 3) has recently noted that, while a great deal of development activity has occurred, "*it has generally been much more difficult to establish genuine cross-border activity jointly.*" Euro-regions also vary considerably in terms of their composition and capacity to act effectively (see Hann, 1998: 254). Summarising much recent research on Euro-regions within the EU, Kramsch (2000) has suggested that, while specific projects have succeeded, programmes of economic, political and cultural cross-border collaboration have "*fallen below expectations.*" Indeed, close analysis of existing cross-border cooperation shows clearly that the reality often falls short of the rhetoric. It reveals insufficient resources, mismatched competencies, duplication of effort, 'back to back' rather than genuinely integrated projects, inter-agency conflicts over resource allocation, erratic funding patterns and excessive emphasis on physical infrastructure and 'hard' economic outcomes, rather than on 'soft factors' like social capital and trust.

The buffer zone may be seen as a shifting bridge between east and west.

Cooperation across borders which mark huge structural disparities, such as those across the eastern external border of the EU, is particularly prone to generate unintended consequences. Changed political and economic circumstances interact with the reactivation of old historical and ethnic linkages to create a new form of buffer zone between East and West. This border region has become the source of cheap (mainly Polish) labour for EU labour markets, notably in Germany, as well as acting as a magnet for workers and traders from further afield. It is also an attractive site for German and Austrian foreign direct investment and subcontracting activities, for the creation of huge border bazaars, for smuggling people, drugs and other criminal activities (Krätke, 1999; Strykiewicz and Kaczmarek, 1997). Wallace (1999) argues that Poland, Hungary, and the Czech and Slovak Republics now constitute a new Central European buffer zone characterised by particular forms of capital investment and circulation of people and goods. The movement of people and goods is influenced by the revitalisation of older ethnic and linguistic ties as well as by historical ties associated with German settlements in the east and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the Danube basin.

The buffer zone may be seen as a shifting bridge between east and west. Huge structural disparities interact with sometimes antagonistic ethnic relationships in the region. In these circumstances, the buffer zone serves as a barrier as well as a bridge. The EU and its member states are attempting to create a zone of stability in Eastern Europe by supporting the buffer states in controlling immigration and crime and by seeking to moderate ethnic conflicts further East and in the Balkans.

European cross-border cooperation has been characterised by “administrative complexity, public sector dominance and local dependence on cooperation incentives.”

The flows across the internal borders of the EU are generally less volatile than across the external borders, allowing more structured cross-border cooperation. Where cross-border secretariats consisting of administrative and technical personnel exist to propose or implement particular projects, there is greater scope for genuine cross-border cooperation. Yet, even here, the continued existence of cross-border boards and secretariats can be uncertain in the absence of matching funds and breaks in the continuity of EU funding.

Drawing comparisons with North America, Scott (1999) observes that European cross-border cooperation has been characterised by “*administrative complexity, public sector dominance and local dependence on cooperation incentives.*” There is evidence of a considerable increase in cross-border networking at regional level among public agencies and universities, but less success in stimulating private sector participation in regional development. Likewise, effective cross-border co-ordination of land-use plans and urban development has proved elusive.

To some extent cross-border regions mirror the working of the EU itself. They provide examples of multi-level governance involving the European Commission, national states, local and regional authorities, inter-governmental commissions and a variety of non-governmental agencies. Cross-border regions involve a series of flexible strategic alliances between local political, administrative and business elites.

The availability of funding brings into being new voluntary bodies and enables existing agencies to engage in new activities. It provides opportunities for such bodies to influence regional developments in border zones where historically the priorities of national governments have minimised local influence on cross-border regimes. Cross-border contexts are created with potential for negotiation and learning thereby creating fora for deliberative or participatory democracy.

Like EU institutions themselves, agencies involved in cross-border cooperation control remarkably few resources, despite their profusion.

Cooperation bridging borders also reflects some of the weaknesses of the EU such as excessive bureaucracy and limited popular identification with cross-border projects.

Like EU institutions themselves, agencies involved in cross-border cooperation control remarkably few resources, despite their profusion. They comprise shifting and skeletal networks covering territorial areas centred on state borders but with rather vague and elastic boundaries. Within these areas, the hierarchy of state institutions wields far more influence on daily life. The 'infrastructural power' of national states, especially in its coercive and re-distributive aspects, remains paramount.

BORDERS AS RESOURCES

The limits of EU cross-border cooperation suggest that borders are part barriers and part bridges.

The limits of EU cross-border cooperation suggest that borders are part barriers and part bridges. But, they may also serve as resources for a range of actors. As Wilson and Donnan (1998: 28) observe, borders are also places of economic and political opportunity for nations and states as well as for a host of other interest groups and agencies, legal and illegal. The EU's removal of internal border controls reveals the conflicting interests surrounding state borders. Some actors have a vested interest in maintaining borders as barriers, others wish to develop their bridging role. Others still use borders as a positive economic resource in ways that seek to benefit from their bridging and barrier functions simultaneously.

While the Single Market enhances competitiveness and challenges national monopolies, it does not necessarily render state frameworks redundant. States continue to play a regulating or co-ordinating role to facilitate the competitiveness of economic activities within their own borders. This takes the form, for example, of social capital arising from national solidarity, variable fiscal policies, hidden subsidies, or different wage-bargaining regimes. The 'competitive state' (Cerny, 1997) may have to abide, to a greater or lesser degree, with supranational regulations at EU or global level but it remains an important entity in the realm of actual market competition. Intensified market competition does not guarantee the economic primacy of state borders, however. The voluminous literature on industrial districts, learning regions and the geographical clustering of production shows how regional borders may be valorised at the expense of state borders (see, for example, Amin, 1999). The co-operative networking of the four 'motor regions' of the EU (Catalonia, Rhones-Alpes, Lombardy and Baden-Wurtemberg) demonstrates how economic regionalisation can provide a rationale for trans-national cooperation beyond the inter-state level.

The borders of EU member states still demarcate different political economies, welfare states, legal, political and cultural traditions.

The borders of EU member states still demarcate different political economies, welfare states, legal, political and cultural traditions (Crouch, 1999). In border regions, the juxtaposition of two or more systems of rules associated, for example, with different legal, fiscal, environmental or immigration regimes provide ample opportunity for border-dependent arbitrage. A whole range of legal and illegal activities exist for which the border is the *raison d'être*. These range from cross-border shopping to illegal trafficking in people, drugs and weapons (Anderson, 2001: 9; Castells, 1998: 166-205).

The eastern...and southern border[s] of the EU reflect a massive structural asymmetry.

The greater the difference between the economies on either side of a border, the greater the scope for activities such as illegal trafficking. The eastern border and southern border of the EU reflect a massive structural asymmetry which juxtaposes different kinds of economies with different histories of economic development. The bazaars along the Polish-German border, for example, are only the most visible manifestations of such border economies. But, this form

of border-dependent activity is not confined to marginal economic activities. It is inherent in the activity of trans-national investors that use borders to take advantage of better investment conditions such as government subsidies, lax environmental regulations, cheap labour or a surplus of trained workers.

Trans-national corporations adopt intrinsically instrumental or pragmatic policies with respect to state borders. While trans-national corporations may be keen to diminish the barrier role of borders in one sphere, they may favour consolidating them in another sphere. Media multinationals, for example, do not wish borders to be a barrier to the trans-national ownership of TV stations and newspapers but, on the other hand, their sales benefit from serving and even protecting national markets. Maximising their control in segmented, 'national' markets may mean utilising, and even defending, ethnic, linguistic and national borders. Thus, they oppose trans-national or supranational forms of regulation while benefiting from insulated national markets.

Employees in state bureaucracies, voluntary sectors and professional organisations retain a vested interest in maintaining a territorial monopoly. For example, the skills and qualifications of civil servants, lawyers, voluntary sector workers and educationalists are seldom easily substitutable across national borders. For them, borders are a necessary resource even if they favour structured relationships with colleagues in other states.

Border-dependent activities feed off the juxtaposition of mismatched markets and political, administrative and legal institutions.

Borders, therefore, are an integral element in the economy. They can bring opportunistic gains, sometimes to areas that have few other resources although these gains are not always retained in border regions. As Krätke (1999) points out in relation to the Polish-German border, opportunistic arbitrage activities can inhibit or crowd out more soundly based cross-border networks based on clusters of production units or learning networks. Border-dependent activities feed off the juxtaposition of mismatched markets and political, administrative and legal institutions. In so doing, they also lay the basis for different types of cross-border cooperation among law-breakers and those upholding the law such as police forces (see Gallagher, 2001), immigration or customs officials. A border-dependent political economy is necessarily volatile as laws, fiscal policies and exchange rates vary with changes in state and EU policies. This volatility may encourage a certain form of flexible entrepreneurship but may not compensate for the marginalisation of many border regions from centres of economic activity or for their lack of attractiveness to trans-national investors (Anderson, 2001). Here much depends on the characteristics of specific border regions.

BORDERS AS SYMBOLS OF IDENTITY

All borders, including state borders, carry a heavy weight of symbolism.

Analysing borders as barriers, bridges or resources can obscure another fundamental dimension – their role as symbols of identity. All borders, including state borders, carry a heavy weight of symbolism. They stand for both integration and difference, implying processes of homogenisation within the border and differentiation from the 'other' outside (Paasi, 1998). In this sense, they provide the pre-conditions for social identity and for individual and collective action but they also close off possibilities that might otherwise flourish (Connolly, 1994). Within the EU, however, borders are no longer seen solely as symbols of exclusive sovereignty, as barriers between a homogeneous entity and the outside world. The result is a cultural framework with the potential to facilitate cross-border interaction and learning and to develop or rediscover forms of trust or social capital.

The INTERREG initiative and the spread of Euro-regions have limits as border-bridging or co-operative exercises. However, in the short term, their main

contribution may be in symbolically challenging the malign baggage associated with borders and their histories of conflict, division and separate economic, political and cultural development. Discourse or talk about cross-border cooperation marks a significant move away from using borders as symbols of exclusivistic forms of nationalistic solidarity. Slogans such as a 'Europe without frontiers' may be a very misleading description of reality but they nevertheless may have real effects in that they legitimise a certain way of thinking about borders and of developing border policies.

A number of examples of the importance of the new symbolism may be cited. Sustained cross-border interaction may contribute to a 'we-feeling' or a sense of common identity which spans borders. This is enhanced where state borders have divided ethnic groups in the past and where the restoration of cross-border links facilitates the (re)generation of social capital or trust. This in turn facilitates economic and political cooperation. On the other hand, cross-border cooperation and border regions may be constrained when adjoining states are threatened by autonomist or separatist tensions from within.

The expansion of cross-border cooperation has also enhanced the symbolic role of a number of border regions which are linguistically and culturally highly diverse.

The expansion of cross-border cooperation has also enhanced the symbolic role of a number of border regions which are linguistically and culturally highly diverse. Examples include the tri-national and tri-lingual border regions like the Maas-Rhein Euro-region on the Dutch-German-Belgian border and the Adriatic region linking Italy, Slovenia and Croatia (see Bufon, 2001). While not representative of the EU as a whole, these regions symbolise in a particularly stark form some of the key challenges faced by European integration – notably the problems of designing institutions in a multi-cultural setting and managing the interaction of cultural divisions and economic disparities. They raise at a regional and local level one of the abiding issues of the European 'project', i.e., the relative emphasis or priority to be given to economic, political or cultural issues in promoting cross-border integration.

Perhaps more than their co-nationals, borderland residents can still appreciate how they were affected, and continue to be affected, by past and present conflicts and their consequences. Border residents are in their own biographies and family histories constantly reminded of the role of war, violence and coercion and the almost congenital volatility of European borders. They also know that they have been the objects rather than subjects of much policy and politics. Little wonder that many of them welcome the new discourse of cross-border cooperation and the associated opportunities to be more proactive in shaping their own environment.

Cartographic entities like the Atlantic Arc, the Mediterranean Region and the Baltic Sea Region, create new frameworks for thinking about cross-border cooperation.

The EU Commission's promotion of Euro-regions, especially on the eastern border of the EU may not bring about substantial material changes as they are often relatively nebulous bodies with divergent and sometimes contradictory agendas. Their symbolic value is nevertheless important for they serve as spatial metaphors which suggest bridge-building and peaceful border change. Similarly, although the Commission has no direct competency in the field of physical planning, it does play a symbolic role. It has encouraged what Scott (2000) terms a 'visionary cartography'. This envisages and encourages the development of physical infrastructure such as euro-routes, economic corridors and bridges that integrate the space of the EU regardless of state borders. Similarly, cartographic entities like the Atlantic Arc, the Mediterranean Region and the Baltic Sea Region, create new frameworks for thinking about cross-border cooperation. The European Spatial Development Perspective is a framework rather than a policy document; nevertheless it contextualises state borders within an overarching conception of European space. Cross-border links such the Channel Tunnel and most recently the Oresund bridge between

Sweden and Denmark may or may not have substantial material effects in the short term. They are enormously symbolic, however, and are given a form of legitimacy by 'visionary cartography' at EU level.

The emphasis is on trans-national cross-border cooperation to strengthen borders as barriers against illegal immigration, refugees and asylum seekers.

Of course border symbolism is not confined to benign images of bridge-building, cooperation and negotiation. This is most obvious in the area of immigration and crime. Here the emphasis is on trans-national cross-border cooperation to strengthen borders as barriers against illegal immigration, refugees and asylum seekers. Again, symbolic representation is crucial. Frequent appeals may be addressed to elements in national constituencies who feel threatened by an influx of 'outsiders'. Hence, the symbolism of 'Fortress Europe' plays a role somewhat like that of the 'high-tech' barriers on the US-Mexican border (Heyman, 1999). In practice, of course, like the latter, the external borders of the EU to the South and East are highly permeable. The restrictionist rhetoric is often at odds with the reality of immigration and is often fuelled by the difficulty of counting the number of illegal immigrants in the EU (Joppke, 1998). Moreover, the influx of immigrants is a requirement for the competitiveness of many economic enterprises. In the medium term, the demographic profiles of several EU countries suggest that a massive increase in immigration will be necessary to sustain economic development. This will enhance the symbolic ambiguity of borders as barriers and gateways and make the regulation of borders a major issue in the internal politics of the EU and its member states.

CONCLUSION

The European project represents some progress towards a more democratic regulation of borders.

The EU is not ushering in a 'borderless Europe'. However, in the long view of history, its reconfiguration of state borders does serve as an antidote to the Europe's historical legacy of border violence and conflict (Weiler, 1999). The European project represents some progress towards a more democratic regulation of borders. For example, enlargement is dependent on democratic support in applicant states – a process infinitely preferable to invasion and conquest. Moreover, the EU demands that applicant member states meet 'democratic criteria' such as functioning markets, electoral democracy and the 'rule of law', although the EU itself suffers from a severe democratic deficit. In contemporary Europe, however, intra-state conflict has largely replaced inter-state conflict. Intra-state solidarity is being undermined by the retrenchment of the welfare state, by ethnic and regional tension and anti-immigrant sentiments and the rise of reactionary state nationalisms, political corruption and by the spread of a globalised criminal economy. These factors critically influence what is happening to, and at, borders. They will help determine whether border change can be rendered more peaceful, democratic and consensual.

One of the most striking features of EU borders is their variability and heterogeneity.

One of the most striking features of EU borders is their variability and heterogeneity. This heterogeneity arises from different experiences of border formation, formal and informal cross-border relationships, the relative economic and political power of contiguous states and the role, if any, played by external powers or regional ethnic and national questions. Moreover, the EU's stress on market integration and economic competitiveness impacts in differential ways on pre-existing border heterogeneity. When combined with the territorially uneven thrust of wealth accumulation itself, there is rich scope for creating or recreating borders, particularly at local or regional level. Processes of 'debordering' advanced by globalisation and European integration co-exist and mutually interact with new forms of re-bordering or demarcation (Albert and Brock, 1996: 70).

While an awareness of the history and heterogeneity of state and border formation should inform analysis of contemporary cross-border relationships, it

is also necessary to grasp the abiding ambiguous and often contradictory nature of borders themselves. Four dimensions of borders have been identified in this article – their role as barriers, bridges, resources and symbols of identity. The ‘European project’ is reconfiguring borders as both barriers and bridges. In the process it reveals the extent to which borders may be a positive resource for some and a material disadvantage for others. Above all, European integration reveals the role of borders as symbols of identity – symbols that are themselves frequently ambiguous and contradictory. While borders are expressions of identity, they also inevitably limit the acknowledgement of shared identities beyond borders. Even if frequently ineffective as defences, they symbolise the role of the state in protecting its citizens against violence. Simultaneously, and even more ambiguously, they also symbolise the benefits which accrue from the coercion and violence typically involved in their original construction.

Borders are multi-dimensional. They represent power and coercion while simultaneously facilitating democracy and the rule of law. They are instruments of social exclusion as well as of social inclusion. The border metaphors outlined in this article provide one vehicle for assessing the recent reconfiguration of borders in the EU and how it impacts on the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in all borders. What is important is how these ambiguities are handled whether the border regimes being put in place are more open and democratically accountable than closed and coercive. Potentially, at least, the EU borders’ policy provides a framework within which we can compare state borders and border regions. In so doing, we may be able to glimpse some of the promise as well as some of the pitfalls inherent in the process of European integration itself.

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- ¹ The long-standing concerns of political geographers (e.g., Van Houtum, 2000; Paasi, 1998; Sparke, 1998) are being supplemented by contributions from other disciplines including anthropology, sociology, political science, economics and international relations (e.g., Strassoldo and Delli Zotti, 1982; Sahlins, 1989, Wilson and Donnan, 1998; O’Dowd and Wilson, 1996; Eger and Langer, 1996; Anderson, M., 1996; Hansen, 1983; Newman, 1998). For a multi-disciplinary collection see Anderson and O’Dowd (1999). Particular regions have become the focus for sustained inter-disciplinary study, most notably the US-Mexican border zone. Research centres devoted to border research have spread throughout Europe also (for a listing of such centres see www.qub.ac.uk/cibr).
- ² Margaret Thatcher is a case in point, once observing: “*I did not join Europe to have free movement of terrorists, criminals, drugs, plant and animal diseases and rabies, and illegal immigrants*” (quoted in Spicer, 1990: 37).
- ³ The designation of ‘border regions’ by the EU, national states and regional authorities, echoes older, pre-modern notions of frontiers between political units as buffer zones, often characterised by overlapping allegiances, rather than sharply delimited geographical lines marking the borders of the modern state.

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