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Bridges and Barriers: The Lake Superior Borderlands

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Abstract

This paper investigates the Canada-U.S. borderlands relationship along the two geographic corridors as bounded by Lake Superior: Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario–Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan and Thunder Bay, Ontario–Duluth, Minnesota. Borderland communities—driven by their shared cultural characteristics (ethnicity, language, religion)—are said to challenge the border as a dividing device and undermine the very essence of international borders. Moreover, borderlands regions are dynamic and overlapping, providing the first point of contact and interaction between nations. Our results depict inherent differences between these particular border regions, with each illustrating characteristics that both connect and divide. Despite the passage of time and both countries’ determined efforts to make the passage safe and less demanding, the peoples in these border regions perceive a continuing frustration with crossing the border and connecting to the people on the other side of the border.

Introduction

Despite the move toward a globalizing (some might say borderless) world, borders between countries remain “a pervasive influence...in shaping the organization of human life and identity” (Parochial 2009, 21). This is certainly true for the border that both joins and divides the people of Canada and the United States. Some even posit that the management of the Canada-U.S. border defines the very essence of the overall Canada-U.S. relationship (D’Aquino 2011). And while the international border that binds Canada and the United States remains the subject of debate among policymakers and stakeholders in bi-national regions and beyond, one observation appears to stand out above all others: “border policies that strengthen or weaken the Canada-U.S. relationship are the life line for continued prosperity” (Border Policy Research Institute 2010, 14). With this in mind, it is our hope that the following discussion will provide insight into how best to craft a future that embraces the true essence of what a Canada-U.S. borderlands means to the people of both countries.

We begin by referencing a project initiated by the Canadian-American Center of the University of Maine, which in 1989 published two monographs reflective of a borderlands project designed to “stand as a record of the depth and diversity of borderlands research, as applied to the relationship between Canada and the United States” (McKinsey and Konrad 1989, iii). These monographs were introduced by two seemingly uncontroversial statements about the Canada-United States border: (1) The sense of mutual security and amity afforded by a century’s experience with the “undefended” border masks the border’s complexity and importance, and (2) North America runs more naturally north and south than east and west as specified by national boundaries.

We explore these assertions given the context of the Canada-United States border as it exists today—a border that fosters a borderlands experience in need of a major rebuilding of trust and mutual confidence (Ackleson 2009; Savage 2009). To do so, we highlight the Canada-U.S. geographical regions that border the eastern and western limits of Lake Superior. We investigate four areas of interest: (1) the degree of integration across Canada-U.S. border regions; (2) the asymmetric nature of the Canada-U.S. border relationship; (3) whether the Canada-U.S. border serves as a bridge or a barrier; and (4) the changes in crossing the Canada-U.S. border since 9/11.

Borders and Borderlands: Defining the Concepts

The study of borders and borderlands transcends disciplinary fields, touching the edifices of political geography, international relations, history, sociology, and anthropology; all situated in terms of cultural and ethnic memberships with emphasis on the concept of symbolic boundaries (Prokkola 2009). Interestingly, borders between countries are viewed as both fragile structures on which nationalities depend (New 1998), and as boundaries that appear to be as strong as ever (Ganster and Lorey 2005). In brief, borders are viewed as gateways for some and barriers to others (Pellerin 2005; Rumford 2009). Paul Ganster and David Lorey capture the essence of this confusion: “contemporary borders present an intriguing paradox, with globalization proceeding everywhere at an astounding pace, at the same time political borders remain pervasive and problematic with respect to separating peoples” (2005, xi).

The study of borderlands is a relatively recent phenomenon (Papademetriou and Meyers 2001), with borders and border regions remaining remarkably poorly understood (Ganster and Lorey 2005), yet growing in importance (Eagles 2010). Part of the reason for misunderstanding regarding borderlands is that the concept of a border (or a borderlands region) is abstract in nature, requiring imagination and vision to define its physical and psychological nature in concrete terms (Alper and Loucky 2007). Borderlands identity is defined through the available social and cultural discourse inherent along international borders, and not located merely in the context of actual physical borderlines, but also in wider social and cultural processes and institutions (Prokkola 2009; Wong 2011). Having said that, there are very good basic descriptions of what a borderlands region is said to be. Victor Konrad and Heather Nicol provide one such description: a borderlands region is defined as a region shared by two countries “where people on one side of the border share values, beliefs, feelings and expectations with people on the other side of the border” (2008, 32). Randy Widdis provides another: “The borderland...is a physical, ideological, and geographical construct, a region of intersection that is sensitive to internal and external forces that both integrate and differentiate communities and eras on both sides of the boundary line” (2005, 154). These are the definitions that will guide the rest of our work.

Border regions are physical spaces possessing a unique cultural perspective (Diochea 2010). They are the first point of contact and interaction between nations (Alper and Loucky 2007), and provide cross-border linkages that span international borders. They are influenced by such factors as free trade, international organizations, central states, regional governments and/or cities, local sociological, economic, or cultural elements, and geographical proximity (Brunet-Jailly and Dupeyron 2007; Schimanski and Wolfe 2010). Moreover, these border regions—in today’s globalizing world—are viewed as a function of unstable borders that are characterized as both connecting devices and barriers, with the variance skewed by the sharing countries’ histories and cultures, as well as their defining political and economic structures (Ackleson 2009; Alper and Loucky 2007; Baber and Bartlett 2009). Nationalism and security concerns foster division, while social, culture, and environmental affinities and economic interaction strengthen the sense of connectivity (Alper and Loucky 2007).

Seen in this light, the nature of borders is to be porous, serving as historical and geographical expressions of human ties where borderlands emerge as buffer zones at “the convergence of complex human interactions of an economic, political, and cultural nature” (Brunet-Jailly and Dupeyron 2007, 3). Hence, borderland communities—driven by their shared cultural characteristics (ethnicity, language, religion)—challenge the border as a dividing device and undermine the very essence of international borders (Brunet-Jailly and Dupeyron 2007). On another level, borderlands regions are viewed as matters of degree on a continuum: from displaying little evidence of integration to displaying fully developed, interactive zones which show substantial linkage in trade, cross-border policy integration, institutional alignment, and cultural belonging (Konrad and Nicol 2008).

The Canada and United States Border and Borderlands

The theoretical concepts of borders and borderlands (or borderlands regions) have long been difficult to pin down, and that remains true for the Canada-U.S. border and borderlands, where very little research has been completed under the regional lens (Boucher 2005). It is certainly true that the Canadian-American border has often taken on a “mythological significance,” reflecting its length and the fact that it has remained the world’s longest undefended border for some time (Gibbins 2005). The length, as a further sign of the border’s complexity, has led to the fact that no single borderlands region can be defined along the Canada-U.S. border. Instead, we find that “the Canadian-American borderlands are a collection of very different regional communities that reflect the sheer length of the border and the geographical complexity of the two transcontinental societies” (Gibbins 2005, 156). Simply put,

differences are less across the Canada-U.S. border than from region to region across the continent (Boucher 2005; Konrad and Nicol 2008; Stirrup and Roberts 2010). One cannot look at Canada-U.S. borderlands without keeping in mind the fact that “a strong and lingering sense of regionalism [is present] with individual provinces [and states] each having distinct histories, identities, and economies” (Hardwick and Mansfield 2009, 388).

The Canada-U.S. Border

The Canada-U.S. border, generally speaking, is viewed as open and easily accessible from either side; even going “relatively unnoticed save when emergencies such as 9/11 bring travel to a grinding halt, or when new government documentation requirements complicate routine passage” (Klug 2010, 396). It is viewed as very porous, “spanned by extensive family and friendship ties, corporate structures, media networks, trade unions, social and religious organizations, and professional sports leagues” (Gibbins 2005, 153). The Canada-U.S. border is also not an obstacle to the transfer of ideas (Lowry 2009). In fact, it is considered a “gateway” in terms of goods and people (Alper and Loucky 2007; Konrad and Nicol, 2008). Yet, while the Canada-U.S. border has functioned historically as more of a bridge than a barrier, the events of September 11 brought about the era of the “smart borders,” an era marked by a growing socio-technological sophistication that is said to impede transboundary relationships (Alper and Loucky 2007; Sands 2011).

The defining characteristic of the Canada-U.S. border is the simple fact that the relationship between Canada and the United States is one that, while characterized by interdependence, shared norms, and mutual respect, has also been one that is highly asymmetric, with Canada as the junior partner (Boatright, 2009; Gattinger and Hale 2010; Rabe 2008). The Canada-U.S. border plays a more prominent role in the lives of Canadians than it does for Americans (Alper and Loucky 2007; Gibbins 2005; Papademetriou and Meyers 2001), and it remains true that Canadians still object to being taken for granted and ignored by Americans (Lipset 1990; Yaffe 2010). There is a basic reason for this asymmetry: over half of the population and jobs in Canada are concentrated in only four broad metropolitan regions, mostly sequestered close to the United States border (Fry 2005; Gibbins 2005).

Canada-U.S. Borderlands and 9/11

The September 11 attacks brought about a political agenda, especially in the United States, that has been dominated by security issues (Genna and Mayer-Foulkes 2011; Helleiner 2009; Hiller 2010; Robertson 2011; Winterdyk and Sandberg 2010). There is no doubt that 9/11 brought about substantial change regarding the Canada-United States relationship, with some scholars arguing that there has been a definitive decline in the growth rate of trade (Moens 2011) and social interaction at the Canada-U.S. border (Border Policy Research Institute 2010), as well as a significantly reduced freedom of movement between the two countries (D’Aquino 2011); what has now become known as a “thickening” of the border (Dvorak 2011, A8.) Jason Ackleson makes this very point, stating that “the Canada-U.S. border—which at one time was characterized as a thin, relatively weak legal boundary with interdependence and interaction constant elements in the social, economic, and political lives of border residents—is growing much more difficult to traverse, both legally and illegally” (2009, 336-337). In fact, some say that the Canada-U.S. border has now become “an edifice that produces anxiety, discomfort, and often fear” (Alper and Loucky 2007, 24).

Other scholars argue that the borderlands regions of Canada and the United States, as they appear today and despite the changes and rhetoric surrounding the fall-out from 9/11, remain “consistent with the border landscape fashioned during the 20th century of peace and prosperity between the countries” (Konrad and Nichol 2008, 312.) Some even suggest that it would be “politically naïve to expect great shocks in the bedrock of [the Canada-U.S.] relationship” (Haussman and MacDonald 2009, 324). Any change in the basic relationship between Canada and the United States in recent years has been “aligned with the sustained, core values of both nations, and the border protocols based on these values” (Konrad and Nicol 2008, 7). Konrad and Nicol sum up this sentiment of change: “In reality, however, mainstream Americans and mainstream Canadians have found greater continuity in culture across their international border than between themselves and the indigenous and immigrant minorities in their own countries” (2008, 316).

Two Case Studies: Thunder Bay-Duluth and the Twin Saults

Our investigation of the border and borderlands concepts--as depicted above--centers on the two geographic corridors connecting Canada and the United States as bounded by Lake Superior: Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario/Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan (often referred to as the "Twin Saults") and Thunder Bay, Ontario/Duluth, Minnesota. As posited earlier, great differences exist between the regions that define the Canada-U.S. border from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans, with no two regions encompassing all we need to know about Canada-U.S. borderlands. We chose the Lake Superior region to study for one very simple reason: to date, it has received very little attention in the literature. While there is a rich and descriptive portrayal of many of the Canada-U.S. border regions (Border Policy Research Institute 2010; Robertson 2011), the regions bounded by Lake Superior have been largely ignored. In addition, these two border regions compare nicely with respect to the defining concept of distance, which is said to be irrelevant in today's globalizing world (Rumford 2009). Two of the cross border communities (Thunder Bay-Duluth) are separated by a great distance, while the other two (Twin Saults) are separated by a negligible distance.

Geographically, the Sault Ste. Marie borderlands region is marked by a bridge over the St. Mary's River that spans approximately one mile of water. The Twin Saults are not only considered to be an important commercial crossing, it is said that they represent cross-border communities that "thrive and work where cooperation is necessary both to sustain livelihood and community" (Konrad and Nicol 2008, 123). In contrast to the relatively inconsequential distance between the Twin Saults, Thunder Bay and Duluth are physically separated by nearly 200 miles. Furthermore, the Duluth-Thunder Bay corridor is not recognized as any type of commercial crossing. The communities, however, are officially recognized as Sister Cities.

Scope and Methods

The data for this research project was gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted from December 2010 through December 2011. The vast majority of the interviews (91 percent) were conducted in person during visits to Duluth, Minnesota; Thunder Bay, Ontario; Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario; and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. These in-person interviews took place in December 2010, May-June 2011, and September 2011. All other interviews were conducted via phone and/or email.

The intent of the interviews was to gain perceptions from a wide range of people who make their homes in one of the borderlands communities. We took our cue to focus on citizens of these particular areas from the work of Konrad and Nicol (2008) as defined earlier, and of Chris Rumford (2009), who emphasizes the fact that borderlands are most clearly defined by ordinary people; it is citizens that are directly involved in constructing and contesting borders, and that not everyone experiences borders in the same way. That is, some people are more comfortable with borders than others. In short, it is people embedded in their local cultures, not states, that define the borderlands by either working to reinforce state-defining borders or working to subvert them.

Respondents were classified into two groups: activists or citizens. The activist group is made up of individuals expected to have an enhanced understanding of the border and borderlands due to their advanced educational degree, formal public-sector service and governance, or professional business experience and leadership. Individuals who fell into this classification included university professors, business owners, public administrators (e.g., mayors, city council members, heads of libraries, museums, or tourism units) and community activists (e.g., Sister City board members). These interviews were formally set up in advance via the phone and/or email messaging. Specific dates and times were set to conduct the interviews.

The citizen group is made up of individuals who live and work in the community but had no professional or public ties to leadership or governance. Simply speaking, these "on the street" interviews were with people who represented the general public. Individuals who fell into this classification included such people as waitresses, gas station attendants, steel workers, truck drivers, bartenders, maintenance workers, construction workers, and barbers. These in-person interviews were all conducted in public places (e.g., shopping malls, public libraries, on the street, and restaurants). Individuals were asked if they would respond to a series of questions regarding their community and the border. [Note: All people approached agreed to talk except for one individual who requested not to be interviewed.]

While the respondents do not represent a purely random sample, the overall selection process for each group was essentially representative of the selected categories of interest. In other words, for the activist group we contacted people in general categories: e.g., heads of libraries, titled government officials, executive directors of agencies, administrators of museums, and newspaper editors. People chosen for the citizen group were selected randomly in public areas and asked if they were willing to answer several questions. The same process and same general public locations were used in all four communities.

The interviews consisted of asking open-ended questions, with the following questions serving as the focus of this particular study:

1. How many years have you had experience with and/or use of the border? When was the last time you crossed the border? Why did you cross?
2. Is there a special relationship between the two border communities? Why is it special?
3. Do you view the border as a bridge or a barrier? Explain why.
4. Did 9/11 change the border relationship? If so, how?
5. On a daily basis, do you follow what is happening on the other side of the border?
6. Does what happens on the other side of the border affect your daily life?

Demographic information such as occupation and length of time lived in community was also collected. The interviews took approximately thirty minutes to an hour to complete, although many went much longer. The format of the interviews was semi-structured as each respondent had the opportunity to use his or her own words to describe how they felt about each of the areas of interest. In the end, 106 activists were interviewed (Duluth = 26; Thunder Bay = 21; Sault Ste. Marie, ON = 33; Sault Ste. Marie, MI = 26) and 156 citizens were interviewed (Duluth = 39; Thunder Bay = 39; Sault Ste. Marie, ON = 39; Sault Ste. Marie, MI = 39).

Results

The Degree of Integration Across Canada-U.S. border regions

Questions 2, 5, and 6 (as delineated in Tables 1 and 2) relate to the degree of integration taking place across Canada-U.S. border regions. The results regarding the question of whether a special relationship exists between these particular border communities are quite interesting. For the Duluth-Thunder Bay corridor, the vast majority of respondents (both citizens and activists) on both sides of the border do not view the cross-border relationship between the communities as special. Respondents recognize similarities across borders but still view the other side as different, as a foreign country; a place to go just to get away. For the Twin Saults corridor, the views regarding a special relationship are mixed. While the majority of Ontario citizens do not see a special relationship, the majority of Ontario activists and Michigan respondents do perceive a special relationship between the Twin Saults. The proximity of the border and the daily interactions of the people in the Twin Saults provide a sense of connectedness. This points to a distinct difference between the Duluth-Thunder Bay and Twin Saults corridors, with the Twin Saults (physically separated by only a river and bridge) showing a much higher level of integration than the geographically distant communities of Thunder Bay and Duluth. Moreover, within this dynamic, it is citizens (not activists) on both sides of the border that have a much more critical perception of the special relationship.

[TABLES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE]

The results regarding the question of whether the people in cross-border communities pay attention to what is happening on the other side of the border are also quite fascinating. In general, the majority of Canadians and Americans residing in these cross-border communities do not pay attention to what is going on immediately across the border. They do not follow happenings on a regular basis and do not think the other side has any substantive effect on their daily lives. This is true across all four communities and for both activists and citizens, although a slight majority of activists see a stronger connection with respect to the other side of the border affecting their daily lives. This is most surprising for the Twin Saults, separated only by a one-mile long bridge. One would think that such proximity would bring about close attention to a place so close and so familiar. Except in a few instances, however, it does not. There is a general recognition that the other side is there, but no detailed attention is given to the substance of what is happening on the other side of the border.

Respondents often mentioned what they perceive as the general ignorance of Americans regarding anything Canadian, be it at the local or national levels. This comes as no surprise, as it is commonly accepted among those who study the Canada-U.S. relationship that Americans do not pay much attention to Canada. Having said that, with the large number of Canadians that cross the border each day to visit Duluth and Sault St. Marie, Michigan, one would expect Americans in these two U.S. communities to follow Canada more closely than they do. Certainly, Americans in Duluth and the Michigan Saults are more familiar with Canadian accents and their shopping habits. But when asked about Canada as a whole or what is happening in the local government across the border, there was generally silence, possibly reflecting the differing governmental structures across the borders.

Canadian respondents, for the most part, do follow what is happening in the United States as a whole. They are aware of U.S. politics at the national level and follow American media fairly closely. They know who the President is, when the elections are taking place, who the candidates are, and are generally aware of what is happening in the U.S., from weather events to sporting, entertainment and political events. On the other hand, the people of Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, just like their counterparts in Duluth and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, generally do not follow what is happening just across the border. There is no specific knowledge of community issues, especially if that knowledge pertains to things on the governmental agenda or who is running the government. People know the price of gas and whether the casino is smoking or non-smoking, what the drinking age is, and the best time to cross the border. In general, however, the people of these communities do not follow the substantive issues occurring immediately across the border.

According to those interviewed, there are few formal or institutional connections between governments, universities, and libraries across the border. Formal institutional linkages are in place. After all, Thunder Bay and Duluth are Sister Cities and the Twin Saults work closely regarding policing, fire-fighting, and border patrols. But one would expect much more from Sister Cities and two communities encompassed as “twins.” Recently, the major universities in Duluth (University of Minnesota-Duluth) and Thunder Bay (Lakehead University) sponsored an event to highlight the connections between the universities and to forge closer ties. Yet, there remain few strong connections between the universities. Almost all those interviewed said that they wish there were stronger connections but could list very few.

For the Twin Saults, it is much the same. People focus on their particular institutional problems and issues, with little interaction with similar institutions across the border. One thing that stands out in the Twin Saults is that there are a large number of Canadians who cross the border to go to school at Lake Superior State University. While not at the same quantity, there are also a good many American students who cross the border to take classes at Algoma University or Sault College. Hence, there is a fair amount of interaction between students and faculty across the border, including some sharing of classes on an occasional basis. But the knowledge gained does not reflect much regarding substantive issues at the community level.

The Asymmetric Nature of the Canada-U.S. Border Relationship

Question 1 (as posited in Tables 1 and 2) relates to the asymmetric flow of people across the Canada-U.S. border, which, by far, is dominated by a flow from Canada to the U.S. This is true for both Lake Superior corridors, but most obvious for the Thunder Bay-Duluth crossing. The percentage of activists and citizens who had extensive experience with the border is higher in the Canadian communities than in the American communities. Respondents pointed to the difference in cost of goods, with American prices being less expensive because of Canada’s higher taxes, as the major reason for Canadians crossing the border. Almost every single person interviewed on the Canadian side of the border said that Canadians crossed to get the cheaper American gasoline, while those from Thunder Bay also noted clothing as a large purchase item and those from Sault Ste. Marie regarding dairy products as a large purchase item.

Canadian respondents, as a whole, feel that Americans are self-centered, focused on themselves, looking inward, while they believe that Canadians are more outward looking. As mentioned earlier, it is perceived that Americans generally know little about Canada in general and do not pay much attention to what happens in Canada. This is borne out by American responses to questions about Canada and reflected by the fact that most Canadians view getting a passport as second nature (even prior to the passport requirement), so do not view the passport requirement to cross the border as much of a restriction as Americans do. Americans, on the other hand, are more likely to view the passport requirement as a restriction, an unnecessary regulation, or simply not worth the cost.

The Canada-U.S. Border: Bridge or Barrier

Question 3 of Tables 1 and 2 deals with how the border is perceived regarding the difficulty in crossing. For the Duluth-Thunder Bay region, both Canadians and Americans overwhelmingly view the border as a bridge, a gateway to the other side. On the other hand, for the Twin Saults, the results are not so clear. While the vast majority of Canadian citizens view the border as a bridge, a majority of Canadian activists view the border as barrier. On the American side, citizens cast the border as a barrier while the activists are evenly split regarding this question. Overall, however, it does appear that—for the most part—Canadians view the border more as a bridge and Americans view the border more as a barrier.

As noted earlier, the passport is considered a major hindrance to border crossing. The passport restriction is the most often cited barrier to crossing the border by both Canadians and Americans, although most respondents thought that as time has passed, more and more people are adjusting to the requirement. Still, the cost of the passport or its alternative continues to be considered prohibitive by many, with the greater effect on Americans in Duluth and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. Simply put, Americans are more likely to cast the passport as a negative influence regarding crossing the border. Many argue that it is not worth the cost of a passport, enhanced driver's license, or NEXUS card to cross the border for a day trip or long weekend. While some Canadian respondents mention cost as a factor, most suggest that it just is not a big deal to get a passport and most of those interviewed already had passports before the restrictions were put in place. On the other hand, a good portion of the Americans interviewed do not have a passport and do not intend to get one. It should also be kept in mind that there is no NEXUS lane in any Minnesota-Ontario border crossing, and that the NEXUS lane only came into being at the Sault international bridge in 2007, so there is little experience or knowledge about NEXUS in these borderlands.

Most people on both sides of the border do not think in terms of the border being a bridge or a barrier. They had to be prompted to speak using such terminology. For most American and Canadian respondents, there just is not much thought about the border at all, other than the difficulty in crossing. Overall, people do not view the border as a barrier; they generally believe, given the circumstances, it is easy to cross the border. The one exception to that generalization is that a good many Americans in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan have stopped crossing into Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario for day trips since the passport requirement has gone into effect.

The Canada-U.S. Border and 9/11

Question 4 of Tables 1 and 2 portrays how respondents feel about the effects of 9/11 with respect to crossing the border. Obviously, the vast majority of people on both sides of the border believe that 9/11 brought about major changes in crossing the border. However, there are contrasting views between the regions. For the Thunder Bay-Duluth corridor, 9/11 and the newly created restrictions appear to have had less of an impact on those crossing the border. While complaining about the added restrictions and the American penchant for security, most Thunder Bay respondents continue to cross the border at a regular rate. Those interviewed point out that the time periods immediately following 9/11 and at the initiation of the passport requirement were trying times and cross-border excursions were reduced. However, they also feel that things are moving in the right direction and crossing the border is becoming more like it had been; more of a routine crossing. On the other hand, for the Twin Saults corridor, 9/11 has had a relatively negative effect on crossing the border, more so for Americans than Canadians. Canadians continue to cross the border at a regular rate, with Canadian respondents complaining about the erratic nature of how long it takes to cross (sometimes 10-15 minutes; sometimes over an hour). But, Canadians still cross regularly. Among those Canadians interviewed, none say that they have stopped crossing the border because of the new restrictions. That cannot be said of the American respondents, with many saying that they simply did not cross as much or that they have completely ceased to cross the border since the passport restriction went into effect.

Surprisingly, at least to us, unless specifically prompted to talk about the terrorist threat, few people on either side of the border mention any concerns about terrorism, especially as it relates to crossing the border. Their focus is on how much more difficult it is crossing the border (the hassles of crossing and the time it takes) and not on the immediacy of terrorism as it threatens the border. A few people spoke of the necessity of restrictions but did not indicate any fear of terrorists crossing the border.

Analysis and Conclusions

The Thunder Bay-Duluth and Twin Saults borderlands regions share very similar historical, geographical, economic and cultural settings. Founded on the abundance of natural resources (e.g., mining, timber, the great outdoors, the lake), as well as being situated at key points of transportation and shipping, each of these regions has also suffered the boom-and-bust periods of a natural resource-based economy and have developed a working-class culture and atmosphere. Because of these shared experiences and their inherent tie to the lake and land, the people that populate each of these regions, be they Canadian or American, pretty much look the same. Whether you are in Duluth or Thunder Bay or on either side of the St. Mary's River, other than the accents, it would be difficult to tell the people in these communities apart. This is reflected in the responses to the interview questions. When asked about what makes their communities special, time after time, the respondents named the same things. Moreover, to a person, respondents would say that despite the fact that there were differences between Americans and Canadians, they still shared the same basic values of family, hard work, and ties to the land and water.

When conducting the interviews, we almost always got the feeling that the border in and of itself was not important; that it was just a minor obstacle to be negotiated to get to the other side; that it is no big deal. It was accepted that there are two different, distinct countries, but not two, different and distinct communities. This finding seems quite paradoxical because, at the same time, for the most part, the people in each of these communities generally ignore what is happening in the community across the border. Yet, this makes sense in one way; that is, there is such a strong sameness among the communities and the people that the differences are just not that noticeable. This suggests a strong sense of borderlands within these regions; that is, places where people on one side of the border share values, beliefs, feelings, and expectations with people on the other side of the border.

Still, as suggested in the literature, this study offers evidence that 9/11 has challenged this strong sense of borderlands. The restrictions in crossing the border put in place since 9/11 have surely decreased the interaction among the people of these communities. This is especially true for the Twin Saults. Where once it was easy to cross in a timely manner, it has now become a much more difficult process, and many have decided it is not worth the effort. Make no mistake, however, there remains a vibrant crossing of the border in the Twin Saults region as well as a strong Canada to U.S. crossing of the border in the Duluth-Thunder Bay region. It is just that with the newly instituted barriers to freedom of movement, the sense that the two sides of the border represent a single community with shared values has been diminished. Crossing the border, for many, has turned into an anxiety filled experience, at times even humiliating, and this experience accentuates the fact that people are crossing into a foreign country. Under these circumstances, building cross-border linkages becomes even more difficult.

On the other hand, based on the interview results delineated above, there is no doubt that the borders that connect Thunder Bay to Duluth and Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario to Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, both join and divide the people of Canada and the United States. For Canadians in the Thunder Bay-Duluth region, the border is a gateway to shopping, entertainment, and an (almost) exotic place to visit; a place to "get away to." A large part of this cross-border dimension is driven by the fact that Thunder Bay faces a form of isolation in that the closest destinations (speaking in terms of larger communities) are far away and Duluth, with its four hour drive, is a reasonable distance to travel for a brief get-a-way. Contrary to the flow from Thunder Bay to Duluth is the almost non-existent flow going north. People from Duluth seldom cross the border to go to Thunder Bay, seeing no reason to go. The cross-border flow going northward consists mostly of those who go to fish, to experience the wilderness as provided by the Boundary Waters. There are also a large number of people who travel north of Duluth, heading up the Northern Shore to recreate. But most stop before crossing the border, enjoying the recreation and beauty of Grand Marais, Lutsen, and Grand Portage. Few people from Duluth head to Thunder Bay to shop or to get-away; in this regard, most head to the Minneapolis area, which is seen as the "big city" place for Minnesotans to go.

The Twin Saults region offers a bit of a different categorization regarding the border, as the connecting route is the relatively short bridge across the St Mary's River. The bridge is viewed much more along the lines of a gateway. For Canadians, this means crossing the border to shop (especially for gasoline and at the Super Wal-Mart), to gamble, and to golf in the near region; to travel and recreate in a larger U.S. region, meaning camping in the U.P. (Upper Peninsula) or heading to Mackinac Island or Detroit. At the same time, the bridge is a gateway for Americans, as the greater populated Ontario side—about eight times larger than the Michigan side—offers strong programs in the arts (music, dance, art) and athletics (especially for younger children) that are not offered regularly on the American side. While the flow remains primarily from the Canadian side to the American side, the difference does not appear

nearly as great as the one between Thunder Bay and Duluth. Certainly, a large part of this difference may be related to the geographic proximity of the Twin Saults. With students crossing the border regularly to attend classes on the other side, and the prevalence of intermarriage between people on each side, there are much stronger family connections that are accommodated by the easy access to the other side of the border. Having said all that, there exist signs that for many Americans, the new crossing restrictions—primarily the passport restriction and the attention to detail of the U.S. border guards when crossing back into the U.S.—serve as a barrier. Simply put, there are a good many on the U.S. side that have stopped crossing the border on a regular basis because of these restrictions.

Along these same lines, for both corridors, there is a backlash to the longer lines, the many more questions, and the general delay in crossing the border since 9/11. While most say that crossing is fairly easy, most also say that the restrictions bring about bad feelings and mistrust. Canadians tend to emphasize the overzealousness of the American border guards and what they believe is an extreme emphasis on security; arguing that it is a bit much. Americans, as a whole, feel the same way. While there exists a general understanding that these safeguards are necessary, most still believe that it is too much of a hassle. As noted earlier, very few respondents on either side of the border mentioned terrorism when asked to describe the international border and its workings. When terrorists were mentioned, it was with respect to the fact that respondents felt like they were being treated like terrorists. When specifically questioned about terrorism, most responded that it is a concern, but it was not their primary concern regarding the border. The major concern of citizens crossing the border is the time and effort it takes getting through the checkpoints, not the possibility of terrorists using the border as an entry point (especially into the U.S.).

All in all, it appears that the border remains more important to Canadians than to Americans. This is true in both the Duluth-Thunder Bay region and the Twin Saults region. The flow in both these regions is predominantly north to south, although the asymmetry of the Twin Saults (e.g., the Canadian side being substantially larger in population than the American side) modifies this flow slightly. And the restrictions since 9/11 have, not surprisingly, proved a challenge to greater integration between these borderland communities. But to the people in these communities that is all the border is—a challenge. While some have let the increased difficulty in crossing affect their travel, most have not. The peoples of these borderlands communities remain committed to crossing the border and enjoying what their neighbors have to offer. This is good news for maintaining and growing the cross-border relationships, as the people of these regions generally appreciate what the other side has to offer.

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Table 1. Percent Answering Questions as Listed

		Thunder Bay		Duluth	
		Activists	Citizens	Activists	Citizens
1. Do you have extensive experience with the border?	Yes	100.0	89.7	61.5	33.3
	No	0.0	10.3	38.5	66.7
	(n)	(21)	(39)	(26)	(39)
2. Is the border relationship special?	Yes	42.9	25.0	38.5	10.3
	No	57.1	75.0	61.5	89.7
	(n)	(21)	(32)	(26)	(39)
3. Do you view the border as a bridge or a barrier?	Bridge	66.7	90.6	72.0	74.3
	Barrier	33.3	9.4	28.0	25.7
	(n)	(21)	(32)	(25)	(35)
4. Do you see changes at the border since 9/11?	Yes	90.5	82.4	76.9	65.7
	No	9.5	17.6	23.1	34.3
	(n)	(21)	(34)	(26)	(35)
5. Do you follow what happens on the other side of the border?	Yes	38.1	5.1	23.1	7.7
	No	61.9	92.3	76.9	92.3
	(n)	(21)	(38)	(26)	(39)
6. Does what happens on the other side of the border affect your daily life?	Yes	9.5	2.6	19.2	7.7
	No	90.5	97.4	80.8	92.3
	(n)	(21)	(39)	(26)	(39)

NOTE: The data delineated in this table is solely the product of the authors' interviews.

Table 2. Percent Answering Questions as Listed

		Sault Ste. Marie Ontario		Sault Ste. Marie Michigan	
		Activists	Citizens	Activists	Citizens
1. Do you have extensive experience with the border?	Yes	100.0	94.9	92.3	71.8
	No	0.0	5.1	7.7	28.2
	(n)	(33)	(39)	(26)	(39)
2. Is the border relationship special?	Yes	69.7	30.8	65.4	53.8
	No	30.3	69.2	34.6	46.2
	(n)	(33)	(39)	(26)	(39)
3. Do you view the border as a bridge or a barrier?	Bridge	42.4	78.9	50.0	42.1
	Barrier	57.6	21.1	50.0	57.9
	(n)	(33)	(38)	(26)	(38)
4. Do you see changes at the border since 9/11?	Yes	87.9	94.6	100.0	97.3
	No	12.1	5.4	0.0	2.7
	(n)	(33)	(37)	(26)	(37)
5. Do you follow what happens on the other side of the border?	Yes	54.5	25.6	46.2	12.8
	No	45.5	74.4	53.8	87.2
	(n)	(33)	(39)	(26)	(39)
6. Does what happens on the other side of the border affect your daily life?	Yes	36.4	15.4	50.0	12.8
	No	63.6	84.6	50.0	87.2
	(n)	(33)	(39)	(26)	(39)

NOTE: The data delineated in this table is solely the product of the authors' interviews.