



POLICY REPORT

The Potential Role of Inter-Parliamentary Institutions in a Cross-Border Impact Assessment

Tobias Heyduk

The Upper Rhine Council has the potential to play a pivotal role in enhancing cross-border cooperation by addressing legal and administrative obstacles, advocating for cross-border-friendly legislation, and providing comprehensive insights essential for effective policy development and implementation. Its current activities encompass analysis, monitoring, evaluation, removal of cooperation barriers, support for infrastructure development, and promotion of bilingualism, all of which are crucial for facilitating cross-border activities and ensuring effective communication and citizen engagement. A key recommendation is to implement a cross-border impact assessment procedure involving the Upper Rhine Council at all policy-making stages. This would integrate cross-border perspectives into policies at European, national, regional, and local levels, leading to more effective solutions to legal-administrative obstacles.

Executive Summary

In this policy paper, I examine the pivotal role of parliamentary institutions in cross-border cooperation, particularly the Upper Rhine Council, in enhancing cross-border cooperation and addressing legal-administrative obstacles. It highlights the necessity of cross-border friendly legislation, achievable through the active involvement of the Upper Rhine Council, which offers comprehensive insights essential for effective policy development and implementation. The current Upper Rhine Council's activities include analysis, monitoring, evaluation, removing cooperation barriers, supporting infrastructure development, and promoting bilingualism. These efforts are crucial for facilitating cross-border activities and ensuring effective communication and citizen engagement. A key recommendation is to implement a cross-border impact assessment

procedure involving the Upper Rhine Council at all policy-making stages. This would integrate cross-border perspectives into policies at European, national, regional, and local levels, leading to more effective solutions to legal-administrative obstacles. The Upper Rhine Council has untapped potential to play a transformative role in cross-border cooperation. By integrating its functions into an institutionalized cross-border impact assessment process, policymakers can effectively address legal-administrative obstacles and foster a more collaborative and cohesive cross-border region. This approach not only benefits the Upper Rhine region but also serves as a model for other cross-border areas, promoting greater integration and cooperation across Europe.

Tobias Heyduk, M.A., PhD Student, Department of Government and Politics, University College Cork, Ireland; Research Associate, University of Applied Sciences Kehl, Germany. Contact: 124102168@uemail.ucc.ie. ORCID ID 0000-0003-4960-4182



1 Introduction

Legal-administrative obstacles could potentially be better addressed by a stronger integration of cross-border institutions fulfilling parliamentary functions in an institutionalized form of a cross-border impact assessment in policymaking.

In this article, I combine the findings of two studies: an empirical analysis of the work of the Upper Rhine Council (Heyduk & Eppler 2026; Eppler & Heyduk 2023) and a legal analysis of the potentials of a cross-border impact assessment (Frey & Müller 2024). This interdisciplinary approach offers a comprehensive, empirically grounded, and prescriptively informed perspective advancing institutional designs for more effective policymaking in cross-border cooperation. With this approach, the article addresses an important and not sufficiently solved complexity of cross-border cooperation being burdened by legal and administrative obstacles, highlighted by numerous studies: according to a survey conducted by the European Commission in 2020, 44 percent of citizens living in border regions consider legal or administrative differences to be a problem for cross-border cooperation, making this the second most commonly cited aspect after language differences in a list of five predefined potential obstacles (European Commission 2020, 61). In their analysis of 239 legal and administrative obstacles, Pucher, Schneidewind, and Stumm establish an extensive database of obstacles (2017, 35). The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) of the European Commission, through the b-solutions initiative, gathered information on the challenges and obstacles hindering cross-border cooperation across Europe, documenting 131 distinct border-related obstacles (Boucher et al. 2024; Brustia et al. 2021; Association of European Border Regions & European Commission 2020). These findings offer a clear picture of the relevance of legal and administrative obstacles in cross-border cooperation.

These legal-administrative obstacles can ultimately only be mitigated by legal acts. The finding of solutions outside legal instruments comes to its limits, sooner or later. This requires what Frey and Müller (2024) call cross-border friendly legislation. Such legislation aims to create a legal framework that facilitates cooperation across borders, overcoming the administrative and regulatory hurdles that currently impede seamless collaboration. In this context, it is essential to engage policymakers and legal experts from all involved regions to draft and implement laws that reflect the complexities of cross-border interactions. Cross-border institutions fulfilling parliamentary functions such as the Upper Rhine Council play a vital role in promoting cross-border friendly legislation. Cross-border friendly legislation requires the involvement of cross-border institutions such as the Upper Rhine Council for expertise and a 360-degree perspective on specific issues. These

institutions ensure cross-border representation of the people and articulate and precisely formulate their concerns. Additionally, they scrutinize the actions of international, supranational, national, and subnational governments and legislators both ex-ante and ex-post, to ensure the representation of a cross-border dimension in legal acts. Only with such a cross-border perspective represented in legislation can the mitigation of legal-administrative obstacles be achieved. This integrated approach ensures that all relevant stakeholders have a voice in the legislative process. The Upper Rhine Council is particularly relevant to examine more closely, given its relative neglect in research literature and cross-border governance. The work of its executive counterpart, the Upper Rhine Conference, seems to receive more scientific and practitioner attention. However, as I will argue in the following sections, the Upper Rhine Council has the potential to fulfil important functions in cross-border impact assessment. This potential includes assessing the effectiveness of cross-border legislation, identifying areas where further legislative action is needed, and ensuring that the interests of all parties are considered in the legislative process. By leveraging its unique position and expertise, the Upper Rhine Council can significantly contribute to the development of effective cross-border legislation and governance.

This article proceeds by first outlining a reflection on the parliamentary dimension in cross-border cooperation and descriptions of the context of the Upper Rhine region and the institutional context of the Upper Rhine Council. Secondly, the findings of the legal analysis are introduced in order to describe the potential role a cross-border parliamentary institution such as the Upper Rhine Council can have in a cross-border governance based on the functions it currently fulfils and the ideas of a cross-border impact assessment as proposed by Frey and Müller (2024). Thirdly, the findings of the empirical analysis will give insight into the functions the Upper Rhine Council fulfils and the activities it conducts. The fourth section concludes on these findings followed by implications and recommendations on the potential role the Upper Rhine Council in a cross-border impact assessment.

2 Parliamentary Functions in Cross-Border Cooperation

Three dimensions of cross-border parliamentary functions are relevant for the analysis: (1) representation, (2) articulation, and (3) scrutiny (Eppler & Maurer 2017, 241). (1) Representation encompasses expressing the mind of the people (Raunio 2011, 305). Representation in a cross-border dimension means multi-level horizontal and vertical representation. Cross-border cooperation is conceptualized as inherently multi-level, predominantly involving subnational actors but within a multi-level governance including national and European

actors (Eppler & Maurer 2017). Accordingly, (2) articulation can be described as informing the people (Raunio 2011, 305). Articulation functions in the sense that cross-border governance is directed horizontally and vertically at various players. The actors at the respective sub-national levels are addressed to the executives through parliamentary work. This includes both regional and local governments (Badulescu et al. 2015, 561), but also cross-border intergovernmental institutions, which bring together executive actors and are conceptualized as drivers of integration in cross-border cooperation (Kaucic & Sohn 2022, 2375; Lagana 2017; Noferini et al. 2020). Furthermore, national and European administrations and governments—or in the case of the EU, the Commission—are included in the target group for a genuine multi-level element. In terms of horizontal governance, however, the work of the institution is also aimed at other actors in the national and sub-national parliaments themselves to address all relevant decision-makers. This articulation is also necessary for the independence of interparliamentary cooperation in order to fulfil functions that go beyond a pure information network, even without explicit and codified competence. In national contexts, (3) scrutiny refers to the ability of parliaments to control and limit government autonomy on their respective level (Eppler & Maurer 2017, 241–242; Bursens & Högenauer 2017, 132; Sprungk 2016, 181). Scrutiny refers to the examination and evaluation of policies and actions, often conducted by oversight bodies or institutions to ensure accountability and transparency. Scrutiny can be performed at different stages of the policymaking process and is accordingly conceptualized in two dimensions: ex-ante and ex-post scrutiny. Ex-ante scrutiny is characterized by less need to engage with other actors—in particular the executive—and less institutionalization, as it involves making joint demands on those with decision-making powers. Ex-post scrutiny requires detailed information on the activities of international organizations and sufficient institutional capacity to evaluate this information, enabling the evaluation of the executive's activities and the formulation of independent substantive positions (Eppler & Maurer 2017, 244).

3 Cross-Border Parliamentary Functions in a Cross-Border Impact Assessment: Untapped Potential for Resolving Legal-Administrative Obstacles

Current legislation does not take the cross-border dimension into account systematically enough, and therefore current policy approaches have not been able to mitigate the hurdles described above. To achieve this, the introduction of a cross-border impact assessment (Frey & Müller 2024) has the potential to counteract this by involving the relevant competent institutions in legislation and thus effectively changing the regulations that cause these hurdles, as well as preventing

or reducing new hurdles through new legislation. The cross-border impact assessment aims to evaluate the effects of legislative proposals on neighbouring countries and regions, ensuring that the potential cross-border implications are considered from the earliest stages of policy development. This involves the creation of a framework that can be applied at various governmental levels—federal, state, and local. The assessment includes identifying indicators that signal the possibility of cross-border impacts early in the legislative process. This proactive approach helps in integrating considerations for cross-border effects into standard legislative procedures, thus preventing administrative and normative obstacles that might arise from unilateral legislative actions (Frey & Müller 2024).

The cross-border impact assessment mechanism is designed to systematically evaluate the potential and actual impacts of policies, programs, and projects on cross-border regions. It operates through both ex-ante (before implementation) and ex-post (after implementation) evaluations. The process begins with a comprehensive analysis, monitoring, and evaluation phase to identify and understand existing conditions and potential challenges. This is followed by efforts to remove legal and administrative obstacles, promote and finance necessary initiatives, and foster effective communication among stakeholders. Infrastructure development and modernization, alongside innovation and experimentation, are prioritized to facilitate seamless cross-border cooperation. The mechanism also includes a strategic alignment with broader regional, national, and EU policies. This structured approach ensures that cross-border cooperation is efficient, equitable, and sustainable, ultimately enhancing the socio-economic integration of border regions.

Implementing a cross-border impact assessment is crucial because it ensures that legislation does not inadvertently create barriers or adverse effects for neighbouring regions. Given the interconnectedness of border regions, laws enacted in one country can significantly affect economic, social, and environmental conditions across the border. For instance, regulations affecting labour mobility, environmental standards, or business operations can have far-reaching consequences. A structured impact assessment can help identify and mitigate these issues before they escalate. This process not only fosters better bilateral relations but also supports the economic and social integration of border regions, promoting sustainable and harmonious development. Furthermore, it ensures that the interests of cross-border communities are represented and safeguarded, enhancing the legitimacy and acceptance of legislative measures (Frey & Müller 2024). In this context, the Upper Rhine Council could play a central role as an important institution for cross-border impact assessment. To do this, we first need to understand how the Upper Rhine Council works, what

functions it performs, and whether these could bring added value to cross-border impact assessment. To this end, the next section will first present the institution and its context of action and then outline the research results of an empirical study of its work. This study is the most comprehensive examination of parliamentary functions in cross-border cooperation to date and provides important insights that expand our previous understanding.

4 The Upper Rhine Council: Regional and Institutional Context

Cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine region has a long tradition. It is characterized by a level-specific differentiation in which there are institutional as well as task-structural and functional approaches for a vertical division of labour between the international (intergovernmental commission), interregional (Upper Rhine Conference, Upper Rhine Council), and subregional levels (Eurodistricts) (Beck 2022, 59). While the Upper Rhine Conference and the Eurodistricts are analyzed in relevant publications (see exemplarily Graf 2021; Pupier 2020; Wassenberg 2017; Beck 1997), studies of the Upper Rhine Council are scarce. With 25 years of existence, the Upper Rhine Council is still a young body compared to the Upper Rhine Conference and the intergovernmental commission associated with it. As a cross-border institution, the Upper Rhine Council brings together elected representatives from the geographical regions along the Upper Rhine (Dupeyron 2007, 136; Jakob 2011, 220; Nagelschmidt 2005, 135). Figure 1 shows the geographical location of the Upper Rhine region and the mandate area of the Upper Rhine Council.

Both the Upper Rhine Conference and the Upper Rhine Council are part of the political pillar of the Trinational Metropolitan Region Upper Rhine. It was founded at the end of 2010 and aims to provide an umbrella for not only political but also economic, scientific, and civil society cooperation. The political pillar intends to coordinate the various instances of cross-border cooperation so that they can work together across borders in an even more intensive and targeted manner.

The Upper Rhine Council "accompanies" the work of the Upper Rhine Conference as a political complementary body to the administrative Upper Rhine Conference

(Upper Rhine Council 2017, Art. 1; Knörr and Weber 2019, 11; Jakob 2011, 221; Dupeyron 2003, 330). However, the cooperation between the Upper Rhine Council and the Upper Rhine Conference is only loosely structured and not particularly formalized (Jakob 2011, 226; Hartz & Caesar 2018, 49; Nagelschmidt 2005, 146); there is no fixed structure to which both belong. While the founding agreement and rules of procedure regulate relations with the Eurodistricts in detail, there are no more precise regulations on the relationship with the Upper Rhine Conference. With the Eurodistricts PAMINA, Strasbourg-Ortenau, Region Freiburg-Centre et Sud Alsace, and the Trinational Eurodistrict Basel (TEB), which are located at the municipal level, the Upper Rhine Council maintains a constant exchange of information.

The aim of the Upper Rhine Council is to promote cross-border cooperation and support the development



Figure 1. The Upper Rhine Region. Source: Wikimedia (open access): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/40/CRS_ORK-Perimeter.jpg.

of the Upper Rhine region in a coordinated and harmonious manner (Upper Rhine Council 2017, Art. 1). The Upper Rhine Council aims to facilitate mutual information and political consultation in the border region and to sensitize the public to important cross-border aspects (Nagelschmidt 2005, 146). It has set itself the following objectives (Upper Rhine Council 2017, Art. 1):

1. Promote and deepen exchange in political cross-border cooperation;
2. Develop initiatives for joint cross-border projects at regional and municipal level;
3. Promote and support the harmonious and coherent development of the Upper Rhine regions;
4. Monitor the activities of the Upper Rhine Conference with regard to objectives and measures.

The Upper Rhine Council carries out its work by means of resolutions, statements, and open letters, which it addresses to various stakeholders (Chilla & Lambracht 2023, 9; Dupeyron 2007, 125; 2003, 333–334), in particular to the Upper Rhine Conference, the relevant national, cantonal, and regional governments and their agencies, as well as European, regional, local, and other public institutions (Upper Rhine Council 2017, Art. 5). Regarding its organization, the Upper Rhine Council has four policy-related committees in which its members work together: (1) Economy - Labour Market - Health, (2) Transport - Spatial Planning - Disaster Relief, (3) Agriculture - Environment - Climate - Energy and (4) Culture - Youth - Education - Sport. There is also a Rules of Procedure Committee. The secretariat of the Upper Rhine Council was set up in 2019 as part of an Interreg project and has been permanent since 2022. It is financed by the regional authorities and was initially, until 2025, weighted according to the number of elected members (Upper Rhine Council 2021, Art. 22). Its tasks are “in particular the keeping of a business register, the storage of files, minutes and audio recordings” (Upper Rhine Council 2021, Art. 22). The permanent secretariat supports the chairpersons of the Commission by cooperating with the secretariats at the regional level (Upper Rhine Council 2021, Art. 22). This expresses the desire to expand the capacities of the Secretariat. According to Art. 14 of the founding agreement, the respective

regional delegations bear their own costs. No project funding is envisaged (Eppler & Heyduk 2023).

5 Functions the Upper Rhine Council Currently Fulfils

The Upper Rhine Council actually fulfils more functions than foreseen in its founding and constituting documents, and it also implements its policies differently, as to be expected. The following are results of a document analysis of all resolutions of the Upper Rhine Council published between 2016 and 2022, applying thematic analysis (Heyduk & Eppler 2026).

Regarding representation, the Upper Rhine Council currently has 71 members (Upper Rhine Council 2017, Art. 3) and 29 substitute members. The founding agreement of the Upper Rhine Council states the number of representatives of the individual regions in Art. 3 paragraph 1. Paragraph 2 specifies exactly which institutions (e.g., subnational parliaments, cities, etc.) send how many representatives. Paragraph 3 stipulates that the delegating institutions regulate the specific appointments in detail. However, the prerequisite is that they are elected representatives. Currently (as of the beginning of May 2024), the Upper Rhine Council is composed as shown in Table 1.

Regarding articulation, the Upper Rhine Council addresses a diverse constellation of actors across different levels.

Of the 69 resolutions, all those addressed to specific addressees are addressed to several levels as summarized in Table 2. The first point of interest is the communication to the Upper Rhine Conference and the Intergovernmental Commission. 35 resolutions are addressed directly to the Upper Rhine Conference, plus 27 resolutions that are intended for the attention of the Upper Rhine Conference, but in which no direct demands are made of it. No resolutions are explicitly addressed to the Intergovernmental Commission. Instead, 38 resolutions are addressed to the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly and 29 to the Franco-German Committee for cross-border cooperation. The addressees of these resolutions include local governments and administrations at the local

Table 1. Members of the Upper Rhine Council Source: author’s representation based on Heyduk and Eppler (2026).

	Land Baden-Württemberg	Land Rheinland-Pfalz	Région Grande Est	Northwest Swiss Cantons
Members of Parliaments	16	5	n.a.	11
Regional Councils	n.a.	n.a.	18	n.a.
Local Councils	7	2	2	—
Local elected Administrators	1	1	—	—
Mayors	3	—	6	—

Table 2. Number of Resolutions with Addressees at the Respective Level in the Period Under Review Source: author’s representation based on Heyduk and Eppler (2026)

	Local level ¹	Federal/central government level	National/regional level	EU level	Upper Rhine Conference
Resolutions	4	64	65	20	35

level; regions, cantons, German Länder, encompassing ministries, administrations, agencies, parliaments, and assemblies at the regional level; ministries, agencies, and parliaments at the national level; and the European Commission and European Parliament at the EU level. Notably, no resolutions are addressed to international organizations.

Furthermore, the data on the addressees does not confirm the prescription in its founding documents that the Upper Rhine Council’s work is primarily related to the Upper Rhine Conference and the Intergovernmental Commission. The data show that the Upper Rhine Council does not consistently follow the logic of other interparliamentary institutions, such as in international organizations, according to which the represented parliamentarians address “their” government representatives, who are represented in the corresponding executive body. This could at best apply to the regional (state/cantonal) level. The extent to which the latter is the case and whether the lack of addressing of the local and disproportionate addressing of the (supra-)national levels is actually due to the loose connection between the institutions and the lack of mirror-image representation must remain the subject of further analyses. It is very noteworthy that the Upper Rhine Council, as a cross-border parliamentary body, addresses such different political levels with its articulation function. This could speak in favour of the emergence of a cross-border parliamentarism that addresses the decision-makers of the entire multi-level system.

In terms of substantive evaluation, Table 3 shows different types of demands in the two scrutiny dimensions: *ex-ante* and *ex-post*. The *ex-ante* demands include analysis, monitoring, and evaluation; removal of obstacles to cross-border cooperation; promotion and financing; communication; building, developing, and modernizing infrastructure; innovation and experimentation; and

strategy. The Upper Rhine Council’s activities encompass analysis, monitoring, evaluation, and the development of an evacuation concept for the Upper Rhine region. A key focus is removing barriers to effective cooperation through mutual recognition and harmonization of regulations, facilitating cross-border exchange of patients and data, and addressing challenges in disaster cooperation. The Council also promotes best practices among stakeholders and emphasizes harmonizing regulations for cross-border activities.

Ex-post demands in the Upper Rhine Council’s resolutions can be categorized into governance and implementation, problem identification and good practices, and structures and financing. Governance and implementation aspects include compliance with agreements, such as setting up a guarantee fund for container removal. The achievement of joint or self-imposed targets is reviewed, with some resolutions expressing regret over unmet promises. Requests for detailed information on specific projects, such as the French government’s center of excellence for dismantling nuclear facilities, are also formulated. Problem identification focuses on national-level obstacles, such as administrative formalities in social security, which burden cross-border workers. Concerns about highly toxic waste storage in an underground landfill are highlighted. The Council also addresses the utilization of structures and financial resources, noting instances of limited or unevenly distributed funding.

6 Conclusion

This policy paper has illustrated the pivotal role of parliamentary institutions—in the form of the case of the Upper Rhine Council—in enhancing cross-border cooperation and addressing legal-administrative obstacles. The findings underscore the necessity of cross-border

Table 3. Demands of the Upper Rhine Council Source: author’s representation based on Heyduk and Eppler (2026)

Ex ante demands	Ex-post demands
Analysis, monitoring, evaluation	Governance and implementation
Removing obstacles	Problem identification and <i>good practice</i>
Funding and financing	Structures and financing
Communication and proximity to citizens	
Infrastructure development	
Innovations and testing	
Strategy	



friendly legislation, which can only be effectively realized through the involvement of institutions like the Upper Rhine Council. By fulfilling parliamentary functions, the Upper Rhine Council brings a 360-degree perspective, offering a comprehensive understanding of cross-border issues, which is critical for the development and implementation of effective policies.

The empirical analysis revealed that the Upper Rhine Council is actively engaged in various *ex-ante* and *ex-post* activities, ranging from analysis, monitoring, and evaluation to promoting and financing cross-border initiatives. Its efforts to remove barriers to cooperation, support infrastructure development, and promote bilingualism demonstrate its commitment to facilitating cross-border activities. Additionally, the Council's focus on communication and citizen engagement highlights the importance of involving the population in cross-border initiatives to ensure their legitimacy and impact. The legal analysis highlighted the potential of the Upper Rhine Council in a cross-border impact assessment framework. This institutionalized approach can provide valuable insights and legitimacy to cross-border legislation, ensuring that the perspectives and needs of cross-border regions are adequately represented. The Council's direct involvement can bridge the gap between different levels of governance, from local to supranational, ensuring a coherent and integrated approach to policymaking.

If intended, to harness the full potential of the Upper Rhine Council, it is essential to institutionalize its role in the policy-making process. This can be achieved through the implementation of a cross-border impact assessment procedure that involves the Council at every stage, from the formulation of policies to their evaluation. By leveraging the expertise and direct legitimacy of the Upper Rhine Council, governments at the European, national, regional, and local levels can ensure that cross-border perspectives are integrated into their policies, leading to more effective and sustainable solutions to legal-administrative obstacles. In conclusion, institutionalizing the Upper Rhine Council's role in policymaking can address legal-administrative challenges more effectively and foster a collaborative cross-border region. This approach not only benefits the Upper Rhine region but also serves as a model for other cross-border areas, promoting greater integration and cooperation across Europe.

7 Implications and Recommendations

If the Upper Rhine Council's role in cross-border cooperation is institutionalized, it will enhance policy coherence and effectiveness across multiple governance levels. Integrating cross-border impact assessments into legislative processes will likely contribute to the reduction of legal-administrative obstacles

and create more harmonized regulatory frameworks. This approach is expected to lead to improved infrastructure, better public services, and strengthened regional integration. Furthermore, the involvement of the Upper Rhine Council in both *ex-ante* and *ex-post* evaluations—functions the Upper Rhine Council already fulfils—will ensure that cross-border considerations are systematically addressed, resulting in more informed and balanced decision-making. This could establish a precedent for other border regions.

Strengthening the role of the Upper Rhine Council by enhancing its mandate to include formal advisory roles in legislative processes will provide essential expertise and ensure the representation of cross-border interests. Furthermore, a higher institutional capacity by the contribution of more resources for research, policy formulation and parliamentary work in the cross-border context would be necessary to implement such a role. This could be achieved by a larger administrative staff in the form of a secretariat, a research group, and a legal back office that would develop legal innovations in a cross-border perspective. Examples of this can already be found in the Grande Region in the form of the Task Force Grenzgänger and in the Infobest network in the Upper Rhine on a project basis in the Infobest 4.0 project. Increasing efforts to involve citizens in cross-border initiatives through public consultations and communication campaigns will enhance the legitimacy and public support for cross-border projects. Establishing platforms for sharing best practices and successful cross-border initiatives among stakeholders will promote innovation and collaborative solutions. Implementing these recommendations will not only address current legal-administrative challenges but also pave the way for more effective and integrated cross-border cooperation. This will benefit the Upper Rhine region and potentially serve as a model for other border regions.

Acknowledgment

This publication has resulted from research conducted with the financial support of Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland under Grant number GOIPG/2025/8489; I am also grateful for the support received for this research from the Graduate School in the College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences, UCC; I am also grateful for a tuition-free fellowship for a Summer Institute awarded by the Borders in Globalisation (BIG) Lab at the University of Victoria.

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