



BORDERS IN GLOBALIZATION REVIEW

Academic and artistic
explorations of borders
in the 21st century

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Spring & Summer 2025

SPECIAL SECTION
European Union
Borders with Ukraine

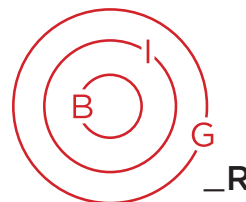
Cover: "The Broken Wall
and the Destroyed Landscape"
by Guillermo Arias Camarena
(Featured inside)

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The editors wish to acknowledge with respect the ləkʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territories the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. The BIG team is grateful to be able to work and live on this beautiful land.

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ROLLING CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS



BIG_Review is a bi-annual, multidisciplinary, open-access, and peer-reviewed journal, providing a forum for academic, policy, and artistic explorations of borders in the 21st century. We publish **scholarly work** (academic articles, review essays, research notes, film reviews, and book reviews), **policy work** (brief and reports), and **artistic work** (photography, painting, poetry, short stories, fiction reviews, and more). The journal is committed to quality research, public access, policy relevance, and cultural significance. We welcome submissions from all disciplines and backgrounds.

Scholarly submissions should engage with the research literature on borders, including, for example, bordering processes, borderlands, and borderscapes. We encourage studies that go beyond the 'land image' by exploring borders as non-contiguous, aterritorial, mobile, electronic, biometric, functional, etc. We are especially interested in explorations of borders and global challenges such as pandemics, climate change, migration, and economic shocks. We also seek border studies that break new ground by integrating Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, and practices. We encourage innovative theoretical work as well as empirical and quantitative research. Articles should be between 7,000 and 10,000 words in length. Book and film reviews should be between 500 and 1,000 words, and essays between 1,000 and 4,000 words. Academic submissions must be previously unpublished and not simultaneously under other publishers' consideration.

Artistic submissions should pertain to borders, whether political, social, cultural, personal, or metaphoric. Borders capture the popular imagination and inspire creative works, which in turn influence the forces shaping borders. We promote portfolios and individual works of photography, painting, poetry, short fiction, video, commentary, and other forms. Under Creative Commons licensing, artists retain copyright of their work and benefit from increased exposure at no cost to them.

Policy submissions should translate research and scholarship into clear, accessible language, avoiding jargon and theory. Policy briefs (2,000 words) and policy reports (4,000 words) should inspire and enable non-experts to incorporate the findings into their policy frameworks pertaining to the governance of borders.

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Submissions are not guaranteed approval. *BIG_Review* reserves the right to reject submissions on any grounds.

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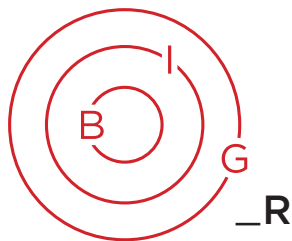
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Letter of Introduction

Dear Readers,

Our much-anticipated 6.2 issue of *Borders in Globalization Review* (*BIG_Review*) is finally here! Leading the issue is a Special Section on the European Union Borders with Ukraine. As always, it is free. It is published Open Access, and printed copies are available and distributed at cost by the University of Victoria's [Bookstore](#). *BIG_Review* is produced on the unceded Indigenous lands of the Lək̓ʷəŋən and WSÁNEĆ peoples, and we are very grateful to live and play on those beautiful lands.

The issue begins with a research article by Ruchika Raina and Firdoos Ahmad Reshi, exploring gender dynamics in the Jammu and Kashmir borderlands through critical analysis, ethnography, and fieldwork interviews. Our Special Section was guest edited with Gyula Ocskay, Martin Guillermo Ramírez, Martin Van der Velde, and Tatiana Shaban, and by Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly. It presents six research articles that emerged after a 2023 conference organised by the Association European Border Region and the Hungarian Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives on 'Ukraine on the road to EU integration (reconstruction, cooperation, pre-accession)'. These research works assess coordination and cooperative efforts straddling the borders of the European Union and EU member states with Ukraine at a time of war.

The papers (by scholars Andrzej Jakubowski, Martin Lačný and Jana Michalková, Marija Mendzhul, Tatiana Shaban, and Iryna Yaremak, as well as by professional border managers Julianna Máté, Monika Kolčev, Iveta Kubeková, and Daniela Kolcunová) illustrate the challenging but very promising cross-border reality and various facets of cross-border relations, i.e., partnerships and trade on the eastern borders on the European Union with Ukraine. Because of their focus on democratic and security concerns, regional development and education, healthcare, culture, and energy, the six papers contribute to an under-researched assessment of cross-border integration and relations between the Visegrad counties of the European Union (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and Ukraine. Collectively, the articles also document the status of the relationships and emerging legal and policy alignments of Ukraine, a candidate-country, with its neighbors and the Union. Indeed, this is key to any European processes of integration. (Note that two additional papers will be published in our winter issue, *BIG_Review* 7.1.)

As always, our Editor in Chief's Choice Portfolio is published at the centerfold of *BIG_Review*. This time, "Divided Landscape" will take you, our readers, back to North America with an unsettling yet stunning set of photography by Guillermo Arias Camarena and a powerful poetic essay by Viviana Mejia Cañedo. The Wall running along the Mexico–United States

boundary cuts through the ecosystems as it divides life, as well as deserts, mountains, rivers, and valleys. Arias' photos illustrate the ecological impact of the militarisation of the region and our human cosmopolitan condition with the natural environment, while Mejia Cañedo's narrative explores the profound denaturalizing impact on outstandingly beautiful, big-sky countrysides.

This issue also presents three Policy Papers, by Hubert Duchesneau on the evolution of the Customs profession, Paola Malaspina on the environmental impact of the Italian–Swiss border's Cervinia–Zermatt Cable Car, and Kalliopi Mitrousi on how Customs organisations can play an important role mitigating climate change. Duchesneau's paper is a masterful review of the evolution of the role of the Customs profession over the last few decades. Malaspina's policy paper underscores how in the face of ecological challenges, technological innovation plays an important role that cannot, however, supplant human interactions. Mitrousi's policy analysis focuses on the counter-intuitive impact of the implementation of Customs' Multilateral Environmental Agreements signed and recorded at the United Nations, which transforms the UN Sustainable Development Goals into Customs' goals worldwide.

This month's Poetry Section, brought to you by Poetry Editor Natasha Sardzoska, presents six war-themed poems by acclaimed poet Diana Burazer. As a borderlander torn between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burazer humanizes and denationalizes conflict through the power of her verse.

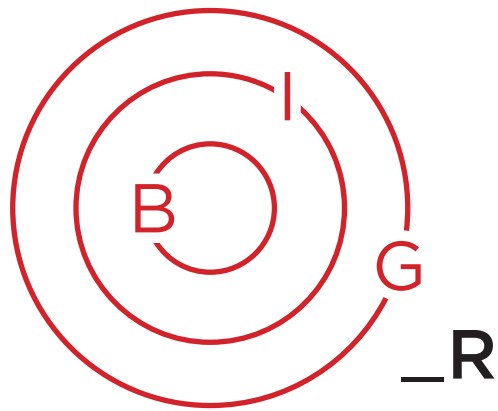
The issue also offers a Film Review of award-winning documentary *YINTAH* (2024), dealing with Wet'suwet'en land defense and Indigenous sovereignty, by Jacob Smallboy, and two Book Reviews: Kalpana Jha reviews *Gender Dynamics in Transboundary Water Governance* (2022, edited by Jenniver Sehring, Rozemarijn ter Horst, and Margreet Zwartveen), and Jules Soupault reviews Silky Shah's *Unbuilding Walls: Why Immigrants Justice Needs Abolition* (2024).

BIG_Review is made possible by a team of editors, board members, blind reviewers, and other colleagues who contribute the labour of reviewing and producing the work, supported by grant funding from SSHRC and Erasmus+. We are also grateful to the Centre for Global Studies and University Libraries at the University of Victoria for hosting and supporting *BIG_Lab*.

We hope you enjoy and share this latest issue.

Sincerely,

Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, Chief Editor



ARTICLES

BIG_Review articles are long-form explorations of borders in a globalized world, presenting original research from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. All articles undergo at least two double-blind peer reviews, drawing on the expertise of our Editorial Board and a wider network of borders scholars, subject to the discretion of the Chief Editor. Like all *BIG_Review* publications, articles are available for free in open-access Creative Commons licensing.



ARTICLE

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Suchetgarh Women: The Strength and Excluded Section of the International Border

Ruchika Raina
Firdoos Ahmad Reshi

Jammu and Kashmir, a region straddling India and Pakistan, illustrates the intersection of two major South Asian states along the International Border (IB), where protracted violence profoundly impacts local communities. This study explores the lived experiences of borderland women in Suchetgarh village, Jammu, focusing on the impacts of ceasefire violations and hostile interactions between Indo-Pakistani forces. Utilizing a feminist methodology, the research highlights the profound effects of conflict on women's physical and psychological well-being. It underscores the dual victimization faced by these women: one stemming from entrenched patriarchal structures and the other from militarism and everyday violence. Despite enduring these adversities, borderland women contribute significantly to local economies, education, and social cohesion, embodying resilience and social unity. However, they remain marginalized in socio-political and security spheres due to prevailing patriarchal norms. The study advocates for increased female representation in security forces and policy-making to mitigate the adverse effects of militarized borders. It also emphasizes the potential for feminist perspectives to inform border security studies and improve women's roles in these regions. By focusing on borderland women's perspectives and their call for peace and dialogue, the study challenges traditional realist frameworks and offers insights into the human dimensions of Indo-Pakistan border conflicts. The research calls for enhanced understanding, empathy, and the incorporation of gendered voices to transform longstanding violent relations into peaceful conditions.

Keywords: Borders, borderland women, Jammu and Kashmir, ceasefire violations, security.

Introduction

Borders have a reputation for being infamous “power symbols” (Donnan 1998, 1). They are the geographical and political delineation of precincts between two states or administrative subdivisions established through political agreements. States have defined

border ideologies as having a fixed and permanent nature (Chowdhary 2012). The term “borderlands” refers to areas that are distinct from the mainland and serve as a state's territorial boundary (Chowdhary 2012, 9). The boundaries of the European Union and the state's

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internal administrative areas are two instances of unfenced, open, unprotected borders. Other borders are truncated, restricted, or both, and can only be crossed through legitimate official mechanisms. In this study, the term 'Borderland people' refers to the residents of restricted and securitized borders. They typically have different geographic limits on their freedom of movement, and their way of life and sociopolitical attitudes differ significantly from those of people living on the state's mainland. Borders have a tangible impact on people's lives, putting them in dead-end situations with various constraints and vulnerabilities, marginalizing them in a variety of ways without giving them a choice (Raina 2021). Borderland people and the obstacles to borderland living, such as life security, material security, constraints, and uncertainty, make it essential to study their experiences.

The people living on the borders of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) entangled between India and Pakistan witnessed the long-running war along with physical and psychological effects on borderland communities in general and women in particular. This paper studies the impact of ceasefire violations on borderland women at Suchetgarh village in the Ranbir Singh Pura sector of Jammu district, J&K. Using narrative technique, the paper explores the different facets of women's affected lives as borderland residents and members of borderland society.

Methodology of study

The challenges that women in Suchetgarh Village, Ranbir Singh Pura Sector, Jammu division, J&K, encounter as a result of ceasefire violations are examined in this piece. Situated within the region under study, this research is informed by our intersecting yet distinct positionalities. Ruchika Raina, from Jammu, foregrounds the gendered experiences of woman lives in borderland spaces, while Firdoos Ahmad Reshi, hailing from Kashmir, examines issues of protracted conflict of J&K borders and militarism in the region. Together, these perspectives facilitate a grounded and ethically attuned exploration of women's lives at the margins of the international border. The paper's objective is to provide the lived experiences of borderland women who are members or residents of borderland cultures and to study their socio-ecological and political facets of existence. This paper also enhances scholarly inquiry on J&K's International Border (IB) and provides valuable insights for creating fairer and more efficient policy solutions. An ethnographic approach is very suitable for examining the intricate and diverse experiences of women residing in borderlands. Researchers can acquire profound understanding of the social, cultural, and political forces that influence life in these locations by fully engaging in the daily experiences of their subjects. Thus, ethnographic research has been employed in conjunction with participatory research methodologies

and a reflective examination of the researcher's positionality to conduct the present study.

Via open-ended questionnaires and informal conversations, these women's stories have been gathered. Interviews were conducted in Hindi and Dogri, according to the respondents' linguistic preferences. Dogri interviews were translated into English by the first author, and Hindi interviews by the second author. Some participants requested anonymity (pseudonyms are indicated). Care was taken to preserve the original meaning and nuance of participants' responses. It has also been documented when participants speak loudly, softly, or remain silent while discussing certain problems and their regular livelihood. Twenty borderland women were approached using the ethnographic method and using the purposive sampling technique of non-probability sampling. Purposive sampling has been taken into account with the inclusion of eight homemakers, four students, four working women, and four senior women of eight households. To investigate the social, economic, educational, health, and political prospects of borderland living, people from all walks of life—educated and uneducated, married and single, wealthy and poor—have been taken into consideration. It is crucial to note that this research includes only the village of Suchetgarh and does not encompass the full border region of Jammu and Kashmir.

Theoretical underpinnings

Regarding the theoretical underpinnings of this study, we have employed the theoretical construct of intersectionality and feminist realist critiques of classical realism as proposed by Tickner and Enloe. Intersectionality is a notion that offers a complete framework for comprehending how different social identities and institutions intersect to create distinct experiences of oppression and privilege. When examining women's encounters with borders, the concept of intersectionality uncovers the complex manner in which gender, race, nationality, class, and other social classifications intertwine to influence their actual experiences. This viewpoint recognises that women do not encounter oppression in a solitary aspect, but rather through various, intersecting identities that shape their life experiences and opportunities (Collins 2000). This approach is crucial for examining the intricate difficulties encountered by women in Jammu borderlands, who frequently navigate complex socio-political terrains characterised by short-term wars, i.e., ceasefire violations, temporary migration, and security concerns in the region. This framework helps us understand how these intersections contribute to the existence of systematic injustice and social inequality (Crenshaw 1989).

Borderlands are distinctive socio-political spaces where different manifestations of authority and opposition intersect. Women in these places frequently face

increased vulnerabilities as a result of the overlapping aspects of their identities. The intersectional method facilitates the analysis of how national policies, cultural norms, and local power dynamics have a disproportionate impact on women. Gender norms and expectations significantly influence the way women perceive and encounter security on borders. Research has indicated that security programmes frequently neglect the distinct needs and susceptibilities of women, resulting in insufficient safeguarding and assistance (Tickner 2001). Tickner's critique of classical realism calls for a gender-sensitive approach, arguing that traditional theories overlook women's contributions and experiences (Enloe 2000). Gendered security assessments demonstrate the differential impact of militarization and border policing on women, often intensifying their marginalisation. She further underscores the necessity of integrating women's roles and experiences into global politics, revealing how their perspectives challenge and enrich our understanding of international relations. Both perspectives advocate for a more inclusive and empathetic framework in addressing conflicts.

Indo-Pakistan Border: The Background

One of the most active and deadly frontiers in the world is the Indo-Pakistan border, which is situated in South Asia. India and Pakistan, the two nuclear-armed nations in South Asia, disagree about Jammu and Kashmir (Varshney 1991). On the border between India and Pakistan, armed personnel are stationed to maintain border security and safeguard the territorial integrity of each country's sovereign state. The main issue has existed since 1947 along the boundary that passes through the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Both nations' border security policies and defense techniques have evolved throughout time as a result of the conflict along this boundary. On the one hand, international borders are changing from their historical function of containing the movement of people, goods, and ideas from one country to another and are increasingly porous. One example of this is the Schengen area of the European Union. On the other, the borders of South Asia, notably those of Pakistan and India, are becoming more controlled and militarized. Border fighting has been a recurring issue since India and Pakistan were divided after gaining independence from the British Empire, particularly in the Jammu and Kashmir region. Historically, to save the territory from tribal invasion, the Hindu Maharaja of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir acceded to India under dubious circumstances. An unresolved issue resulted from Pakistan's invasion, which gave them illegal control over the western and northern areas of the state (often referred to as POK in India and Azad Kashmir in Pakistan) (Ali 2019). Due to the separation of Indian territories and the tribal enmity in J&K, a significant exodus took place on both sides. As a result, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has split into two separate sovereign entities, each of which controls

a portion of the state. Notably, India and Pakistan jointly control the bulk of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. This non-uniform boundary creates problems for border management in terms of territory, cross-border shooting, terrorist infiltration, drug trafficking, and human rights concerns. Due to internal state problems like the unrest in Kashmir followed by encounters with militants, the imprisonment of political leaders for a number of months, surveillance, and other challenges the populace faces in accessing high speed internet or in the complete breaking of cellular connection, many rural communities on both sides of these two borders are deprived of a normal and smooth life as well as a sense of security (Narayanan 2020). Additionally, external forces like ceasefire violations on the IB and the Line of Control (LoC) or terrorist actions supported by terrorist groups with headquarters in Pakistan have increased the number of villages bereft of regular living.

In 2012, Pakistan breached the ceasefire on 37 occasions, compared to 51 incidents in 2011, 44 in 2010, and 28 in 2009 (Deccan Herald 2012). In 2014, Jammu and Kashmir's Line of Control (LoC) and International Border (IB) recorded 562 violations, marked by intensified shelling, firing, Border Action Team (BAT) operations, and sniper attacks targeting civilian areas and forward posts by Pakistani troops (Economic Times 2014). There were 405, 449, and 971 instances of ceasefire breaches in 2015, 2016, and 2017, with 10, 13, and 19 fatalities, respectively. Regarding 2018, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reported in October 2018 that CFVs killed 52 people on the Indian side over the course of the first seven months of the year (including 28 civilians, 12 soldiers, and 12 Border Security Force personnel) and injured 232 others (Press Trust of India 2018). The Indo-Pakistan border experienced 3,289 ceasefire violations in 2018, which is the most in the previous 16 years (Economic Times 2020). Additionally, the IB and the LoC communities continue to suffer devastation as a result of Indian and Pakistani troops' escalating cross-border firings due to a lack of border management laws and regulations. In addition to wrecking infrastructure and agriculture, ceasefire violations are costing human lives and economic prospects. The lives and human rights of borderland people are in danger due to the hazards presented by Indo-Pakistan troops utilizing sophisticated or conventional weaponry on the Jammu and Kashmir border, which have been reported for a number of reasons. Moreover, while conventional forms of violence such as ceasefire violations may have subsided, the evolving nature of threats, including militant activities and drug trafficking, perpetuates a state of turmoil. Rajni (pseudonym), age 32, forwarded her concern about the changing nature of border conflict, while discussing the potential of weapons used during cross-firings, "[b]orders on our part will always remain in turmoil. Some years back, ceasefire violations were the most critical threat; now, it has been overtaken by rising militancy-related events in the region like

terrorist infiltration and attacks on army vehicles and civilians. With the emergence of these terrorist attacks, the borderland life remains tense" (Group Discussion, Suchetgarh, October 24, 2019).

Suchetgarh: A border village

A village on the IB in the Jammu division, Suchetgarh, is renowned for its unusual combination of fertile land and active boundaries. The Muslim and Hindu communities of the village of Suchetgarh were uprooted during the 1947 Partition, with the Muslim community moving to Pakistan and the Hindu community moving to India. There were links by bus and train between the city of Jammu and Sialkot in the Punjab province before Indian independence. Now, Suchetgarh is the last village on the border between the Indian side of Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab province in Pakistan. Before Indian Independence, there was an Octroi Post at Suchetgarh to collect taxes; today, this post is utilized by a Border Security Post for flag meetings between Indo-Pak military authorities. The region is currently a well-liked border tourist attraction in Jammu Division as a result of its historical and geographical significance. Currently, the four villages that make up Suchetgarh Panchayat are Nijabatpur, Bidhipur, Koratana Khurd, and Suchetgarh. This sector was selected for the research primarily due to its proximity to the 'zero-line' in the Ranbir Singh Pura area of Jammu and most troubling ceasefire violations/shelling experiences along the IB in Jammu division. The village of Suchetgarh, which is one of the bordering communities of an IB in Jammu, has 208 residences and a total population of 946 people, including 507 men and 439 women (Government of India 2011). The village is located on the border along with the military checkpoints and concertina wire which runs parallel to the 'zero-line' or 'no man's land' between India and Pakistan. The border and securitized points/concertina wire also run amidst the farmland of local farmers. Coming to the turbulence of borders, the region has experienced a history of ceasefire violations and supposed normalcy overshadowed by psychological uncertainty and fear. For better understanding, we will count the figure of physical and psychological impact in 2018. There were two significant ceasefire violations in the Suchetgarh IB Area, one from January 18 to January 20 and the second from May 18 to May 22 (Raina 2019).

The January 2018 ceasefire violations resulted in five fatalities and 18 severe injuries on this side of the border, while for May 2018, four fatalities and 11 serious injuries were recorded (BMO 2019). Minor injuries were not reported because of the heavy traffic at the Community Health Centre, R.S. Pura, during ceasefire violations. The Government Medical College in Bakshi Nagar, Jammu, received the majority of referrals for critical injury patients.

Broadly speaking, the boundaries between India and Pakistan continue to be a source of disagreement, conflict, and contestation in the midst of debates on de-bordering. Given that the traditional approach to border studies is marked by hyper-masculinity and patriarchy, the gendered effect of boundaries deserves specific examination (Shekhawat & Del Re 2019). Enloe, Lacey, and Gregory (2016) emphasize that rather than focusing just on the international level, one must examine the interaction between the personal and the international. Despite being commonly ignored in borderland research and expert reports, girls and women interact with borders and experience border conflict and violence in very different ways than male border residents. In the midst of a conflict that might dramatically impact women's everyday interactions with the military and society in these border towns, their personal and social lives cannot be ignored. Zakaria (2018) also highlights the narratives of struggles and resilience of Pakistan-administered Kashmir due to political and military conflict between India and Pakistan. In this study, the narratives of Suchetgarh women from normal days of supposed peace to times of ceasefire violations present nuanced understandings of the IB's history and politics. The study humanizes the border conflict by focusing on personal narratives of borderland people through women in the village of Suchetgarh. Following the collection and analysis of data concerning Suchetgarh borderland women, three prominent themes emerged from the field study: (1) everyday violence and borderland women, (2) women as agents of strength, and (3) women as an excluded section. The subsequent sections of the paper will explore these themes in detail.

Everyday Violence and Borderland Women

The study came across the phenomenon of everyday violence in the form of ceasefire violations and militarization of borders which negatively affects everyday life along with patriarchal arrangements in borderland societies. The borders and their militarization impact women adversely: restrictions on mobility or walking out freely, negative social interactions, pervasive surveillance, limited exercise of agency, and even redefined gender roles wherein they are exposed to direct violence. After the collection of data, many themes related to everyday violence and women emerged. Women's victimization has been explored in three spheres: during the period of ceasefire violations, in relief/displacement camps, and in their everyday lives, the supposed peace period. In the village, homes are both fully and partially concreted, with grave marks from cross-border fired bullets on the walls and depressions from mortar explosions both inside and outside the homes. The bulk of dwellings in the town are single-story to avoid direct cross-fire from the opposite side, and few of them are border-facing. As Mamta (pseudonym), 44, explains while showing the devastation through recent mortar

shells in the village houses, "[t]here was a time when bullets had been used in cross-firing, but now, the use of mortar shells is much unsafe. The houses get damaged from shells, so the cattle lives. Everything comes at the point of risk in that period" (Personal Interview, Krotana Khurd, October 4, 2019). Participants indicated that mortar shells do more harm than bullets because they may shatter home walls and ceilings whereas bullets can be stopped by barriers. Additionally, live shells have been found by villagers on multiple occasions before being neutralized by security officers for safety reasons. Aarti, 28 explained what emerges when information of ceasefire violations comes from neighbouring border blocks:

Whenever ceasefire violations start at any other border area, we do not sleep at night. ... We count the minutes when would we have to leave the village, and we get panic by thinking much about our children. ... Fearing that roof would fall down with mortar shells. (Group Discussion, Suchetgarh, October 24, 2019)

Whenever ceasefire violations occur in any location of the border districts, residents get an alarm call to be prepared to leave for safer sites, including relief camps. Women participants have confirmed that the male members start looking for safer places while they stock up the feeders of cattle. When asking Pooja, 30 on the preparedness of displacement in the times of ceasefire violations, "[h]ow do you go to relief camps?" she replied, "[f]amilies with vehicles and resources leave the village quickly, but we do not have enough to move, so we must suffer and wait for outside assistance. In such circumstances, everyone takes care of their personal lives and families" (Personal Interview, Krotana Khurd, August 30, 2019). Thus, an intersectional lens is needed to examine how factors such as socio-economic status and access to resources influence the specific experiences of exploitation and violence in these regions. Furthermore, the study came across the traditional norms and blatant patriarchy where women are taken as symbol of dignity and pride and need to be protected. Many women participants claimed they are not allowed to relocate with their daughters to relief camps. The young daughters and daughters-in-law often fled to safer regions with close relatives or were left at home due to societal dread of being engaged to other men in camps. In order to improve the likelihood of a girl's chosen marriage, which is inappropriate in their customary attitude, they might engage in inter-caste relationships against the family's preference. Before services related to education and health take centre stage, worries about water availability, sanitation, blankets, and clothes still dominate the displacement camps. Authorities usually lack efficient management and relief camp planning due to the unknown duration of ceasefire violations and displacement periods. However, while participants appreciated the efforts of Border Security Forces and their help in difficult times

of border turbulence, still, in the majority of instances, decisions to move are made on the spur of the moment, and the security forces and government cannot afford to provide quick transportation on time. Women who had stayed in displacement or relief camps spoke about their complicated worries regarding the arrangements, facilities, and safety. They lacked adequate accommodations, tents, and other necessities. They commonly revealed that women in camps are compelled to spend their sleepless nights acting awkwardly in the presence of male members. Women often struggle with security and safety in these disorganized camps. The following occurrence was described by Rabbi Devi (pseudonym), 58:

During cross-border firings, a bus was loaded with women and children sent to Chohalla camp on a July evening. There was not a single man from the village on this bus; they simply relocated us to a safer location. The camp was held in a government school with little facilities; we were not provided with power/lights, not even a rug or mat. The school's filthy surroundings and full-grown grass in outdoors instilled fear of snakes, according to someone who claimed to have felt one. We were bound to stay at a naked and open location, keeping watch all night. (Personal Interview, Krotana Khurd, August 30, 2019)

Samrna (pseudonym), her neighbor, age 55, spoke up between the conversation regarding the same camp, saying:

We were only ladies with children here. Unknown adult boys were strolling outside the school's rooms. We became suspicious that we would be robbed or mistreated. They were from a nearby village, one of them claimed, and men standing outside sent him to inquire about what was going on there. But, at the same time, a woman among us phone-called the Police, and two cops arrived in short time and took the youngster with them. Despite this, they had to stay awake all night owing to dread and panic at this location. (Intervention in Interview, Krotana Khurd, August 30, 2019)

Generally, the border villagers took efforts to protect girls from such harassment, such as sending them to a relative's home if they had any at safer places, or having them remain at home with an older or male family member. In the community, Rajni (pseudonym), a 32-year-old mother of two, raised the alarm because she was worried for the safety and security of her daughters in the camps and at a relative's place too:

We do not prefer to take adult girls in the camp, who knows what may happen in the camp ... [Pause with apprehension] I send my daughters to the relative's place and me, myself go to the camp as it does not look good to visit somebody's home every time with the whole family. (Group Discussion, Suchetgarh, October 24, 2019)

The overwhelming majority of mothers who accompanied or sent their daughters or other family members to a relative's home during a ceasefire violation expressed discomfort at being away from home, in other people's houses for an unknown amount of time, and feeling like a burden on others. Another participant of Group Discussion, voiced her worry, saying "[f]or how many days one can stay at others' home, one has to come back ... [struggling for words and pausing] after all, everything is here, house, land and cattle (Suchetgarh, October 24, 2019)."

The new dynamics of the border have resulted in gendered impacts wherein parents of daughters opt for early marriages which hamper their prospects of basic and even higher education. This is exemplified by census 2011 as well as the study's findings. According to the 2011 Census, in the villages of Suchetgarh Panchayat overall literacy rate is 39 percent, with 49 percent of men and 27 percent of women being literate (Government of India 2011). Reflecting these dynamics, Meet (pseudonym), a 21-year-old college student, narrated:

The borderland life is tough where survival instincts dominate and other social good like education of girls are being neglected. Instead of educating girls, here our parents go for short cuts in the form of early marriage preferably outside the borderland sectors. There is hardly a consideration of women's choice of marriage, her education particularly the higher education. (Personal Interview, Bidhipur, October 11, 2019)

Here, the study recognized that the border impacts women in a different way and creates gender-specific victimization which prevents women from realizing their true potential and keeps them limited to their traditional roles of housewives. Likewise, as in any other patriarchal set-up, girls and women are expected to act in accordance with social standards in everyday life. They serve as 'symbols of dignity' for the family and the neighbourhood, and leaving a traditional setting can devastate the home and community. Female family members, especially mothers, are questioned after accusations about a girl's every unexpected action. Given women's interactions with patriarchy and the border at the same time, the gender-specificity is noteworthy. The border's impact on everyday life has also resulted in gendered impacts in terms of the health of borderland women. The study came across three impacts of violent borders on women's life. They start with the many psychological disorders, fears, and trauma that emerge from ceasefire violations. As a result of being on the periphery of the war, they also have a number of economic challenges. Finally, they must manage their well-being, dignity, and social standing throughout the time of ceasefire violations and everyday life.

Women and the family are regularly the targets of terrible incidents on the borders, with many gruesome tales. War and migration cause a lack of resources,

infrastructure, and basic comforts that disproportionately harm women around the world. In male-dominated civilizations, the food and healthcare distribution chains are positioned at the bottom for the women's section of each community. In an interview, Gandhi Nagar, a gynecologist who had worked at R.S. Pura Hospital during ceasefire violations, expressed grave worries about women's health:

For a pregnant woman, the process of displacement and rehabilitation is quite distressing. In the rush to save their lives during Ceasefire violations, a woman nearing her due date usually leaves all of her medical documentation and records of her pregnancy behind. In many circumstances, doctors are forced to take a risk at the last minute without knowing the patient's past medical information, such as blood pressure, ultrasound, and other tests. Doctors must rely only on verbal explanations of the patient's and attendants' criteria.

Pregnant ladies are anxious about their land and cattle as well. Hearing about property destruction and livestock traumatizes them, leading to difficulties in their pregnancy. Additionally, family members, particularly if the husband stays at home to care for the animals, add to the worry of pregnant women. (Government Hospital, Jammu, November 6, 2019)

She also spoke about the rise in polycystic ovary disorder (PCOD) patients in border regions. Despite having a healthy diet (the area does not have a large fast food culture) and working physically in the fields, PCOD instances are increasing in border regions. The displacement and rehabilitation may be to blame for the rise in PCOD in the region. The doctor also voiced worry that one of the factors contributing to the growth in PCOD patients may be the increasing stress brought on by ceasefire violations. Health and health infrastructure can be severely impacted by conflict or catastrophes, which commonly precede injuries/fatalities and displacement in the area. The eyewitness reports of Suchetgarh women highlighted their terrible mental condition, constant fear, and helplessness in the phase of ceasefire violations. When the ceasefire violations in May 2018 occurred, a Swarna Kour, 35, who was three months pregnant expressed at times, with fear on her face:

Before my last pregnancy, I had two miscarriages. During the ceasefire violations, my family and I left house as soon as the firing began, running for safe refuge in terrifying conditions. Fear, hurry, and worry characterized that period, and I was no exception. We made it out of the area without being hurt, but our home was almost completely destroyed by the shelling. (Personal Interview, Suchetgarh, September 26, 2019)

Furthermore, the study claims that the girls and women in the borderland experience a sense of vulnerability as a result of two factors: first, the unidentified physical,

psychological, and material harm they share with all other family members and village residents as border residents; and second, the discrimination they experience due to their gender in the male-dominated military forces of the village and a society based on patriarchal ideals. Traditional patriarchal societies/culture and the male-dominated military atmosphere may be to blame for the mental health of women. Nominally, the border stations in the Suchetgarh region are manned by 12 women constables, a sub-inspector, a pharmacist, a physician, and an assistant security officer, but they are not required to attend the Octroi checkpoint regularly, according to an Inspector of the BSF stationed at Octroi Post, Suchetgarh. There have never been any reported conflict/harassment cases between BSF personnel and locals or women specifically, and nobody has ever raised the issue of military criminal records in the village. However, Suchetgarh women participants, being part of a patriarchal set-up, complained that because the forces are largely male-dominated, it is unpleasant to wander around freely in the neighbourhood at dark and early morning hours. The militarization of borders has its impacts on the borderland women which forces them to live in constant psychological insecurity amidst the surveillance. Women experience suffering in many different ways, some of which are common to all people and others which are exclusive to women. Suchetgarh being a part of the border fortification involves the military's presence, resembling a military cantonment. Significant military posts, guard towers, and patrolling ensure that there cannot be free atmosphere like on the mainland. Moreover, the situation instils social anxiety among the female population of village. Movements inside the home, and outside as well, are psychologically controlled in patriarchal and male-dominated militarized societies. Seemingly, women have to navigate through the military gaze while carrying out basic activities such as going to the market, farming, or cattle-works. Many participants have described the phenomenon of 'the male gaze' which is an unpleasant thing for them. Mosmi (pseudonym), 20, said:

We always feel like someone is watching us, despite the fact that they (military forces) do not intrude on our privacy by commenting/talking to us (Girls) or interacting with us. The BSF personnel are good in behavior; they simply carry out their responsibilities without interfering with our work. But, after all, they are guys, and we always remain under their gaze, therefore we must remain vigilant at all times. In this context, we must also deal with local people, who do not consider it normal if any girl or woman greets or stands near BSF personnel in any way. Boys commonly meet them on the streets and at checkpoints but we cannot do so as bounded by society. (Personal Interview, Suchetgarh, September 26, 2019)

This omnipresent threat of border villages affects their sense of safety and freedom psychologically, if not physically. This not only hampers their ability to

perform daily chores, but also restricts their social interactions and economic activities inside and outside the home. In a way, women's supposedly tranquil everyday lives during peaceful periods are significantly impacted by the constant presence of watch towers and troops (patrolling and moving). The women, especially the young girls, are expected to behave in a particular way due to the foreigners' presence in the village. The study shows that in borderland Indian society, the everyday lives of women are already marginalized, and ceasefire violations, persistent fear of loss (lives and material), and the presence of military troops have intensified this marginalization in a number of ways, directly or indirectly. Therefore, the study concludes, the impact of ceasefire violations on women is fear in regular life, distressing emotional and psychological experiences, along with presence of military posts. Amidst the military conflict, familial and social ties are strengthened by borderland village women. This section mainly shows that the gendered experiences of border conflict are focal points in the ceasefire violations, displacement, and struggles of daily life. It examines the disparate effects of security measures and border challenges on women in comparison to men, exposing the gendered character of borders and border society. However, this victimization does not fully encapsulate the experiences of borderland women, as they also demonstrate significant resilience and contribute substantially to the social and economic fabric of borderland communities. The subsequent section addresses this theme.

Women as Agents of Strength

The study emphasises the gender-specific aspects of borderlands, illustrating how women in these areas manage their lives in the face of the difficulties presented by borders. Ghosh (2020) delves into the daily realities of those residing in border regions, highlighting the profound impact that borders have on their identities and overall life experiences. She analyses the multifaceted nature of borders, which encompass not just political boundaries but also serve as arenas for social, economic, and cultural exchanges. By contributing to the economy, raising families, and engaging in other aspects of border life, this paper positions borderland women as pillars of 'strength' of the family and community. This theme, which emerged from the data, has highlighted women as agents of social strength and cohesion. As a part of borderland societies, women of Suchetgarh have taken part in consistent inter-caste conduct, food sharing, and cultural exchange in everyday life; women do come and assist one another with household duties. However, inter-caste marriages are not acceptable. Yet maintaining inter-family sharing, fostering community ties by sharing duties, and passing down traditional values to new generations, Suchetgarh women are a great social strength of this borderland community. Rajni, 32 described their social and economic bonds in the following words:

We knitted each other sweaters and other handicrafts, which helped during hard times on the social and economic fronts. We make monthly installment payments, which helps women with their financial requirements, while helping out around the house aids with social and familial needs. (Group Discussion, Suchetgarh, October 24, 2019)

The second element of strength that the study came across has been women as economic agents. Women generate between 60 and 80 percent of the food in the majority of poor countries, accounting for half of all food produced globally (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2007). In the village of Suchetgarh, the women are in charge of all household duties, including cooking, cleaning, and animal and agricultural labour. In order to heat their homes and prepare food throughout the winter, the ladies of this hamlet create a form of fuel from dried cow dung. Several girls and women in the village work as tutors and tailors, as well as outside the village as private instructors, aides, and labourers, to help support their families financially. While dealing with cattle, Sansaro Devi, 70 said, "O sister, you can see us doing all the chores, but who remembers our work...?" (senior participant while doing cattle works at her home, Suchetgarh, September 27, 2019). However, in terms of their household's financial status, most rural women do not view their economic empowerment as a source of pride or self-sufficiency, despite their undeniable role as the foundation of the village economy, families, and society at large. From planting to harvesting, they invest their time and energy in the fields. They also prepare meals for their own men and hired labourers who work in their fields. Depending on the family structure and the location of the fields, the Suchetgarh women contribute directly and indirectly to agriculture.

Cecelski (2000) remarked that women have emerged as resource managers and tend to be better at this work than men because they are more impacted and endure a heavier load of labour in both household and economic activities. On average, women shoulder 53 percent of the total work burden in developing countries and 51 percent in industrialized nations, according to World Economic Forum. The women in the village of Suchetgarh make financial decisions in their households, either by themselves or alongside their husbands. Nearly all women think that the social and financial responsibilities of the family are best handled by women since males are unable to do it. Komal (pseudonym), 19, said, "[b]oys do not understand the stress that their families are under, so they simply order what they want, but girls deliberate before making any demands on their parents" (Bidhipur, October 12, 2019). The regular practice of managing household resources, agricultural production, and income makes women wiser to govern and conserve resources at micro-levels. So, it can be concluded that if they are provided more information and understanding of new technologies,

the market, job opportunities, and sustainable development on big platforms, they may show capability in managing resources and others.

During ceasefire-violation displacements, Suchetgarh women endure the camp life together, a third element of strength in difficult times of borders. They share physical and psychological stress and anxiety with each other, helping to continue their collaboration in the period after ceasefire violations. Asha, 40 provided this tale of help for a pregnant neighbor:

During the night of the ceasefire violations, our neighbour, who was in the latter stages of labour, began experiencing pains. It was imperative that she be sent to the hospital right away. Although a vehicle had been provided by the security forces, the fire got tense and prevented us from getting to our destination. We assisted the woman with her typical birth while spending the night at the temple premises close to the Octroi Post. A newborn girl was born into the care of the village women during the night of terror and gunfire. (Personal Interview, Suchetgarh, September 27, 2019)

Ghosh (2020) explores the paradox of security in borders, where efforts to establish security frequently lead to increased unease among the Indigenous communities. But the study analyses the consequences of militarization, surveillance, and ceasefire violations on borders, and opens the way to bypass inter-caste challenges and promote social cohesion in difficult times of active border conflict as well as in daily existence, especially through women. The border region itself is characterized by pervasive poverty, high rates of illiteracy among women and children, and severe violence against women (Banerjee 2010). Unexpected ceasefire violations have a negative effect on the social and educational standards for women (as discussed earlier) on the border, which ultimately affects their personalities and psychological well-being. On the other hand, in the post-ceasefire or supposed peace period, women struggle to normalize the environment at home for their children. Suchetgarh women devote most of their time to raising kids and imparting to them daily living skills. They contribute to the development of society by fostering positive social norms among youngsters at home and by passing down traditional knowledge despite unfavourable physical conditions on the boundaries. By sending children to relatives' homes in advance of ceasefire violations (or whenever rumours start to circulate), involving them in extracurricular activities, and teaching at home the skills of weaving, knitting, and other traditional handicrafts, Suchetgarh women attempt to lessen the impact of border-conflict at family and societal levels.

Regarding opinions about the border situation, almost every girl and woman was against the war mindset. They were also worried about the difficulties people living on the other side of the border might have as a result of

ceasefire violations. When asked how she felt about those who resided on the opposite side of the border, Rabbi Devi, 58 responded, *"Pakistanis living on that side of the Border are also a poor section of people like us; they must also be in stress. The rich people anywhere enjoy, we (poor) all are same everywhere"* (Personal Interview, Krotana Khurd, August 30, 2019). Whereas Zakaria (2018) critically examines political propaganda, the role of educational textbooks and study material in shaping narratives in the Kashmir conflict and sometimes the construction of adversarial identities among youth, it is logical to assume that peer pressure (for enlisting in the military) and professional aspirations are the causes of borderland youths' propensity for total conflict with Pakistan. Dheeraj, 24 while playing on the playground, *"[t]he security forces that surround them motivate them to guard and safeguard their country's and people's borders, respectively"* (Conversation with Suchetgarh Boy at Sattowali Playground, September 20, 2019). The data collected revealed that the Indian military forces also provide great financial stability and respect to their families. Conversely, girls and women in the Suchetgarh do not argue with men in the community. Rather than being emotionally linked to the nation's boundaries, they are more concerned about the protection of their families, pets, and possessions. Rita, 28, home-maker aspired about border-conflict, *"[w]e want calm on the borders so that our lives can be peaceful; we do not want every day strife. At home and with children, everyone should be happy and safe"* (Personal Interview, Bidhipur, October 12, 2019). Thus, Suchetgarh women favour conversation and peace negotiations when the subject of Indo-Pakistan ties is raised. Women, as the foundation of the family and community, are devoted to long-term efforts to establish a more equitable society, according to a number of feminist studies that have focused on the role of women in the struggle (Mazurana & Proctor 2013). This can be seen from women's opinions. Women on both sides may be the most effective mechanism for changing the seven decades of violent relations into peaceful circumstances.

A call for a deeper understanding and empathy towards borderland people has been analyzed through women's narratives in this study. Women are a social and economic strength of borderland communities and play a vital role of strength during conflict and post-conflict periods. There is need for peace and reconciliation considering gendered voices and aspirations of borderland women, providing in-depth insights to the human dimension of Indo-Pakistan border conflicts and aggression. However, women's voices and efforts are often neglected, and dynamics of masculine militarism dominate border management. Women's agency is suppressed, affecting their ability to apply their perspectives, address the gendered impacts of borders, and become a part of policy formulation—they are thereby subject to the political violence of exclusion as well as physical and cultural violence.

Women as an Excluded Section

Suchetgarh women have very little political influence/voice and no involvement in military or border affairs. Through the analysis of political parties, women are highlighted as engaging in electoral politics in a number of nations, including Sweden, the United Kingdom, France, India, and Japan; the studies have shown how obstinate patriarchal ways of acting and thinking can be, either in the ideological left, centre, or right (Enloe 2004). Although India's legal frameworks emphasize women's representation at the grassroots level by providing 33 percent reservation for women in local government bodies such as Panchayats, this has not effectively resulted in their representation and emancipation. Due to the Panchayat's allocated seats for female candidates, it was assumed in the village that a female Panch would need to either have some political experience or political links through family members in order to seek a post. They serve only as the voice of the village's male population through husbands or fathers-in-law. Despite occasional calls for gatherings or meetings, women are less likely to serve in their community. In the case of female voters, they attend the meetings as 'forced participants' whenever it is necessary from a political standpoint or to showcase them during bureaucratic visits. In response to a question on her plans to run for office as a woman Panch of her Panchayat, Rani (pseudonym) stated:

In the most recent Panchayat elections, this ward was reserved for female candidates; prior to that, my husband served as Panch of this ward for two years in a row. My husband, together with the current Sarpanch, campaigned for me in the elections. During the campaign, I made no promises; nevertheless, if someone comes to me or to husband with a problem, he will endeavour to address it. (Krotana Khurd, August 30, 2019)

Her husband, who had been silently listening to the challenges of a female Panch's opinion, interrupted the conversation: *"we [active males and workers of Panchayat] decide most of the Panchayat meetings when to hold and discuss the related issues and matters with males of the village ... What would women do in the meetings?!"*

Furthermore, the study revealed that more politically engaged women and girls are viewed as 'disobedient' in terms of social prospects. Although the locals don't expressly call them ill-mannered, there is frequently whispering behind their backs. Only two or three women, excluding Panchayat members, are politically active in the village, and they do so with their husband's support. Additionally, no village girl or daughter (who is not yet married or younger) shows up to public events or takes part in political campaigns. It has also been noted that the media and political leaders have consistently listened to a one-sided perspective, i.e., the masculine one, when discussing the issues and effects

of border crossings owing to a lack of public input. Consequently, borderland women experience violence through exclusion, which is driven by patriarchal structures in society and the dominance of militaristic doctrines in border management. Despite legal provisions for women's representation at the grassroots level, such as the 33 percent reservation in Panchayats, these measures have failed to ensure their true representation and emancipation.

Relatedly, women's social status and decision-making are still influenced by their family's social, economic, and political position. Daughters and wives are often associated with the family's honour and dignity; systemic marginalization silences women's voices and exacerbates their vulnerability. While some families give decision-making power to women in household matters, it is often based on the consensus of the family's males. Even educated and working women are expected to perform traditional roles in the family. In borderland village life, the idea of marriage by choice ("love matches") arose from talks in the village about how adolescents in camps might interact and form relationships, potentially leading to marriage. Families are hesitant to send their daughters to camps where boys from various villages and castes congregate, which is another social insecurity produced by border conflict. In the displacement/relief camps, unknown people congregate under the common shed in schools and universities. It has been narrated by the participants that even married women have at various times faced misconceptions and accusations from their husbands owing to their interactions with other males in camps.

The Office of the District Development Commissioner, Jammu, established the Centre for Border Youth Training and Empowerment (CBYTE) initiative in Suchetgarh. CDPO R.S. Pura serves as the nodal authority for the project (Jammu and Kashmir Integrated Child Development Services n.d.). This initiative falls under Skill Development, BADP, and J&K. The CBYTE project aims to provide physical and mental training to border youngsters interested in serving in the country's defence forces, increasing their proficiency. The district administration has built playgrounds in all border regions for this project. But, neither district or sub-district government promote the physical and mental development of borderland females or encourage them to pursue their selected vocations under CBYTE. Yuvraj Singh, an Office Assistant at the CBYTE project in R.S. Pura Border Sector, informed that the program has been running in six border zones (Suchetgarh, Arnai, Marh, Chidi, Pragwal, and Khour) as of January 2016. It is currently working with the 13th batch of candidates, with a total enrolment capacity of 70 at R.S. Pura. The candidates have a physical and academic instructor (former Army officers) and receive a monthly grant of ₹600 (Indian Rupees) to cover their food expenses. Singh also updated that "[c]urrently, no border girls have joined in this training and empowerment

programme" (Tehsil Office, R.S. Pura, November 12, 2019). Contradictorily, girls from Suchetgarh village who attend college get to enrol in the National Cadet Corps (NCC), with some of them aspiring to join the military. Girls interested in the scheme reported that the youth training and empowerment program is available only to boys from Border Villages, as there is no specific direction to create CBYTE for girls in the area. The state-led exclusion from opportunities in interesting job areas has also been observed in this sense.

Lastly, by focusing on subjects like Borderland women and their perspectives rather than more conventional investigation into the nature of borders, this study also adds to the body of knowledge on the borderland. To take into consideration women's potential at the intersection of gender and borders, sociological and political research on the struggles and experiences of borderland women is necessary. Women are the torchbearers of borderland families and society, with the potential to help the nation through military and security services, if recognised. They are unpaid labourers at home, despite also being the backbone of the village economy; they are under-represented despite collaborative efforts at social unity during times of trouble and during periods of supposed border peace; and they are ignored by the initiatives of politics, economic distribution, and decision-making bodies of borderlands, as well as by media persons. According to this study, women-centered politics and programmes on these geographical edges have the ability to reshape border politics and security, as well as bring in new social and political positions locally and nationally at large.

Conclusion

This study aims to understand the actual circumstances faced by the borderland women of Suchetgarh village due to ceasefire violations and the hostile behaviour of Indo-Pakistan forces in J&K border regions. The study's feminist methodology helps to give voice to many women's bodies and minds. Such border conflicts result in people losing their lives, losing loved ones, having limbs amputated, losing cattle and agricultural production, losing homes and common property, being separated from one another, and being relocated to new locations/relief camps under ambiguous conditions for long periods of time. Like their male counterparts, women in this Indo-Pakistan Border village experience two sorts of victimization: one is brought on by the long-standing patriarchal structure of traditional culture, and the other is brought on by militarism and its associated everyday violence. Due to ceasefire violations as well as additional obstacles provided by society, borderland women are experiencing a physical and psychological onslaught. They support the economy, educate children, and improve other aspects of border life. They are pillars of social unity and strength during the challenging times of ceasefire violations and

displacement. On the other hand, because of patriarchal structures of borderland communities, they are also excluded from socio-political and security/military fronts. According to this study, women's involvement in security and other related fields—as well as the connections between women in the Border Security Force (BSF), women in political leadership, and women in rural communities—could lessen the negative effects of borders on women. This study also opens up new opportunities for feminist security studies regarding women-specific policies in respect to borderland studies. If borderland women were able to participate in the economy, political system, and security arrangements as well as the transition to new socio-political roles on the geographical margins of Jammu, they would benefit from doing so. Feminist critiques of Hans Morgenthau's classical realism, such as those by J. Ann Tickner (2001) and Cynthia Enloe (2004), highlight the neglect of gender and women's roles in traditional international relations. This study examines women's narratives to advocate for peace dialogues and processes free from militaristic mindsets, suggesting that women on both sides could transform decades of violent relations into peaceful conditions. Understanding and empathy toward borderland people, considering their gendered voices and aspirations, provide valuable insights into the human dimensions of Indo-Pakistan border conflicts and aggression.

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**SPECIAL
SECTION**

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European Union Borders with Ukraine

Edited by:
Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, with
Gyula Ocskay,
Martín Guillermo Ramírez,
Martin Van der Velde,
and Tatiana Shaban



**SPECIAL
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INTRODUCTION: European Union Borders with Ukraine

**Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, with
Gyula Ocskay
Martín Guillermo Ramírez
Martin Van der Velde
Tatiana Shaban**

This special section, European Union Borders with Ukraine, provides a unique assessment of the understudied process of cross-border relationship-building that takes place between Ukraine, the European Union, and EU member states. Collectively, the six papers look at the progressive alignment of Ukraine with the Visegrad countries, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, and Ukraine, assessing the state of democratic and security concerns, regional development and education, healthcare, culture, and energy, as a multipronged way to understand cross-border integration and European integration.

This special issue was made possible in November of 2023 by a partnership that brought together various pan-European organisations for the establishment in Košice, Slovakia, of a four-day event connected to the annual meeting of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), including the conference titled:

European Integration of Ukraine across borders (the Conference)—Ukraine on the road to EU integration (reconstruction, cooperation, pre-accession). What lessons to learn for Ukraine from the V4 countries' experiences in the field of cross-border cooperation?

The rationale for the unfolding events were set in 2014 when Ukraine signed with the European Union (EU) the **EU–Ukraine Association Agreement**, and since then, undertook together several steps to adapt Ukraine to Common European values, to improve Ukraine's administrative system, and more broadly, to introduce and align Ukraine with the Union Policies.

In 2023, it was generally agreed upon that the integration process had been very slow and seemed long lasting (Shaban 2019). Also and most importantly, in June 2022, only six months after submitting its application

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for European Membership, because of the Russian invasion, Ukraine had been granted 'candidate status'. The general understanding was that after the war, Ukraine would have to make remarkable efforts to reach 'accession status into the EU'.

The *Košice* events provided excellent opportunities to gain a better understanding of the achievements of Ukraine in matters of EU integration from 2017 to 2023. And it was also an opportunity to assess the geopolitical role Ukraine played between the EU and Russia.

The Hungarian Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI), as well as the largest European regional gathering and European lobby group for regional cooperation, the AEBR, had agreed to partner together and to bring along numerous other public sector organisations and universities to work on a broad assessment of lessons learned and to provide best practices from the experiences for all Ukrainian partners of the Four Visegrad countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, which had joined the EU in 2004.

The AEBR, CESCI, CESCI Carpathia, the University of Prešov (Slovakia), the Technical University of Liberec (Czech Republic), the WSB University (Poland), and the National University of Uzhhorod (Ukraine), as well as the University of Victoria (Canada), the Province of Gelderland and Radboud University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, all contributed time and funds to this broad partnership on cross-border cooperation in the EU and with Ukraine.

All together numerous other partners including academics, policy and decision makers, and elected officials from Belgium, Canada, France, Hungary, Israel, Poland, Slovakia, the United States, and Ukraine contributed to the conference and other activities, including the AEBR annual conference and executive meeting and the AEBR/Borders in Globalization (BIG) Cross-Border School.

The event was co-sponsored by a CESCI held Visegrad grant (a fund created by the governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) to advance ideas for *sustainable regional development in Central Europe* and was made up of four main events, which together gave life to four days of intense discussions.

The partnership allowed for a BIG Cross-Border School to shoulder the core events, i.e., the AEBR members' annual conference and the AEBR executive meetings. Those events were complemented by an ambitious program for an international conference led by CESCI; it brought together scholars from the EU, central and eastern Europe, and Ukraine.

At inception, the idea of the event was to contribute to the *Košice* Platform, a *Central and Eastern European*

Partnership for experts and practitioners focusing on the Eastern Partnership. It was to organise, for instance, activities that would facilitate knowledge exchange in cross-border cooperation among Central and Eastern European public and not-for-profit organisations. Another goal of the *Košice* platform was to inform and support EU policy makers and national governments in their work with the Central and Eastern regions of Europe and, in particular, cross-border cooperation.

Such goals were reflected in the key players of those partnerships, including the CESCI, the AEBR, and the European Commission Directorate in charge of enlargement policy and for the management of relations with countries in the Eastern and Southern Neighborhoods of the European Union, i.e., the EU Commission's Directorate General NEAR (*Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations*) (DG Near).

In part due to the *Košice platform* of October 04, 2016, the city of *Košice* had become the symbol of such cooperative approaches in European Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC). The originally modest platform was able to bring together both the CESCI and the AEBR as well as many partners from across Europe alongside several universities in support of Central and Eastern border regions partnerships to enhance effective European integration.

On Day One, events were kicked off by the AEBR BIG_Lab Cross-Border School (CB-School), which was then followed Day Two, with the annual AEBR statutory events: **Conference and Board/executive meeting**. Day Three then focused on central and eastern partnerships with the CESCI's international conference: the three days final programme (as it happened), including links to the all presentations, are available on [the AEBR main webpage](#). Day Four was spent in Ukraine with a study visit to Uzhhorod.

The idea of the AEBR Border School came together in 2017. Noting that stakeholders operating within European border regions—including governmental bodies, private enterprises, civil society organisations, and academic institutions—consistently had a deficit in systematic knowledge exchanges, a representative of the Dutch provinces of Gelderland and Overijssel, and the German federal state of North-Rhine Westphalia, and the secretary general of the AEBR, floated the idea of an annual Border School. The CB-School was conceived as an annual meeting between professionals and academics working on cross-border issues. The goals were to fight the fragmentation of ideas and to counter the limited reciprocal dissemination of research findings and best policy outcomes, and, to bring together border managers and professionals and the academic sector.

In response to those observations, the Dutch Nijmegen Centre for Border Research at Radboud University,

together with the AEBR and the Province of Gelderland, initiated a strategic intervention aimed at fostering sustained and structured knowledge exchange between practitioners and academics. The initiative targeted long-term collaboration among (early-career) academics, (emerging) policymakers, and professionals. The cornerstone of this initiative was the establishment in 2017 of a Cross-Border School in Cáceres (Extremadura, Espana/Portugal border), with the support of Interreg Danish/Dutch (DE), employing an interactive format, including workshops and presentations, to facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building. The intent was to institutionalise the CB-School as an annual event, thereby creating a recurring platform for scholarly and policy engagement. The meeting in Košice in 2023 was the 7th such School, which has been organised annually without interruption, despite the COVID pandemic and other challenges. The CB-School program in Košice focused on cross-border cooperation with Ukraine. It was introduced by the vice dean of the faculty of Law, Professor Alena Krunkova, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University of Košice, and the AEBR secretary general Martín Guillermo Ramírez. A first panel discussed Ukrainian war refugees in Poland in 2022–23, a second panel looked at cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and the Visegrad countries in various sectors: energy, education, and cross-border labour markets. A third panel comparatively reviewed challenges to cross-border cooperation before and during the pandemic. The fourth session was a roundtable to debate what research and practicing borders are.

Day Two focused on the statutory meetings of the members of the AEBR and their Annual Conference. Established in 1971, the AEBR is a European organisation inspired by the **European Charter for Border and Cross-border regions**. In 2022, to attract attention to the Russian invasion of eastern and southern Ukraine and to join efforts that enable Ukraine's accession to the European Union, the AEBR welcomed the invitation of the CESC and CESC Carpathia to host their annual activities in Košice in 2023, because of the preexisting *Košice Platform* but also because Košice is located about 100 kilometers from the Ukraine border close to the border city of Uzhhorod in Zakarpattia Oblast, Ukraine (i.e., Transcarpathian Region).

The AEBR and CESC agreed on a suite of events that could take place over several days. The AEBR annual conference's three initial panels launched the conference with a panel dealing with "general challenges for Cross-Border Cooperation", including a presentation by the European Commission on the post-2027 Interreg by Ms. Simona Pohlova, deputy head of the DG Regio Unit on Internal borders/Interreg cross-border cooperation; a Horizon Europe project on EU citizens' perceptions of borders by Professor Sara Svensson (Halmstadt University, Sweden); and a keynote presentation by professor David Newman (Ben Gurion University, Israel) on the borders of the Gaza Strip. Two panels

dealt with "CB Labour Markets", with a perspective from practitioners by Frederic Siebenhaar of the AEBR task force on Labour Markets, EGTC Pamina (France/Germany), Leyre Azcona of the EGTC Euroregion Nouvelle Aquitaine Euskadi Navarra (France/Spain), and Madelene Kutt, Innlandet Country Council in Norway; and another series of contributions from the institutions, with Balazs Lengyel from the European Labour Authority, Niina Malm, Member of the Finnish Parliament, and Dirk Peters, legal expert at DG Regio.

On Day Three, the CESC partnership conference focused on the role of borders in Ukraine's EU accession. This was addressed through panels supported by the International Visegrad Fund and organised by the CESC and CESC Carpathia in cooperation with the University of Prešov (Slovakia, SK), the WSB University (Poland, PL), the Technical University of Liberec (Czechia, CZ), and the National University of Uzhhorod (Ukraine, UA). All together, representatives from more than 30 countries attended.

The panels had two-fold aims: (i) to summarise the efforts Ukraine has made for EU integration, and (ii) to collect and share experiences of the four Visegrad countries on the role of cross-border cooperation in the adaptation of EU policies and values.

Accordingly, in the first panel, Oleksandr Ilkov (Director General of the Government Office for Coordination on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine) gave an overview of the process of adopting the EU acquis; Myroslava Lendel (Vice-Rector of the National University of Uzhhorod, Ukraine (UZhNU) focused on the cooperation activities of the tertiary educational institutions; Mykhailo Buromenskyi (Co-chairman of the Commission on Legal Reform under the President of Ukraine) gave an overview on the progress of legal harmonisation during which 90 acts had been approved by the Ukrainian Parliament by that time; finally, Yaroslav Lazur (Dean of the Faculty of Law of UZhNU) summed up the evolution of the legal background for cross-border cooperation in Ukraine.

The second and third panels included presentations on the evolution of cross-border cooperation in the Visegrad countries, illustrated by representatives from Academia in the four Visegrad Countries: Universities of Prešov (SK), Ludovika of Public Services in Budapest, Technical of Liberec (CZ) and WSB in Dąbrowa Górnicza (PL); and various cross-border structures; *Neisse-Nisa* Euroregion (DE/CZ/PL) and *Tisza* (HU/UA), *Tritia* (CZ/PL/SK), and *Via Carpathia* (HU/SK) EGTCs.

The program was completed with a round-table discussion whose participants (Nathalie Verschelde, deputy head of unit of the DG REGIO, Eduard Buraš, former advisor of the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Michal Lebduška, research fellow of the Czech Association for International Affairs, Wojciech Opiola, professor at the

University of Opole, and Gyula Ocskay, secretary general of the CESCO spoke about the role of cross-border cooperation in the EU integration process of the four countries.

For Day Four, as a post-conference shoulder activity, the CESCO and CESCO Carpathia organised a study visit for the AEBR members and partners to Uzhhorod (Ukraine) where the participants were briefed on the situation in Ukraine directly from the regional governor Viktor Mykyta, the head of the regional council Roman Saray, and vice-rector of the UZhNU University Ivan Myroniuk.

The following papers emerged during and after the events thanks to a call for papers set by the organisers to invite participants to showcase internationally their works; works done and necessary, and current works that encourage and foster cross-border coordination, cooperation and collaboration in borderland regions between Visegrad countries and Ukraine. Note that the authors are both professionals and researchers, and together they provide a unique review of the complexity of cross-border coordination and cooperation in that part of the EU, i.e., the Visegrad countries and Ukraine.

Andrzej Jakubowski (Professor, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland) in "From Commuting to Connectivity? The Evolution of Cross-Border Telework in Cross-Border Labour Markets" explores the interplay between cross-border telework and traditional cross-border labor mobility, focusing on two case studies: Cascadia (US/Canada) and the Greater Region (EU). It examines how national borders and telework shape the development of digital cross-border labour markets and the regulatory frameworks of telework. The article concludes that cross-border telework complements and reshapes traditional cross-border labor markets, presenting both opportunities and challenges for regional economic integration in a digitally connected world.

In "Cross-Border Cooperation in Slovak-Ukrainian Borderlands", Martin Lačný (Professor, Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, University of Prešov, Slovakia) and Jana Michalková (PhD, Research fellow, Department of Geography and Applied Geoinformatics, Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences, University of Prešov, Slovakia), analyse the socio-economic situation of Prešov and Košice, two self-governing regions in Slovakia's Transcarpathian region on the other side of the Schengen border in Ukraine. Their analysis of cross-border cooperation tendencies leads to policy recommendations, including future regional development strategies across the Slovakia-Ukraine borderlands. The analysis focuses on the impact, i.e., the challenges and opportunities as perceived by local borderland actors, of such cooperation on the local cross-border economies.

Julianna Máté, Monika Koľvek, Iveta Kubeková, and Daniela Kolcunová who each work for the Via Carpatia EGTC, in "Two Regions, One Vision: The Cross-Border Mission of the Via Carpatia EGTC" review cross-border activities and implemented projects of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Via Carpatia (EGTC), which was founded in 2013. The EGTC consists of two members: the Košice Self-governing Region in Slovakia and the county of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén in Hungary. This EGTC operates on a territory with an area of just over 14,000 square kilometers, where over 1.4 million inhabitants live in the cross-border region. The grouping initially planned well over 90 projects and €30 million in investments. As of 2023, projects in education, healthcare, and culture mobilized €19 million and sustained over one thousand jobs: thus, bridging the boundary line in the process thanks to trust and better cross-border governance.

In "Digitization in Higher Educational Institutions as a Catalyst for Cross-border Cooperation", Marija Mendzhul (Professor, Doctor of Science of Law, Department of Civil Law and Procedure, Faculty of Law of the Uzhhorod National University) analyses the digitalisation of educational services at higher educational institutions. The focus is a legal analysis of cross-border cooperation between higher educational institutions in Ukraine and the EU. The research focuses on the EU regulatory environment at the EU and Ukrainian levels and its impact on academic mobility. Along with a review of current academic projects between the EU and Ukraine, the paper's core suggestion is a proposal for a more effective development of cross-border educational services at the external border of the EU, including problems of online services and of control and quality of educational processes.

Tatiana Shaban (BIG_Lab non-resident fellow, University of Victoria) in "The Role of Cross-Border Cooperation in Democracy Promotion Between Slovakia and Ukraine: The Zakarpattia (Transcarpathia) Region" studies the development of existing cross-border relations between Ukraine and Slovakia and looks more specifically at the Prešov and Košice autonomous counties of the Slovak republic with the Ukrainian Zakarpattia region. The core finding is that cross-border cooperation practices stand as a vehicle of Ukraine's bottom-up integration with the European Union. Such cooperation also helps establish mutual public trust in neighbouring border communities with their local and regional authorities.

In "EU-Ukraine Cross-Border Energy Cooperation: Trends and Directions for Post-War Reconstruction" Iryna Yaremak (Professor, Department of Electric Power, Electrical Engineering and Electromechanics, Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine) presents a comprehensive up-to-date analysis of the Ukrainian integration into the EU energy market. After a detailed overview

of the Ukrainian cross-border sectoral cooperation with its neighboring states (Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and Moldova) the paper presents the scope of destruction of Ukrainian energy infrastructure due to Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Such study of interstate powerlines across the borders of member states of the EU and including Moldova underscores the importance of energy cross-border potentials and EU-Ukraine cooperation.

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ARTICLE
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From Commuting to Connectivity? Cross-Border Telework and the Evolution of Cross-Border Labour Markets

Andrzej Jakubowski

The emergence of digital communication technologies and the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the nature of work, giving rise to cross-border teleworking as an important dimension of labour mobility. This study explores the interplay between cross-border telework and traditional cross-border labour mobility, focusing on two case studies: Cascadia (US/Canada) and the Greater Region (EU). Through the analysis of desk research, legislative documents, and in-depth interviews, the study examines how national borders and telework shape the development of digital cross-border labour markets. The findings show that while cross-border telework uses digital tools to foster economic integration and reduce geographical constraints, its growth is hampered by inadequate regulatory frameworks. The article concludes that cross-border telework complements and reshapes traditional cross-border labour markets, presenting both opportunities and challenges for regional economic integration in a digitally connected world.¹

Keywords: cross-border telework, cross-border labour markets, cross-border integration, cross-border functional linkages, Cascadia, the Greater Region.

Introduction

The digital space is proving to offer exceptional opportunities for cross-border activities, including international trade in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and ICT-enabled services (Brunet-Jailly 2021), information and knowledge transfer, value chain development, e-commerce, remittances (ESPON 2024), telemedicine (Whitten & Cornacchione 2010) and teleconferencing, as digital solutions help to reduce border frictions that often dampen cross-border relations (Richardson & Cappellano 2022). This development has

changed our understanding of the functional dimension of cross-border integration (Durand 2015), focusing on the physical connectivity (Bertram et al. 2023) facilitated by cross-border transport infrastructure and manifested in the movement of goods, services, and people (Durand et al. 2020; Durand & Decoville 2020; Turner et al. 2022).

Digital transformation also extends to labour mobility. The COVID-19 pandemic, combined with rapid

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advances in digital communication tools, has significantly reshaped the way work is done, with millions of people worldwide shifting to remote work (OECD 2021a). While digital solutions have enabled people to work virtually from anywhere, they have also fuelled the growth of international virtual labour mobility, commonly referred to as cross-border telework, making labour mobility an even more diverse phenomenon. These changes have also created additional challenges and consequences in areas such as taxation, labour law, insurance and access to healthcare, social security, data protection, and the implementation of additional legal benefits (Bruurs 2023).

According to Castells, “the space of flows is not placeless, although its structural logic is. It is based on an electronic network, but this network links up specific places, with well-defined social, cultural, physical, and functional characteristics” (1996, 413). This means that “cyberspaces coexist with geographic spaces, providing a new layer of virtual sites superimposed over geographic spaces” (Kitchin 1998, 403). On the one hand, digital linkages extend the geographical realm. On the other hand, digital linkages change the geographic space (Zook 2007). This means that although digital solutions provide connectedness globally, the development of digital cross-border linkages may be place-based and often remain territorially defined. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the development of digital linkages in cross-border labour markets (telework) and to contrast them with more traditional (physical) forms of cross-border flows, namely cross-border labour mobility and commuting. More specifically, by focusing on cross-border telework, it aims to illuminate the relationship between cross-border economic linkages in both geographical and digital space and the role of the national border in the development of cross-border labour markets.

The article draws on two case studies—Cascadia, a bi-national economic and environmental region spanning the US–Canadian border, and the Greater Region, encompassing Luxembourg and adjacent border areas of France, Germany, and Belgium—to empirically examine the interplay between cross-border labour markets, national borders, and cross-border telework. These regions were selected for their illustrative value and analytical potential. Both exhibit high levels of cross-border integration, with established economic linkages, supportive policy frameworks, and a strong presence of sectors conducive to telework. Notably, during the COVID-19 pandemic, both regions recorded some of the highest proportions of teleworkers in their respective contexts—Cascadia within the US and Canada, and the Greater Region within the European Union. At the same time, the two regions offer a basis for a meaningful comparison due to contrasting institutional and structural contexts. They differ in the characteristics of their cross-border labour markets, the permeability and governance of their

borders, and the broader frameworks of supranational, intergovernmental, and interregional integration in which they are embedded. This juxtaposition allows for a nuanced analysis of how telework develops in differing cross-border settings, shaped by both shared features and divergent governance and labour market dynamics.

The paper relies on a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research, legislative analysis, and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The integration of rich empirical data—including statistical information, policy documents, and interview findings—offers a comprehensive, multidimensional perspective on the phenomenon under study.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: the next section provides an overview of the literature on cross-border workers, labour markets, and telework. The case study analysis section examines the Cascadia and Greater Region cases to provide an empirical examination of cross-border labour markets and telework. Finally, the concluding section discusses the findings of the study.

Literature Review

Cross-border commuting and cross-border labour markets

As the processes of de- and re-territorialization of state borders deepen, national economies and labour markets are undergoing significant changes. One of the main manifestations of these changes is the development of cross-border labour markets, which provide workers with access to more diversified job opportunities and enterprises with access to a wider pool of skills. Cross-border labour mobility, which is at the heart of cross-border labour markets, reflects the dynamics of globalization, migration policies, and regional economic integration. The literature highlights the complex interplay between economic incentives, geographic factors, and socio-political contexts as key elements shaping cross-border labour catchment areas, understood as geographical regions spanning national borders where people regularly commute for work (Böhm & Opiofa 2019; Turner et al. 2022). These territories are arguably the most common type of cross-border functional areas, which are regions that span the borders of two or more countries functioning as single, interconnected socio-economic and/or spatial systems despite administrative divisions (Jakubowski et al. 2022). While cross-border commuting can enhance economic opportunities and foster regional integration (Sohn 2014a), it also creates a number of challenges, including employment regulations, health insurance and healthcare issues, and tax regulations.

One of the central themes in the literature is the economic rationale for cross-border labour mobility. The

'push and pull' theory posits that cross-border mobility and commuting are primarily driven by economic factors, including regional income differentials and employment opportunities (Buch et al. 2009; Comerio et al. 2020). This view is supported by a rich literature highlighting how wage differentials and geographical proximity (Pires & Nunes 2017) reinforce the economic underpinnings of asymmetric cross-border movements from poorer to richer countries, and hardly vice versa, as individuals seek better employment opportunities across borders (Decoville et al. 2013). However, cross-border commuting can also improve economic performance on both sides of the border by fostering interaction between regions, thereby generating economies of scale and agglomeration economies (Broersma et al. 2022; Möller et al. 2018).

While traditionally viewed as barriers to mobility and exchange, borders have increasingly been conceptualized as resources that can be utilized for economic, political, and social advantages. Rather than simply obstructing flows, borders can generate opportunities for cross-border cooperation, market creation, and labour specialization (Sohn 2014a). They often serve as catalysts for the development of border regions, encouraging the emergence of cross-border clusters, special economic zones, and enhanced connectivity between adjacent jurisdictions (Scott 2012). From this perspective, the border is not a static dividing line but a dynamic space where actors actively negotiate and leverage differences in regulatory, economic, or cultural contexts to their benefit (Brunet-Jailly 2005).

However, cross-border commuting is not only determined by economic factors. The conditions for the development of cross-border mobility are largely determined by border openings and political reforms that facilitate cross-border commuting and allow workers to participate in the labour market under similar conditions as local residents (Beerli & Peri 2015). A particular role in this regard is played by policy processes at the supranational level, such as the European integration process, based on the historical steps of the establishment of the Schengen area, the abolition of systematic border controls, and the increase in the permeability of national borders (Cavallaro & Dianin 2019; Gottholmseder & Theurl 2007), which alternate labour supply and demand dynamics on both sides of the borders (Beerli & Peri 2015; Bello 2020). Conversely, tighter border controls can exacerbate labour shortages, demonstrating how policy decisions on border regimes can directly affect labour market conditions (Devadoss & Luckstead 2018).

Finally, cross-border commuting depends on transport infrastructure and existing transport modes (Kouti & Ramirez 2010). A coherent cross-border transport network is essential to facilitate efficient commuting and enhance regional integration (Kramarz et al. 2020; Nordregio et al. 2023), but insufficient cross-border

transport options remain a significant barrier to cross-border activity (Bertram et al. 2023; Medeiros 2019). This barrier could be partially removed with the rise of teleworking and virtual migration, which leads to less transport (Hartmann 2019). Undoubtedly, telework adds another layer to the understanding of (cross-border) labour markets, providing new opportunities for cross-border workers and changing existing socio-spatial dynamics.

Telework and the jobs that can be done remotely

Historically, work has been closely associated with specific physical locations. However, this link began to weaken as work became increasingly centered on information that could be managed remotely. The digital revolution, which has introduced a wide range of tools and technologies, has further weakened the dependence of work on location, allowing many information-based tasks to be performed virtually anywhere with access to the internet and electronic devices (Graham & Anwar 2019). As Standing (2016) observes, this shift has led to a significant migration of labour without a migration of workers.

According to UNECE (2022, 47), telework refers to a specific form of remote work that relies on personal electronic devices such as computers, tablets, or telephones (either mobile or fixed) as essential tools for performing work. While there is considerable overlap between telework and homeworking – with many teleworkers working from home and many homeworkers teleworking – the two concepts remain distinct. Telework should not be also confused with digital work, which is characterised as both income-generating and digitally intensive, rather than simply facilitated by digital networks (Graham & Anwar 2019). Furthermore, while telework is often equated with telecommuting, there are regional preferences: "telework" is more common in Europe, while "telecommuting" is more common in the United States. For example, the Washington State Energy Office describes telecommuting as part-time work or a transportation alternative that allows employees to work from home or an office near their residence instead of commuting (Johnson 2013). Therefore, telework is considered a broader and more relevant concept overall.

A first wave of teleworking took place in the 1980s, but rapid development of this phenomenon has occurred more recently, with the boom brought about by induced changes in the labour market during the COVID-19 pandemic reaching a peak in the 2020s, when almost half of the workforce in Australia, France, and the UK was teleworking, as well as around a third in the US and Canada (OECD 2021a). Although teleworking has a potentially broad application, not all jobs can be performed remotely. Dingel and Neiman (2020) estimate that only 37% of jobs in the US can be performed entirely at home, with considerable variation across

industries. The current literature on telework highlights its transformative effects on labour markets. Research suggests that telework can increase job satisfaction and productivity by providing greater flexibility and reducing commuting time (Felstead & Henseke 2017), and increase job accessibility, especially for those in remote or underserved areas (De Vos et al. 2017).

Cross-border telework

Before the advent of ICT tools, cross-border work was limited to workers physically crossing international borders to work in another country. However, advances in digital platforms and other technologies have changed these patterns. Cross-border workers now include a wide range of individuals, such as temporary migrants, daily cross-border commuters, seasonal workers, consultants travelling internationally for specific projects, and cross-border teleworkers who work remotely for companies in one country while living in another. In addition, nomadic workers who have no fixed place of residence are a distinct subset of this group (Choudhury et al. 2021).

Cross-border teleworking provides access to pools of skilled workers in other parts of the world. There are many reasons for the current interest in this area: competitive market pressures, skills shortages, wage differentials, and workers' expectations of a better work-life balance and less commuting. However, cross-border 'teleworkability' depends on the job, with different occupations having different degrees of tasks that can be performed remotely (UNECE 2022). In general, it is most common in knowledge-intensive services. For example, most of the world's IT workforce teleworks, while more than 18% work remotely across borders (Maggioli 2022).

Based on the definition provided by Eurofound (2020), cross-border telework refers to any work arrangement where dependent or independent workers perform their tasks remotely for an employer located in a different country than their own, utilizing digital technologies such as networks, laptops, mobile phones, and the internet. As outlined by Zwaan (2022), three distinct categories of cross-border telework can be identified. Each of these forms of cross-border telework carries distinct legal and practical implications, influenced by the international nature of the arrangements and the specific characteristics of the work relationship.

The first refers to telework conducted under a formal employment contract, where workers are paid by companies that do not maintain a legal entity within the worker's jurisdiction. In such cases, despite the absence of a local branch or subsidiary, the employment relationship is governed by the contract between the worker and the employer operating abroad (Zwaan 2022). Such an arrangement generates a range of implications, including the fact that it does not exempt

a foreign employer from the obligation to comply with the labour laws of the country where the employee performs their work. It may also lead to difficulties regarding tax and social security obligations, as well as the enforcement of employee rights (OECD 2021b).

The second, self-employment, encompasses cross-border telework performed by owners of unincorporated enterprises, commonly referred to as own-account workers. These individuals are not engaged in traditional paid employment but instead earn income through commercial transactions. Within this category, two subtypes can be distinguished. Independent workers engage in commercial agreements without hierarchical dependency on a client or organization. In contrast, dependent contractors are formally self-employed but maintain a hierarchical dependency on a client (UNECE 2022). This form offers the greatest flexibility for both parties but carries the risk of false self-employment, lack of employee protection, and issues related to coverage under the social security system (Stefanov et al. 2021).

Employment via Employer of Record (EOR) introduces yet another, third model of cross-border telework. Here, a third-party organization, the EOR, is responsible for hiring and paying employees on behalf of another company. This arrangement may involve a local entity established within a specific jurisdiction or an online platform designed to facilitate the administrative complexities of managing a cross-border remote workforce (Zwaan 2022).

The phenomenon of cross-border telework is still largely understudied. The case studies presented in the next section aim to shed light on the phenomenon of cross-border telework, including its drivers, barriers, and consequences for the further development of cross-border labour markets.

Methodology

A three-stage study included desk research, document analysis, and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The desk research—based on secondary data from administrative sources, relevant reports, and news articles—aimed to assess the development of cross-border teleworking in the context of connectivity and cross-border labour mobility. To assess the level and dynamics of telework and cross-border telework, data were drawn from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (US), Statistics Canada, STATEC (Luxembourg Statistics), the Transfrontier Operational Mission (MOT), and the Chamber of Employees of Luxembourg.

Document analysis included the analysis and interpretation of legislation at national, EU, and international level in order to understand the conditions created by existing regulatory regimes for the development of

telework. Publicly available legal databases—including Congress.gov, GovInfo.gov, the Justice Laws Website, and EUR-Lex among others—were utilized in the search for relevant documents. The query employed keywords such as: cross-border telework, cross-border telecommuting, cross-border telework + labour standards, cross-border telework + occupational health and safety, cross-border telework + employment standards, and more.

Finally, the results of semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted between November 2022 and May 2023 were used to gain new insights into the development of cross-border telework in Cascadia. Interviews were held with 11 representatives from US companies employing teleworkers residing in Canada, as well as members of business associations and public sector institutions with extensive knowledge of the Cascadian labour market, particularly in relation to telework. The interviews utilized a flexible guide with open-ended questions designed to explore participants' perspectives in depth while allowing the interviewer to adapt the sequence or probe further based on responses. This approach ensured both consistency across interviews and the collection of rich, nuanced insights. Interviewees were asked, among other things, about the scale, dynamics, and prospects of the cross-border telework market, the main drivers and obstacles to its development, and the influence of different regulatory regimes on cross-border teleworking.

Case Study Analysis

Cascadia (US/Canada)

The idea of a binational economic and ecological region in the Pacific Northwest and Western Canada, with the Vancouver–Seattle megalopolis at its core, known as “Cascadia”, emerged in the 1990s (Alper 1996; Brunet-Jailly 2006; Loucky & Alper 2008). Once largely dependent on the export of raw materials, the area is now one of the world's leading centres of high-tech industries. The region's rapid economic development in recent decades has been accompanied by significant levels of cross-border commuting, shopping, and trade in goods and services, which have increased significantly with the passage of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Konrad & Nicol 2008). Cascadia is also home to a cross-border innovation ecosystem promoted by the Cascadia Innovation Corridor (CIC), which is developing multidimensional cross-border economic linkages (Cappellano 2019; Trautman & Cappellano 2019). This initiative has been supported by Microsoft Corporation, which—like many other US companies from Washington State—shows interest in better access to talent from Canada and the de-bordering of the cross-border labour market (Cappellano et al. 2021; Friedman et al. 2019).

According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Washington State is the 11th largest economy in the US, with nearly 3.6 million jobs, compared to 2.8 million jobs in British Columbia. The structure of gross value added (GVA) in both Washington State and British Columbia is dominated by finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing, information, and professional and business services. There are many similarities in the employment structures of Washington State and British Columbia. Both have a significant share of service sector jobs, more than 80% of total employment. Furthermore, the two main cities of the Cascadia region, Vancouver and Seattle, share a similar economic cluster portfolio, characterised by a large number of employees in business services, e-commerce distribution, information technology and analytical instruments, financial services, and marketing, design, and publishing (Cappellano 2019).

One of the distinctive features of the two regions is the immense importance of the high technology sector in the economy and the employment structure. For several decades, Washington State has been home to large and growing sectors in software publishing and the logistics and aviation industries with companies like Microsoft, Amazon, Boeing, Zillow, and Redfin centered in the Seattle area. The economic impact of the technology industry accounts for more than 20% of the Washington state economy, which is the highest rate in the US and well above the national average of 8.8%. In the Seattle–Tacoma–Bellevue metropolitan area, the industry accounts for nearly 30% of the local economy (Saldanha 2023). In British Columbia, companies providing telecommunications services, software, and motion picture production & post-production, among others, generate about 6.6% of the province's economic output (Statistics Canada 2022b). Approximately 70% of BC's high-tech firms are located in the Mainland/Southwest region, most of them in Metro Vancouver (Schier 2021), the fastest-growing high-tech market in North America (CBRE 2022), often described as “the new tech hub” (Vancouver Economic Commission 2023).

The growing importance of the high-tech sector in Cascadia is reflected in the structure and dynamics of the labour market. Washington State has the highest concentration of technology workers in relation to its overall employment base in the US (Saldanha 2023). In British Columbia, the technology sector employs over 150,000 professionals, 75% of whom work in Metro Vancouver. This represents about 6.6% of jobs (compared to 6.0% nationally) (Schier 2021). Despite the lower importance of the high-tech sector in Canada's economy compared to the United States, Canada has recently experienced a much higher rate of employment growth in the sector (CBRE 2022). The sector's rapid growth and increased demand for labour are putting upward pressure on wages. Technology workers in BC earn 15% more than the national average in the high-tech sector. However, wages for high-tech software/services workers in Vancouver are on average 30%

lower than in Seattle. Washington State is second only to California in this regard, with Seattle behind Silicon Valley and San Francisco (Schier 2021; CBRE 2022).

Labour mobility, often characteristic of many border regions, is relatively limited in Cascadia, particularly in relation to developed trade flows (Gibbins 1997). According to the results of a 2018 passenger vehicle interception survey conducted by BPRI in partnership with the Whatcom Council of Governments at four ports of entry between British Columbia and Washington State, only 3% of Canadians (CAN) and 8% of Americans (US) were crossing the border for work/business purposes (Border Policy Research Institute 2019). Despite the geographical proximity, Canadians make up a relatively small proportion of the working population in Washington State. In 2021, Canadian-born individuals accounted for less than 3.9% of the foreign-born workforce (approximately 42,000) (Migration Policy Institute 2023). In general, the data underscore the limited cross-border labour mobility within the Cascadia corridor (Richardson 2017).

Washington State and British Columbia are among the states/provinces with the highest percentage of people working remotely in the United States and Canada, respectively (Burrows et al. 2023; Jakubowski 2023). This may be related to the structure of the Cascadia region's economy, with developed high-tech industries, including the IT sector (Richardson 2017). However, the number of cross-border teleworkers in Cascadia is very difficult to estimate. Some light is shed on this issue by the results of Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS). In June 2022, when the LFS included questions on this topic for the first time, 2.6% (87,000) of employees in Canada who work most of their hours at home report to an office or worksite in another country. The proportion of cross-border teleworkers was highest in British Columbia, with about 4.3% of homeworkers (range 2.6% to 6.4% at the 95% confidence level), or about 16,000 employees. At the same time, in British Columbia, about 10.6% of home-based workers mostly interact with people in another country (55,100), compared with a national average of 7.5% (Statistics Canada 2022a). Although it is likely that a significant proportion of teleworkers are employed at workplaces in the US, the results of this survey do not answer the question of what percentage of teleworkers report to an office or worksite located in the US or Washington State.

According to the interviewees, in some sectors (e.g., software development and other ICT or ICT-enabled services), cross-border teleworking has been developing for at least a few years, while in other sectors it has only become more visible with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the more general shift towards teleworking that it has triggered. The cross-border telework market has recently become more diversified, but it is highly differentiated from sector to sector. While cross-border teleworking is most prevalent in

the software development sector, this industry also has the widest and an almost global range of connections. This makes the market for cross-border teleworking in the information technology services sector fuzzy, characterised by many multidirectional links. Given the nature of the industry, cross-border teams of workers are not limited to the Cascadia region. Rather, the ability to access cross-border teleworkers has led some high-tech companies to seek them out around the world, taking advantage of the cost benefits. There has also long been, and continues to be, a migration of BC workers to California (Silicon Valley) rather than Seattle. Additional opportunities for hiring cross-border telecommuters have been provided by online platforms such as Deel (www.deel.com), Oyster (www.oysterhr.com), or Amazon MTurk (<https://www.mturk.com>), which enable cross-border hiring and global payroll.

According to respondents, the development of cross-border teleworking in Cascadia also reveals another interesting feature. In the pre-pandemic period, sourcing talent from Canada was mainly the domain of large and medium-sized companies. They did this by attracting knowledge migrants using institutional capacities that allowed them to overcome barriers related to US visa policies, or by establishing offices on the other side of the border (such as the Microsoft Development Centre or Amazon Vancouver). Small (and to some extent medium-sized) firms have not been able to compete on an equal footing for Canadian labour. The development of cross-border telecommuting in the Cascadia region has levelled the playing field between firms of different sizes and can therefore be considered more favourable to small firms.

Based on respondents' statements, two main groups of determinants and drivers of cross-border telework in Cascadia can be distinguished: those of a general nature and those specific to the region. The first group includes more general factors, such as the digitalization of the economy, the spread of teleworking forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the dynamic development of teleworking tools and the greater efficiency of teleworking compared to stationary work, and the increasing popularity of this form of work in the broader context of the cultural changes that are taking place. However, the importance of these factors remains highly sector-specific. In addition to factors of a general nature, it is possible to identify several factors that influence the development of cross-border telework in Cascadia. First, cross-border telecommuting facilitates access to talented knowledge workers in British Columbia. Second, a key factor influencing the development of cross-border telework in Cascadia remains the wage gap (wages for high-tech software/services workers in Vancouver are on average 30% lower than in Seattle). Third, although cross-border teleworking is a solution that significantly reduces the role of geography in international flows of workers and the way work is performed, geographical proximity and the associated

lack of time zone differences positively affect the progress and efficiency of tasks performed by workers in international teams. Fourth, the linguistic and cultural proximity of Americans and Canadians positively influences the development of telecommuting in Cascadia. Another factor is the relatively good knowledge of the labour market by Washington State companies.

On the other hand, the main barrier for the further development of the cross-border telework identified by the interviewees is the lack of adequate regulation of cross-border telework, both in the US and Canadian legal systems and at the international level (bilateral and within USMCA). It is especially relevant to challenges such as employment regulations, health insurance and medical care issues, tax regulations, laws protecting the flow of intellectual property across borders, and data security. With both NAFTA and USMCA emphasizing the regulation of foreign trade and investment, cross-border labour migration has been and continues to be largely neglected. In parallel, only some of the challenges of cross-border telework have been regulated in bilateral agreements. Regulations and their interpretation in the US and Canada differ, leaving some legal aspects of cross-border telework unclear, such as the applicable labour and employment laws or health and safety regulations for teleworkers abroad. Generally, however, both the US and Canada do not have specific requirements governing cross-border remote work. All of this prompted one of the experts to describe the cross-border telework market as a "regulatory wild west".

The Greater Region

Located in the heart of Europe, the Greater Region covers an area of approximately 65,400 km² with a total population of around 11.5 million. It is a vibrant transnational area encompassing the border regions of France (Grand Est, mainly Lorraine), Belgium (Wallonia), Germany (Saarland and part of Rhineland-Palatinate), and the whole of Luxembourg. It is known for its cross-border cooperation and integration within the European Union and its unique position as a cultural and economic crossroads. Over the years, regional and local actors from the Greater Region have developed different forms of cross-border governance, such as the Euroregion of the Greater Region, formerly also known as SaarLorLux, and the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), which promotes cooperation in areas such as economic development, environment, and education and serves as a model for cross-border cooperation in other areas (Böhm & Drápela 2016; Decoville & Durand 2017; Nelles & Durand 2014).

The geographical core and economic engine of the transnational region is the city of Luxembourg. Once dominated by the steel industry, Luxembourg has successfully diversified its economy to become a global financial centre (OECD 2015). The financial sector

currently accounts for around 25% of the country's GDP, with Luxembourg serving as a key operational centre for numerous international financial institutions. Beyond finance, Luxembourg has fostered growth in information technology, telecommunications, and logistics, further broadening its economic base. The economic landscape of the Greater Region is further enriched by sectors such as agriculture, particularly viticulture in the Moselle Valley, and a burgeoning tourism industry that capitalises on its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. This diverse economic structure underlines the region's adaptability and resilience, with Luxembourg playing a central role in its economic dynamism. However, there are notable economic differences across the region. Luxembourg's GDP per capita is among the highest in the world, while other parts, such as the rural areas of Wallonia and Lorraine, face economic challenges.

Luxembourg's strong economic position and the consequent development of a cross-border labour market have consolidated its position as a cross-border metropolis (Decoville et al. 2013; Sohn 2014b; Sohn et al. 2009) and the centre of an important cross-border functional area, benefiting from the EU's single market, which promotes the free movement of goods, services, and labour. In the EU, barriers to migration and mobility are at an absolute minimum (free movement of persons) and there is freedom to move without hindrance to work, but only for citizens and permanent residents within the zone. Indeed, Luxembourg's economy relies heavily on workers from neighbouring countries, whose cross-border commuting is one of the region's main characteristics (Carpentier 2012; Drevon et al. 2018).

The number of cross-border workers in Luxembourg has grown steadily over the past 30 years, attracted by the country's dynamic economy and higher wages. There are 479,000 people working in the country, of whom 47% are cross-border workers, mainly from France. Only 25% of the workforce is of Luxembourgish nationality (STATEC 2023). In 2022, over 222,000 workers commuted daily to Luxembourg, making the city the most common destination for cross-border commuters in the EU. The main area of origin for cross-border workers is the French region of Grand Est, particularly Lorraine, from which 113,000 cross-border workers commute. From Belgium (Région Wallonne), 49,000 workers commute every day, mainly from the province of Luxembourg, while Germany's regions of Rheinland-Pfalz and Saarland contribute 45,000 and 14,000 respectively (Schütz & Thiele 2023).

Cross-border workers in Luxembourg are key to the local economy, especially in the financial, technology, and services sectors. As a global financial centre, Luxembourg has had to become highly specialised in order to compete with other financial centres while maintaining and developing its business volume. In order to maintain its competitive advantage, Luxembourg

needs highly qualified human resources, which it has so far found in the Greater Region (Fromentin 2021). A wealth of literature points to other conditions conducive to labour migration, the most important of which are higher wages and social benefits in Luxembourg (Albanese & Marguerit 2022; Belkacem & Pigeron-Piroth 2020; Carpentier 2012) and geographical proximity as well as a developed transport infrastructure (rail and road) that facilitates daily commuting.

The global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has had a profound effect on the way work is organised in Europe, leading to a surge in the popularity of remote working. These changes were particularly evident in Luxembourg, where remote working became a key element of the labour market, especially for those engaged in cross-border work. The pandemic led to the implementation of lockdowns and travel restrictions, compelling numerous employees to perform their duties from home. In response to the travel restrictions and border closures that occurred in 2020, several European countries, including France and Luxembourg, introduced emergency regulations that permitted the widespread adoption of teleworking without disrupting existing tax and social security systems. These regulations enabled cross-border workers to work from their country of residence, preventing the shifting of tax and insurance obligations (MOT 2022).

The proportion of teleworkers in Luxembourg was already relatively high before the COVID-19 pandemic (20% in 2019). The proportion rose sharply from 26% to 52% in 2020, reflecting the widespread shift to teleworking caused by the closures and restrictions imposed. After an initial peak in the following months, the share of teleworkers declined, stabilising at around 38–40% in 2021. After the easing of restrictions in 2022, telework remained stable, with the proportion of teleworkers in Luxembourg between 32% and 34%, an increase of 70% compared to the level before the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that telework has been maintained as a standard option in some sectors (STATEC 2023). According to a report by the Chamber of Employees of Luxembourg (Schütz & Thiele 2023), at the end of 2023, one third (29%) of Luxembourg employees were still teleworking regularly.

Teleworking in Luxembourg has therefore played and continues to play an important role in shaping today's labour market. It has become common practice in many sectors, especially in the digitally skilled professions that dominate the Luxembourg labour market. However, telework in Luxembourg has proved particularly important for frontier workers, who make up almost half of the country's workforce. During the pandemic, it allowed many of them to remain in their country of residence and provided them with work during COVID-19. Currently, after the pandemic, a significant factor contributing to the importance of teleworking

is the growing challenge of traffic and commuting in and around Luxembourg, which has prompted consideration of flexible working solutions (Kennedy 2024) that allow workers to reduce their daily commute, thus saving travel costs and time (European Commission 2024). Employers have also recognised the value of teleworking, using it as a way of structuring work that offers employees greater flexibility and the opportunity to work from home. Thus, as Kennedy (2024) writes, Luxembourg is a "country embracing the teleworking lifestyle".

However, despite the ease of working from home, there are income tax and social security implications that affect both the employee and the employer. In the case of Luxembourg, these challenges are particularly relevant given its unique employment structure and reliance on workers from France, Germany, and Belgium (European Commission 2024). As one of the main recipients of cross-border workers, Luxembourg offered a flexible approach to teleworking during the pandemic. Its agreements with France, Germany, and Belgium allowed cross-border workers to telework up to a certain number of days per year without changing their tax residence status. These agreements provided a framework for managing the tax implications and social security obligations of teleworkers, although some problems remained. A partial solution to these problems was provided by measures taken at EU level, which led to the adoption of the Framework Agreement on the Application of Article 16(1) of Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004 (2023). This document aimed to address the complexities created by the growth of cross-border telework by allowing derogations from the usual "25% rule" for social security legislation. It allows the social security legislation of the employer's country to apply even if telework is less than 50% of the working time in the employee's country of residence. This will ensure smoother administrative procedures and better adaptation to the realities of cross-border telework. The framework agreement also included a definition of cross-border telework.

Discussion and Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated profound changes in the way work is done, as millions of people around the world began to work remotely. Although many people have returned to their offices since the end of the pandemic, much work that does not require daily face-to-face interaction with clients, supervisors, or colleagues is still done remotely (Finlayson 2021). These developments have also paved the way for the rise of international virtual labour migration (cross-border teleworking), making labour mobility an even more diverse phenomenon. A comparison of two case studies, namely cross-border telework in the Cascadia and Greater Region border regions, allows us to look at the

determinants, dynamics, and prospects of cross-border telework in different spatial, economic, and political contexts and to draw some conclusions.

First, the study shows that COVID-19 did not introduce entirely new trends in cross-border teleworking, but (exponentially) accelerated existing trends. Forced by periods of closure and supported by rapid improvements in digital communication tools, the shift towards telework in both cases reflected earlier linkages, i.e., high cross-border labour mobility prior to COVID-19. While cross-border teleworking did not reach significant levels in Cascadia during the pandemic, it became very popular in some cross-border areas of the European Union (MOT 2022). A good example is the Greater Region, where prior to the pandemic there was a developed cross-border labour market, characterised by a significant number of cross-border workers and cross-border commuters, among others. The outbreak of the pandemic has led a significant proportion of cross-border workers to switch to teleworking, although today, in the absence of restrictions, this most often takes the form of hybrid work. Both examples also suggest that cross-border telework does not necessarily develop where there is simply a high potential for remote working, but where the cross-border labour market is characterised by strong functional links.

Second, the situation in the cross-border telework market depends on the size and scope of the labour markets in cross-border areas. Cross-border flows are often conditioned by existing disparities, e.g., in terms of job availability and wages. These differences between the two labour markets can be exploited by workers seeking employment on either side of the border (Decoville et al. 2013; Jakubowski 2020). This is evident in the case of the cross-border labour market with a main core in Luxembourg, which forms a large catchment area covering the border areas of neighbouring countries and concentrating intra-central cross-border flows. In the case of Cascadia, the situation is somewhat different. On the one hand, workers in British Columbia are much more likely to telecommute to firms in Washington State than vice versa. The high level of education at Canadian universities and more liberal immigration policies have long made British Columbians an attractive group of potential employees for companies in the booming high-tech industry in the Seattle metropolitan area. Another important factor is the existing wage gap (Richardson 2017). In Washington State, on the other hand, the cross-border labour market is characterised by global connections and rivalry with California. Indeed, both metropolitan areas—Seattle and Vancouver—are characterised by a very large supply of jobs and seek to attract knowledge workers from around the world. This means that the development of virtual labour markets is subject to two opposing processes: globalisation and regionalisation. The development of digital solutions makes it

possible to work from anywhere (digital nomads) and to attract skilled workers from almost anywhere in the world. Nevertheless, as the Internet tends to produce economic geographies with an increased number of "conversations" (via e-mail and other electronic media) between distant locations, it often requires localized clusters where face-to-face interaction can take place (Leamer & Storper 2001).

One of the main barriers identified is the lack of adequate regulation of cross-border telework. Due to its transnational nature, much of today's digital labour is not bound by regulations (Graham & Anwar 2019). According to Policy Horizons Canada (2016), "virtual work is relocating the job from a regulated environment to an unregulated one where current labour law does not necessarily apply". By breaking the link between the country of residence and the place of work, telework forces changes in the implementation of existing legal frameworks related to employment, including labour and tax laws, employment standards, occupational health and safety, and equality. In many countries, including the US and Canada, there is no specific legal status for employees who work remotely from another country. However, this does not mean that cross-border teleworking takes place in an unregulated environment. As noted by Graham and Anwar (2019, 185), "if digital labour is seen to take place in a global digital market, some would argue that the reason why it is largely unregulated is that it is unregulatable". To counter this idea, they recognize that "digital work is not global. Rather, it is international. It has clear concentrations, and always/inherently falls under the jurisdiction of at least one place". It proves problematic in this regard to determine under which jurisdiction a cross-border teleworker falls, and to what extent. For example, the lack of a specific legal status for cross-border teleworkers in Cascadia means that direct employment of teleworkers is still rare compared to self-employment or employment through EOR. In the case of the Greater Region and, more broadly, the European Union, an attempt has been made to address at least some of these issues through the adoption of the Framework Agreement on the Application of Article 16(1) of Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004. However, there is essentially no coherent global regulatory framework for cross-border telework. Cross-border telework requires an appropriate policy agenda at the international level to address many unresolved issues, particularly a supportive legal framework to remove the uncertainty associated with the status of cross-border teleworkers and to secure employee benefits. At present, regulation, as opposed to technological solutions, does not allow for fully borderless telework.

These observations lead to the general conclusion that the linkages in the digital space reflect, to some extent, the linkages in the geographical realms. We may conclude that digitalization enhances traditional

cross-border labour market linkages in certain contexts, such as enabling remote meetings with international partners and forming global working groups. In other cases, it replaces traditional connections, as seen in the shift from labour migration and cross-border commuting to teleworking. Additionally, it fosters entirely new types of cross-border interactions, exemplified by the rise of online platforms facilitating cross-border recruitment and global payroll management.

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Cross-Border Cooperation in Slovak-Ukrainian Borderlands

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The present policy report looks at the recent empirical research findings on barriers to cross-border cooperation (CBC) and the effects of cross-border interaction on local economies and regional development as perceived by local cross-border cooperation actors in Slovak-Ukrainian border regions. It compares the differing degrees of attention paid by regional authorities to the opportunities provided by the changing character of the border and exogenous factors influencing CBC-based development impulses.

Keywords: Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands, Schengen border, cross-border cooperation, regional development.

Introduction

The border regions of Ukraine and the neighbouring EU countries can be usually considered as peripheries that are not the most important centres of economic activity. Their development potential depends largely on the conditions for mutual trade and cross-border cooperation (CBC). From their mutual proximity and connections, they can draw productive advantages and learn to build on their strengths and economic development opportunities (Liikanen et al. 2016, 33–35).

The borderland on the Slovak side of the Slovak-Ukrainian border includes the self-governing regions of Prešov (8,993 km², pop. 810,000) and Košice (6,755 km², pop. 775,000); the Ukrainian side is the Transcarpathian region (12,777 km², pop. 1,282,000). The lack of transport connectivity is one of the main challenges in the analysed border area, especially since the region is bisected by the Schengen external border.

Not only the small number of crossing points but also their distribution and capacity (e.g., weight limitation) and the bottlenecks of the cross-border road and rail networks pose problems. On the 97-km Slovak-Ukrainian joint border section, only two road crossings accommodate vehicles (Vyšné Nemecké-Uzhhorod; Ubľa-Malyi Bereznyi). The third road border crossing (Veľké Slemence-Mali Selmenci) is intended solely for pedestrians and cyclists. Waiting times at border crossings often run for several hours, which is not conducive to collaborations requiring physical contact, including economic ones (e.g., labour market commuting) and person-to-person meetings (CESCI 2020, 68–71; Brenzovych et al. 2023, 89–91).

According to analyses conducted by the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, the optimal use of cross-border cooperation with Ukraine under the

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Figure 1. Slovak Prešov and Košice Self-governing Regions Bordering Ukrainian Transcarpathian Region. Source: the authors.

conditions of the Association Agreement, and within it, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (AA/DCFTA) represented an opportunity to increase the annual turnover of bilateral trade by potentially €1 billion (Duleba 2005). However, in the current context, the nature of exogenous factors has been fundamentally and dynamically changing. Restrictive anti-pandemic measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have closed the Schengen border in many ways in recent years (referred to as re-bordering or covid-fencing), the daily functioning of border regions has changed dramatically during particular pandemic waves, and the border has become simultaneously a testing ground for existing and novel forms of cross-border cooperation. Subsequently, in 2022, the exogenous factor of the war in Ukraine re-opened this border in many ways (in the sense of de-bordering) and significantly influenced migration flows and border management, as well as the forms and intensity of cross-border cooperation. Following the onset of the war, Ukraine became a candidate country for accession to the EU, thereby changing a significant pair of exogenous factors (the implementation of the AA/DCFTA), which have in the last few years determined the conditions and dynamics of cross-border cooperation.

State of Play

The Prešov Region is an industrial and agricultural region (2023 regional GDP per capita over €14,000; unemployment slightly below eight percent). Key economic sectors in the region include processing industries, namely food, based on local agricultural production, clothing, textiles, wood processing (specializing in furniture and interiors), motor vehicles, and other transport industries. Electrical engineering and chemical and pharmaceutical industries are also important, while rubber, plastic products, metals, and metal products are key strategic industries. There is no heavy industry located in the region (Slivková et al. 2022; Brenzovych et al. 2023).

The economy of the Košice Region (2023 regional GDP per capita over €19,000; unemployment slightly below seven percent) encompasses all sectors from food to metallurgy. Its potential is dependent on its strong industrial base in the Košice agglomeration and in the Michalovce, Spišská Nová Ves, and Košice districts, where the largest concentration of large companies and small and medium-sized enterprises can be found. Regional GDP is very sensitive to the performance of the largest employers in the area, as well as to investment inflows, especially foreign investment. In recent years, foreign direct investment in the Košice Region has mainly benefited the engineering, IT, automotive, and chemical industries. The regional economy is shaped by the strong industrial, financial, research, and educational base in the Košice agglomeration, which has the potential to boost growth across Eastern Slovakia (Rosičová & Kováčová et al. 2023; Brenzovych et al. 2023).

Transcarpathia's regional economy (2021 regional GDP per capita over €19,000; unemployment over 11 percent)¹ is mainly dependent on cross-border trade, wine production, and forestry, including wood processing. The industrial complex in the Transcarpathian Region ranges from mining to mechanical engineering to the production of essential goods including food. The region's machine-building industry manufactures computers, electrical and electronic products, electrical equipment, machinery, and motor vehicles. One third of enterprises in this sector are engaged in toll manufacturing and are increasingly dependent on foreign partners, which hinders the expansion of domestic enterprises that specialize in the production of raw materials and semi-finished products, mainly under contracts with foreign partners. Moreover, the sale of unprocessed wood is having a negative impact on the woodworking and furniture industry, with the region becoming an exporter of low-grade wood (Duran et al. 2019; Brenzovych et al. 2023).

Slovak-Ukrainian Research on Cross-Border Cooperation

The first comprehensive research project, entitled "Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine and Cross-border Cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine: Implications and Opportunities" (AASKUA, project code: APVV-15-0369),² was implemented by the Institute of Political Science at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Prešov over the period from 2016 to 2019.

Recent follow-up research includes a representative opinion poll of residents of the border areas, carried out from July 2021 to August 2022 as a part of the project "Safe and Inclusive Border between Slovakia and Ukraine", which was implemented by a consortium of organizations led by the Bureau of Border and Foreign

Police of the Presidium of the Police Force/Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic with the support of the EEA Grants (SIBSU, project code: GGC01005).³

In case of the AASKUA project, the data collection focused on surveying the positions of a wider circle of local cross-border cooperation actors took place from November 2017 to January 2018, a few months after the introduction of the visa-free regime in Ukraine (for more details: Lačný & Polačková 2019). In the case of the SIBSU project, data collection in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands was conducted from December 2021 to January 2022, shortly before Russia's invasion of Ukraine (for more details: Benchak et al. 2023).

Perceptions of Local Cross-Border Cooperation Actors

Respondents in the AASKUA and SIBSU projects were asked to identify barriers to CBC, understood as conditions or activities that hinder or restrict the free movement and interaction of people, capital, goods, services, ideas, etc. In particular areas (infrastructure, border-crossing, the level of CBC support, and general and economic—geographic conditions as barriers), the total mean values of responses ranged around the middle of the scale between “no barriers” and “insurmountable barriers” (corresponding to the permeability of the border between two regions of the same country). Although the respondents were of different backgrounds and experiences, comparison of the results of both surveys provides a picture worth noting. The most significant, persistent barriers to CBC perceived by local actors can be categorized as follow: corruption, security issues, and frequent changes of business rules. Moreover, in the SIBSU survey, the respondents identified two additional factors that they thought were major obstacles to cross-border cooperation at that time: namely, political instability and health concerns. While the first of these barriers was more systemic, the health concerns were associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, as the survey was conducted in winter 2021/2022.

On the other hand, local actors in the particular sub-dimensions used in both surveys identified the following as relatively low barriers to CBC: telecommunications (telephoning, postal mail, and Internet access); support for CBC by NGOs; differences in religion, language, and culture; and the size of nearby markets on the other side of the border (for more details: Lačný & Polačková 2019, 30–46; Benchak et al. 2023, 7–19). Among the economic and geographical barriers identified by respondents to both surveys, there was a low purchasing power resulting in the difficulty of expanding business. In this regard, more targeted help from the state would be beneficial, as it would allow the regions to attract more private investment, especially

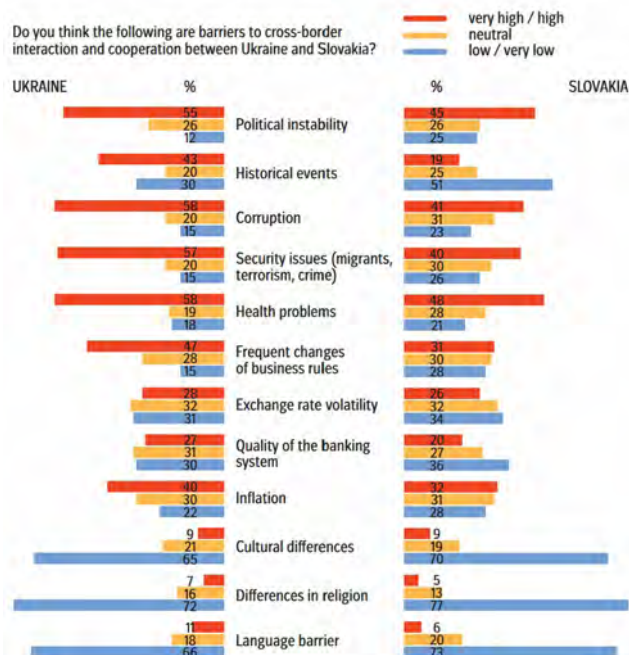


Figure 2. Perceived Barriers to Slovak-Ukrainian CBC. Source: reproduced from Benchak et al. 2023, 17.

for private businesses, as concluded by Benchak et al. (2023, 40).

The most significant and persistent difference in the perceptions of Ukrainian and Slovak local actors has been related to support from European organizations, especially the EU. In the case of both the AASKUA data from 2017/2018 and the SIBSU data from 2021/2022, Slovak respondents saw support from European organizations as the largest obstacle to CBC among the monitored factors, while for Ukrainian respondents this represented one of the lowest barriers (compare Lačný & Polačková 2019, 62–66; Benchak et al. 2023, 26–27). However, this finding indicates the need to strengthen EU support for the Slovak border regions and to target a communication campaign to support CBC, especially in the direction of Slovak actors and local communities in the districts near the Slovak-Ukrainian border, since Ukrainian CBC actors appeared to be rather satisfied with the support from the EU.

In both surveys, according to Slovak and Ukrainian local CBC actors, more intense cross-border interaction had a rather positive impact on the local economies and societies; however, the difference in responses from Slovak and Ukrainian respondents was statistically significant across some of the assessed factors. The replies of Slovak respondents were slightly more neutral than those of Ukrainian respondents, while the perception of more intense cross-border interaction by the Ukrainian respondents appeared to be more positive. Slovak respondents rated a prospective possibility of completely open borders within the wider Europe

and the immigrants from Ukraine working in Slovakia as the relatively least positive impact of more intense CBC (at the level of a slightly negative evaluation). In contrast, the Ukrainians saw opportunities in fully open borders, and respondents in both countries acknowledged the importance of joint research and regional planning, which could inspire regional authorities trying to coordinate regional development with the neighbouring country. Within this context, both Slovak and Ukrainian respondents saw the most positive impact of intense cross-border interaction in cooperation between universities, research institutes, etc., in cultural interaction and in terms of local exports to the other side of the border (compare: Lačný & Polačková 2019, 52–55; Benchak et al. 2023, 19–21). At the same time, it is necessary to add that among respondents on both sides of the border, the predominant opinion was that both countries benefited from mutual cooperation, and that both border zones benefited from more intense cross-border interaction.

Respondents assessed the effectiveness of particular CBC policies as largely positive both in the AASKUA and SIBSU surveys, except for national CBC policies, which were perceived significantly more critically than regional CBC policies or the CBC policy of the EU. In particular, local actors on both sides of the border considered the policy of cultural cooperation, the education and research cooperation policy, the CBC policies of the NGOs, and the European Union's CBC policy to be the most effective. They considered the following to be relatively less effective (at the level of neutral evaluation): cooperation policies on environmental issues and natural disasters, cooperation policies on organized crime,

cooperation policies on migration, and a trust-building policy. Slightly more critical views were present among Slovak respondents. The local CBC actors considered minorities and their organizations, cultural associations, NGOs, universities, and research centres as the most active CBC actors, while private businesses and local and regional state administration were considered the least active ones (at the level of neutral or moderately critical assessments) (for more details: Lačný & Polačková 2019, 62–71; Benchak et al. 2023, 26–28).

In case of both surveys, perceptions of local CBC actors regarding the partnership of Ukraine, Slovakia, and the EU can be considered relatively significant correlates of local actors' views on the effects of cross-border economic interaction, cross-border cooperation, and the effects of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine. Local CBC actors who considered Ukraine or Slovakia as a reliable partner have shown a (moderately strong) tendency to positively evaluate the impacts of various forms of cross-border economic interaction and cross-border cooperation. At the same time, Slovak and Ukrainian actors, perceiving the EU as a reliable partner for Ukraine, did not show a tendency to conclude that the EU should primarily benefit from the implementation of the Association Agreement, but were more inclined towards the opinion that Ukraine would benefit from its implementation. The predominantly positive perceptions of the effects of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement also correlated positively with the assessment of the effectiveness of CBC policies. Slovak respondents who positively evaluated the impact of the Association Agreement on local, regional, or national CBC policy also showed a moderately strong tendency to positively assess both the effectiveness of local and regional CBC policies and the effectiveness of national CBC policies. Ukrainian respondents who positively assessed the impact of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement on local, regional, and national CBC policy also showed a moderately strong tendency to positively evaluate the effectiveness of local and regional CBC policies, but only a weak tendency to positively assess the effectiveness of national CBC policies (compare Lačný & Polačková 2019, 101–109; Benchak et al. 2023, 27–29, 39–42).

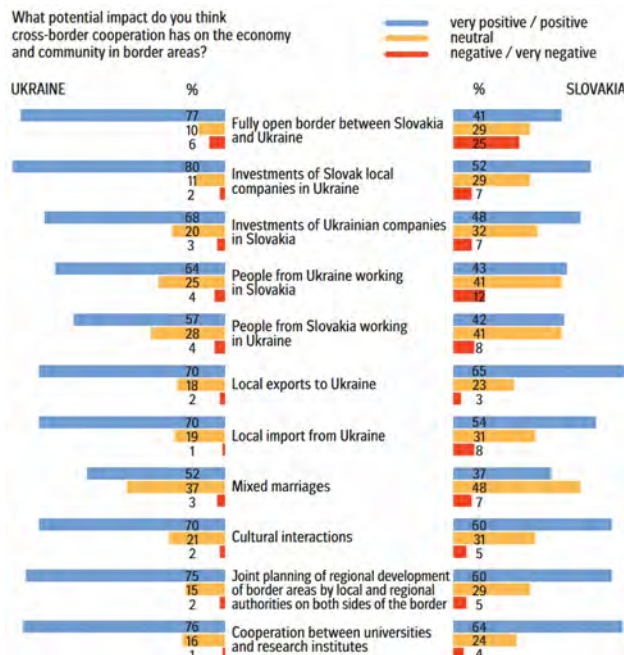


Figure 3. Perceived Potential Impact of Factors on CBC Development. Source: reproduced from Benchak et al. 2023, 20.

Implications for Regional Development Management

In the field of regional development management of borderlands, cross-border cooperation is being utilised as one of the significant tools generating growth impulses for regional economies and a synergistic effect in the use of existing resources and capacities in cross-border entrepreneurship, as well as in cross-border public services. Cross-border cooperation and cross-border public services contribute to cohesion by connecting border regions more effectively, supporting cross-border flows, developing functional

areas of regional economies, overcoming gaps in service provision, increasing the efficiency of production and service provision, opening new perspectives, and ensuring the sustainability of interregional achievements (Mariančíková & Király 2022). From this point of view, when formulating strategies for the regional development of border regions, the identification of opportunities and barriers to cross-border cooperation and the subsequent incorporation of the findings into strategic objectives and operational measures are very important.

In the above context, the strategic documents prospectively setting the development priorities of the Prešov self-governing region, the Košice self-governing region, and the Transcarpathian region should by default include cross-border cooperation in the portfolio of tools for achieving defined development goals. When analysing these documents, however, we see a different degree to which the strategies employed by individual regional authorities reflect the importance and need of using cross-border cooperation in the regional development, as well as a different level of attention paid to the opportunities wrought by the changing character of the border and exogenous factors influencing CBC-based development impulses. The Economic and Social Development Program of the Prešov self-governing region for the years 2021–2030 currently envisages the support of cross-border cooperation explicitly in the field of tourism and the support of improved access to the TEN-T infrastructure and cross-border mobility. In the currently available Economic and Social Development Program of the Košice self-governing region, there is stated intent to support the development of east–west and north–south transport corridors and the connection of adjacent cross-border regions; interest in the continuation and development of cross-border cooperation with Ukrainian regions is declared here as well. In contrast to these strategic documents of the Slovak border regions, the Regional Development Strategy of the Transcarpathian Region from 2021 to 2027 includes cross-border cooperation among the elementary growth factors of the regional economy, while considering it a tool for accelerating competitiveness and innovation of the regional economy, for removing cross-border asymmetries and achieving development levels of Central European cross-border regions in the medium term. In this strategic document, the regional self-government of the Transcarpathian region declares its interest in developing particular ties based on cross-border cooperation with the countries of the Carpathian macro-region (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania), or with the regional self-governments of the border regions of these countries, especially in the fields of transport, construction of road and border infrastructure, spatial and territorial planning, environmental protection, tourism, promotion and protection of cultural heritage, provision of social services, and the creation of cross-border clusters such as industrial parks, science parks, eco-parks, cross-border

parks and logistics centres, and business and start-up incubators. With regard to the use of the Interreg program to support cross-border cooperation projects, the Prešov self-governing region focuses primarily on the Interreg Poland–Slovakia Cross-Border Cooperation Program from 2021 to 2027, while the Košice Self-Governing Region focuses mainly on the Interreg Hungary–Slovakia Cross-Border Cooperation Program for the same period. Because the Transcarpathian region borders several EU member countries, it is oriented to cross-border cooperation programs for Poland–Belarus–Ukraine, Hungary–Slovakia–Romania–Ukraine, and Romania–Ukraine, as well as the Danube Transnational Program (Lačný 2023, 118–124). A brief comparison of the different approaches of regional development management actors to the utilisation of cross-border cooperation points to the need to develop joint solutions for managing the regional development of the Slovak–Ukrainian borderlands and to update strategic objectives with regard to the new exogenous factors (e.g., Ukraine’s recovery plan). Coordinated management of the regional development of border regions could contribute to a more efficient use of opportunities, including the planning, financing, and implementation of development projects.

One of the possible practical solutions is institutionalizing the cooperation of regional development management actors in the form of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), which is a multinational entity that facilitates and supports territorial cooperation with the aim of strengthening economic, social, and territorial cohesion and overcoming obstacles, including the implementation of operations supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, and the Cohesion Fund (European Union 2014). Coordinated management of regional development within the EGTC would have the potential to ensure harmonization of strategic planning of regional development of the respective border regions on both sides of the Schengen border and synergy in the use of opportunities, including the financing of development projects.

Policy Considerations and Perspectives

The conventional objective of cross-border cooperation is the removal of barriers and other factors that contribute to the division of political and economic entities across the border. For the Slovak–Ukrainian border, its open character can be a great vision and opportunity for the regional development of the border area. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that cooperation mechanisms at the external Schengen border of the EU have to face a different reality than the internal borders of the EU, where the objectives of cooperation are concentrated exclusively on cohesion and balancing differences between border regions. The specificity

of the situation at this particular border is primarily due to the gradual implementation of the Association Agreement and the gradually changing nature of the border. Throughout this process, the border is successively reproduced and acquires new roles. It still functions as a barrier and filter, but its partial permeability is increasingly enabling the development of cross-border activities. In this context, the EU brought the necessary impulses not only in the form of financing but also in terms of ideas and policies (Lačný et al. 2022). Since Ukraine became a candidate for EU membership in 2022, it may be included in the EU and the Schengen area. This adoption could radically change the situation in the Slovak-Ukrainian border regions in the future as the Slovak-Ukrainian border will cease to be the EU's external border. The presented research points out that both the EU's ability to stimulate cross-border cooperation and the impact of more intense cross-border interaction are perceived by local actors of cross-border cooperation as beneficial from the point of view of the border region's development. The perception of the EU as a reliable partner appears to be an important factor affecting the perception of the impacts of cross-border interaction by local actors in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands, which represents important feedback in relation to the design and communication of cross-border cooperation policies at the transnational, national, regional, and local levels. The perceptions of local actors also point to existing barriers to cross-border cooperation and cross-border business, which need to be reduced from the point of view of regional development management in order to take advantage of the opportunities provided by integration processes and thus support the economic and social development of border regions.

Notes

- 1 The latest regional data provided by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine are from 2021, before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- 2 The AASKUA project outcomes are available here: <https://www.unipo.sk/filozoficka-fakulta/institut-fakulty/ipol-ff/projekty/44911/>
- 3 The SIBSU project outcomes are available here: <https://www.sibsu.sk/publications>

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Two Regions, One Vision: The Cross-Border Mission of the Via Carpatia EGTC

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This article illustrates how the organization European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Via Carpatia (from here on referred to as Via Carpatia EGTC) with limited liability exemplifies the potential of EGTCs to act as effective platforms for overcoming administrative borders and fostering meaningful, results-oriented cooperation that responds to local needs while aligning with broader EU objectives. The Via Carpatia EGTC has played an important role since 2013 in promoting cross-border cooperation between Slovakia's Košice Self-governing Region and Hungary's Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County. Its activities contribute to regional development through coordinated projects and initiatives focused on infrastructure, culture, and economic growth. The Via Carpatia EGTC serves as a key policy instrument for fostering territorial cohesion, addressing regional disparities, and enhancing cooperation in various thematic areas including education, ecology, social policy, and infrastructure. A significant component of Via Carpatia EGTC's work is the Small Project Fund (SPF), through which numerous local initiatives such as cultural events, sports programs, and support for regional producers have been financed. In this article, we also highlight several international collaborations aimed at improving digitalization in elderly care, promoting environmental awareness among youth, and advancing circular economy models. Since 2013, Via Carpatia EGTC has mobilized more than €19 million in investments, contributed to the creation and support of over 1,100 jobs, and implemented more than 40 successful projects.

Key words: Cross-border cooperation, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, Small Project Fund, Regional development, Interregional partnership, Building partnerships.

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1. A European Literature Overview of EGTCs

European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) are legal tools established by the European Union to support cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation (van Lierop 2015). EGTCs were introduced through Regulation (EC) No. 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and the Council with the aim of overcoming administrative, legal, and political barriers between member states (European Commission 2006). A revision of this regulation in 2013 (Regulation No. 1302/2013) further enhanced the flexibility and effectiveness of EGTC as a regional policy instrument (European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2013). The primary mission of an EGTC is to enable public authorities from different member states to jointly implement projects and manage EU funding. Within cohesion policy, EGTCs play a key role in supporting regional development, economic cooperation, and better coordination between regions facing common challenges and objectives. Currently, there are more than 80 active EGTCs in the EU, each focusing on various areas of cooperation, ranging from infrastructure and transport to culture and environmental projects (Gouardères 2025).

EGTCs bring several significant benefits, which have been confirmed by various studies. They support increased integration between different EU regions, leading to improved coordination and stronger regional ties, as shown in the study *The Role of EGTCs in Territorial Cooperation* (van Lierop 2015). EGTCs are also effective legal instruments that enhance and streamline cross-border cooperation within the European Union. According to the study by Anca-Adriana Cucu, the EGTC structure improves coordination between different levels of public administration, reducing administrative burdens and increasing the efficiency of project implementation. By establishing joint administrative frameworks, EGTCs help overcome bureaucratic barriers that typically hinder international collaboration. Thanks to their flexibility, these groupings can adapt to the specific needs of regions, supporting efficient project management and fostering sustainable development. In addition to cross-border cooperation, they also support transnational cooperation, enabling better use of shared opportunities, such as natural resources or tourism potential (Cucu 2011).

This article is based on internal documents and materials from the Via Carpatia EGTC outlining its activities and achievements. The primary sources of information include official reports, project documentation, and archival materials collected throughout the organization's existence. Images included in the paper illustrate specific project results (e.g., cultural festivals, local production facilities, educational initiatives) and are sourced from Via Carpatia EGTC's internal archives and official documentation.

The article provides an overview of projects which have been implemented. The paper first introduces the concept and legal background of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), with a specific focus on the Via Carpatia EGTC. Then, it outlines the organizational structure and mission of Via Carpatia, highlighting its role in fostering cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary. Subsequently, the paper presents examples of successful projects implemented through the departments of Small Project Fund and Implementation of international projects with international funding mechanisms, covering topics such as education, environment, digitalization in elderly care, and local economic development. The final sections assess the broader impact of Via Carpatia's work, identify challenges, and outline the organization's future vision within the framework of EU territorial cooperation.

The authors represent the organization and support its work in their professional capacities as project managers. Our ultimate goal is to describe the benefits of EGTCs to a cross-border region, in this specific case our region, and to explain the functioning of EGTCs to the readers. This specific study highlights how EGTCs contribute to regional development, improve policy coordination, and aid in overcoming administrative and legal barriers between European Union member states. This approach allows us to present a comprehensive overview of EGTCs, emphasizing their positive impact on cross-border cooperation and the practical mechanisms through which these organizations operate.

2. The Via Carpatia EGTC



Figure 1. Logo of Via Carpatia EGTC. All images reproduced in this article are sourced from internal materials of Via Carpatia EGTC.

The Via Carpatia EGTC with limited liability was founded in 2013 (official logo illustrated in Figure 1). The grouping consists of two members: The Košice Self-governing Region (Slovakia) and the county of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (Hungary). It operates on a territory with an area of just over 14 thousand square kilometers, with over 1.4 million inhabitants. The chairman of the general assembly of the Via Carpatia EGTC is Bánné dr. Gál Boglárka from Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County and the vice-chairman of the general assembly is Rastislav Trnka from the Košice Self-governing Region.

The director of the Via Carpatia EGTC is Julianna Máté. The organizational structure of Via Carpatia comprises three departments: the International Projects Implementation Department, the Small Projects Fund Department, and the Social Projects Department, each focused on different aspects of community development and support in the region.

The mission of the Via Carpatia EGTC is to connect the regions of Košice and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County and to develop them through projects in various areas, such as ecology, education, silver economy, local economy, employment, and many other topics that will improve the lives of people in the region on both sides of the border. The key goals of Via Carpatia are to promote cross-border, transnational, and regional cooperation, strengthen economic and social cohesion, and implement development programs. It provides expert consultations and strategic guidance tailored to regional needs, engaging professionals across diverse fields. Through dialogue and knowledge exchange among experts and policymakers, it fosters innovation, shares best practices, and encourages collaboration across Europe. By analyzing data and consulting stakeholders, Via Carpatia identifies core socio-economic and territorial challenges, enabling targeted and effective solutions that support sustainable development and cohesion within the European Union. Zdenko Trebula, vice-chairman of Via Carpatia from 2014 to 2017, described its inception: "in 2011, when the preparation of the founding documents of the Via Carpatia EGTC began, I knew that it would be the right decision. Working within one institution with a cross-border partner was a challenge for us, but we knew that we could handle it and success would come with time".

2.1. Via Carpatia transit route

The Via Carpatia EGTC was initially established to support the development of the Via Carpatia transit corridor. Over time, its focus shifted toward implementing projects with direct regional impact. Via Carpatia is a historical route connecting the Baltic Sea to the Aegean, crucial for economic growth. The route passes through several countries (Figure 2) including Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece. Its development was identified as having potential to boost various sectors such as small businesses, research, and technology. The Lancut Declaration in 2006 initiated cooperation among Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia for its construction. Since then, significant progress has been made through various conferences and agreements. The Via Carpatia Transit Route is a priority for national transport policies in the countries involved. It aims to enhance connectivity and regional development. Numerous activities have been undertaken to promote the route's construction and integration into the TEN-T network. Cooperation agreements have been signed among regional governments to facilitate its implementation. The corridor's significance lies

in its potential to stimulate economic growth and development across regions, and it symbolizes cooperation and connectivity among European nations. The route's completion would therefore streamline transportation and trade across borders. Overall, the Via Carpatia project holds immense promise for the economic and social advancement of the involved countries and regions. Nowadays, this topic is less central for the Via Carpatia EGTC, as all the involved countries are independently working on the development and improvement of the transit route.



Figure 2. Map of Via Carpatia Transit Route.

3. Small Project Fund

3.1. Direct support to the territory

One of the exceptional projects implemented by the Via Carpatia EGTC, thanks to its uniqueness in Europe, is the Small Project Fund (SPF). The overall objective of the SPF is to strengthen social cohesion across borders by supporting local-level cooperation and establishing and improving long-term collaboration between actors on both sides of the border through the implementation of local and regional projects. The SPF supports activities intended to develop cross-border cooperation, including cultural exchange, human resources, planning and development studies, economic development, environment, tourism, and communication. The Via Carpatia EGTC has managed the SPF within the programme Interreg Slovak Republic-Hungary. The total budget for the 2017-2023 programming period was €7,332,185, of which €6,232,359 was allocated to the Small Projects Fund, which supported 127 projects. In the new programming period of 2023 to 2027, the

total budget was €7,593,457, of which €6,454,438 has been allocated to the Small Projects Fund (Via Carpatia EGTC 2023).

The Small Project Fund initiatives must contribute to Via Carpatia's priority objectives. One of these objectives is to increase the attractiveness of the border area, focusing on better utilization of the region's natural and cultural potential. Another priority objective is to improve the level of cross-border inter-institutional cooperation and broaden cross-border cooperation between citizens by fostering the exchange of experience between citizens, strengthening institutional capacities and encouraging greater public participation in cross-border activities, improving mutual understanding and fostering closer relationships between ethnic groups living in the region, increasing the number of long-term institutional partnerships, encouraging greater public participation on cross-border activities, increasing the number of common sustainable events and activities, and improving the level of bilingualism in the program area. The minimum amount of an SPF project is €10,569 and the maximum is €63,431. Each project needs to contribute to the results of the priority axis set out in the program manual.

3.2. Examples of successful projects

Projects that have been implemented within the Small Projects Fund contribute to the improvement of cross-border inter-institutional cooperation as well as the strengthening of connections between citizens.

3.2.1. Puppet theater in Košice

The aim of the Košice puppet theater project was to improve the cross-border flow of information about the border regions of Hungary and Slovakia by presenting common cultural heritage in an innovative form primarily focused on children. Throughout the project we wanted to move cooperation to the neighboring Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County. The main outputs of the project included 10 puppet television fairy tales (evenings), based on folk and fairy tales from the involved regions (for example, Figure 3). The implementation team in the Hungarian-Slovak co-production provides an opportunity to promote both regions, while at the same time introducing the younger generation to the traditional cultural art of puppetry, which is included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

3.2.2. Sárospatak Város Önkormányzata

After the closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was once again a high demand for cultural festivals on both the Hungarian and Slovak sides of the border (see Figure 4 for example). The main purpose of the Sárospatak Város Önkormányzata festival was to connect partners through joint organization and implementation, creating long-term cooperation between the partner organizations and other institutions in the



Figure 3. Puppet Theater in Kosice.



Figure 4. Sárospatak Város Önkormányzata Festival.

Bodrog region. In the coming years, this cooperation will be able to ensure the delivery of high-quality events of international importance for both local residents and tourists.

3.2.3. Civic Association for the Development of Gombasek

The Gombaszög 2024—Cultural Dialogue Without Borders project, implemented under the Small Project Fund, aimed to strengthen cultural and cross-border ties between Slovakia and Hungary. It was focused on promoting cultural diversity and cooperation between communities (Figure 5). The project partner was the Pro Minoritate Foundation from Hungary, an organization dedicated to supporting minorities and cross-border relations. The project increased awareness of regional cultural identities, attracted more Hungarian visitors

to the festival, and enriched the event with Hungarian cultural elements.



Figure 5. Gombaszög 2024 Festival.

4. Implementation of International Projects

Throughout our activities, we have implemented a substantial number of international projects encompassing diverse thematic areas such as education, social development, infrastructure, environmental sustainability, regional growth, and cross-border collaboration. Our portfolio demonstrates a comprehensive approach to addressing both local and broader European priorities. The majority of these projects have been successfully realized within funding frameworks, including the Norway Grants, Interreg Central Europe, Interreg Danube Region, Interreg Hungary-Slovakia, and a national Call for Applications for Grant Funding in the Area of Regional Development Support. Rastislav Trnka, vice-chairman of the Via Carpatia EGTC and president of Košice Self-governing Region from 2017 to present, observes that "the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Via Carpatia has created one big family in both regions with over 1.4 million inhabitants. It is a proof of the above-standard cooperation of Košice self-governing region with our good neighbors, the counties on the Hungarian border whether it concerns employment, education, regional development or social issues. Although we are separated by kilometers, thanks to common projects we are closer to each other and thanks to this we can grow together. I'm extremely proud of this cooperation".

4.1. Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE): Employment cross-border action plan of the Cserehát Micro-Region

The "Szép Cserehát" (Beautiful Cserehát) action plan represents a major initiative coordinated by the Via Carpatia EGTC. The main goals of the action plan were to decrease the unemployment rate, find solutions to the region's most serious problems, and improve

conditions in the micro-region "Szép Cserehát" by utilizing its internal potential. The action plan was implemented through the INTERREG V-A SKHU cooperation programme from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with a total budget of €4,417,494. The project was implemented between the years of 2019 and 2022. There were seven smaller projects within this action plan, each with different goals (see Figure 6, for example). The communication and coordination of all projects was the responsibility of the Via Carpatia EGTC. Promotion was identified as a key factor in project success. The Via Carpatia EGTC developed the complete marketing concept that supports and still serves as the basis for the regional branding of "Szép Cserehát". As part of this effort, the "Local Image" project supported local producers through a web platform and the creation of a regional product identity (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).



Figure 6. Marketplace Constructed within the Framework of the Action Plan.

Gyula Ocskay, Secretary General of the CESC (Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives), shares that "the Via Carpatia EGTC perfectly embodies all the benefits that the EU legislators intended to achieve with this instrument in the mid-2000s: the EGTC has become a successful workshop and the real owner of the border region which connect all actors who can effectively contribute to the development of the region; numerous implemented projects prove that the EGTC has an impact on cross-border development if it is carefully managed and led by a professional team; Via Carpatia also proved that this form of cooperation can also be used for the successful management of programs or their parts, since as the eastern manager of the Small Projects Fund of Slovakia-Hungarian cooperation contributed to the implementation of several local initiatives. The key to success of the EGTC is a dedicated team that works hard day after day, sometimes invisibly, to elevate the border region. We thank all the employees, especially the director who leads the team and we wish you success in your next challenges!"

i. Project: Coordination and communication—CCP

The objective of the coordination and communication project was to facilitate seven projects of the action plan. For this purpose, the Via Carpatia EGTC organized several meetings with individual project partners where further steps to be taken in each project were discussed (for example, Figures 7 and 8). During the three-year duration of the action plan, it worked as a supporting instrument for all partners. Another significant purpose of the project was to provide a communication aspect of the action plan. This was on one side a provision of obligatory communication elements on the level of the Interreg Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Program and, on the other hand, promotion of project activities in media and on social networks. The total budget was €218,052 (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).



Figure 7. Opening Conference of Local Image.



Figure 8. Meetings with Individual Project Partners.

ii. Project: Development of local products

Support for local production became the main tool in this area of Cserehát. The project helped local people by improving job opportunities, education, production, and cross-border cooperation. Here are some inspiring examples of what has been achieved:

- Plant for pumpkin oil pressing, fruit juices, and seed-roasting in Buzica

In Buzica, the firm BARTRANZ Ltd. had the opportunity, thanks to the project, to expand its existing production of sunflower oil and rapeseed oil by adding technology to produce pumpkin oil (Figure 9). At the same time, the warehouse was renovated for the storage of cereals and grains. In Gagyvendégi, the entrepreneurs of Cserehát Völgy Kft. (Cserehát Valley Ltd.) and Dsupin János e.v. built a plant consisting of two sections, one for producing fruit juices and another for roasting seeds (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).



Figure 9. Pumpkin Oil Pressing Plant in Buzica.

- Plant for sauerkraut pressing in Hidasnémeti

Our projects supported both local production and manufacturing for further use of their products. A sauerkraut processing plant was established in Hidasnémeti and a confectionery in Košice focused on processing and selling local confectionery products and from regional producers (Figure 10). In May 2021, the stone foundation for a sauerkraut processing plant was laid in Hidasnémeti. A year later, in May 2022, the plant became operational, fermenting and packing sauerkraut and other cabbage products (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).



Figure 10. Sauerkraut Pressing Plant in Hidasnémeti.

- GESTO Gelato & Pastry

GESTO Gelato & Pastry, a confectionery and outlet of local products, also began operations in May 2022.

The operating unit purchased raw materials from local producers to create confectionery products (Figure 11). In the up-to-date facility, the tasting of local products provides culinary enjoyment (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).



Figure 11. GESTO Gelato and Pastry Products.

iii. SKHU Markets project: Meeting local needs

Infrastructure is a key factor for effective development and prosperity. A survey of the conditions in the Cserehát micro-region found that a great number of municipalities suffer from a shortage of infrastructure and urban functions. The SKHU Markets project addressed this situation by constructing five marketplaces on both the Slovak and Hungarian sides of the micro-region for the sale of products from local producers (Figures 12–16). In addition to the five marketplaces, the construction of the House of St. Stephen (Figure 15), which was to function as the region's educational center, was also part of the project. The renovation of a manor house in Gagyvendégi was included as well. The SKHU Markets project began in September 2019. In Spring 2020, the foundation stones for marketplaces were laid on the Slovak side in the municipality of Buzica and on the Hungarian side in the municipality of Gagyvendégi. The marketplaces were officially opened in Summer 2021 and have since been holding farmers' and craftsmen's markets with active participation by sellers and buyers from the region (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).



Figure 12. Micro-region Marketplace in Buzica.



Figure 13. Micro-region Marketplace in Gagyvendégi.



Figure 14. Opening Marketplace in Encs.



Figure 15. Products from Local Farmers.



Figure 16. House of St. Stephen.

Within the framework of social initiatives, not only were construction projects carried out, but efforts also focused on improving the population's educational level. Common educational and training programs in the fields of social and communication skills, social enterprise, and farming were implemented. Workshops were held to inform residents about current job opportunities, and, in cooperation with employment agencies, efforts were made to find suitable employment for participants, especially for those in the region experiencing long-term unemployment (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).

iv. Project: Renovation & Education

Activities in the project have been implemented to reduce human resources deficiencies. The low educational level has a direct relation to high unemployment. Both of these phenomena contribute to the current situation of the Cserehát micro-region and therefore the implementation of the action plan was aimed at addressing their impacts. As part of this, in Moldava nad Bodvou, the project "Renovation & Education" included a professional renovation of an electro-technical laboratory. In Encs, at the organization "Abaúji Területfejlesztési Önkormányzati Szövetség" (Society of the Regional Development of Abaúj Self-Government), the facilities of the development center were renovated (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).

- The specialized laboratory of Secondary Vocational School in Moldava nad Bodvou

At the Secondary Vocational School of Agro-Technology in Moldava nad Bodvou, the project enabled the school to provide a high-quality electro-technical laboratory for the new generation of electro-technicians (Figures 17 and 18). As a result, the school was able to open a new course in Agromechatronics. The laboratory is equipped with up-to-date technology, and students are taught subjects such as Basics of Electro-Technology and Electronics using a modular system. This teaching method allowed students to enter the labor market more easily and quickly (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).

- Development centre in Encs

In the town of Encs, in the seat of project partner "Abaúji Területfejlesztési Önkormányzati Szövetség" (Society of the Regional Development of Abaúj Self-Government), one whole floor comprising a conference room was renovated (Figure 19). The space is used for the organization of professional conferences, trainings, and other activities. The aim of this project was to provide adequate facilities for education of all those who plan to make moves in their professional life (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).



Figure 17. Secondary Vocational School Moldava nad Bodvou

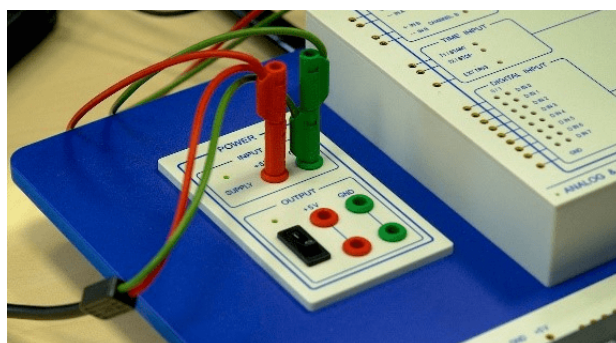


Figure 18. High-quality Electro-technical Equipment.



Figure 19. New Conference Room in Encs.

v. Project: Find Your Way

The central topic of the project Find Your Way was to increase the employment of the population of Cserehát. The Via Carpatia EGTC received a grant of €109,088 for implementation. This project organized training sessions for people experiencing long-term unemployment, providing the opportunity to learn the basics of financial literacy and social communication (Figure 20). In addition, participants were introduced to ways of overcoming dependencies. The most important parts of the program were helping them to create CVs with the assistance of professionals and offering model job interviews to better prepare them for the labor market. Up to 80 unemployed persons participated in the sessions organized within the framework of this project. Sessions were held in the facilities renovated with the resources of the project Renovation & Education on both the Slovak and Hungarian sides of Cserehát. The Via Carpatia EGTC received a grant of €298,153 for implementation. Subsequently, up to 100 persons were interested in an option to participate in a meeting with recruitment agencies where they obtained offers of specific open work positions and had the opportunity to apply for positions immediately on-site. The second part of the project included training on social entrepreneurship for individuals interested in establishing social enterprises. Participants were introduced to relevant legislation, exchanged best practices, and worked together on setting up new social enterprises aimed at employing socially disadvantaged people, thus contributing to the reduction of unemployment (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).



Figure 20. Training Session, Project Find Your Way.

vi. Project: Build the Local Image

The project “Local Image” (brand) was symbolic of the whole action plan. It aimed to promote the results of completed projects of the action plan and to support promotion of local producers via the development of a web platform for local producers and the creation

of regional brands for local products of the Cserehát region. The promotion of completed projects was carried out through the organization of agro-festivals (Figures 21 and 22), at the newly built marketplaces constructed under the SKHU Markets project, with the goal of popularizing them amongst the general public. One of the key outputs of the project was a local agro study to determine the best options for developing local production in the Cserehát micro-region. Another output was the web platform of local producers, which was available on the internet for the public. The platform included a database of local producers from the Cserehát region, allowing users to easily find high-quality local products nearby. The platform possesses various features besides the database of local producers, including reports on markets, assessments of producers, maps of producers, offers of products and services in the local area, and more. Finally, another important output of the project was the regional image (brand) and marketing of Cserehát’s local products to guarantee their locality and high quality. This brand is awarded only to verified producers from the region. At the end of the project, an “Agro EXPO” presented the developed platform and the regional brand (image) to the broad public (Via Carpatia EGTC 2022).



Figure 21. Agro Festivals in Hidasnémeti.



Figure 22. Agro Festival in Gagyvendégi.

4.2. Social topics

4.2.1. I-CARE-SMART project

Social issues also appeared in other projects, such as the international project “Innovation Ecosystem for Smart Elderly Care” (I-CARE-SMART). The project focused on the health and well-being of elderly people in Central Europe. This area represents a social challenge, but also an opportunity to promote growth. Therefore, the goal of the project was to maintain the development of innovative products and services that corresponded to the special needs of elderly community members, contributing to the development of the “silver economy”. The role of the partners in the I-CARE-SMART project was to bring these innovations closer to senior citizens and to create a structured framework for cooperation among all stakeholders in this area. I-CARE-SMART brings a comprehensive set of tools and recommendations aimed at involving seniors and businesses in the co-creation of innovations. The ultimate goal of the project was to build a transnational innovation ecosystem for smart elderly care, enabling collaboration and regular knowledge-sharing between public authorities, universities, businesses, and representatives of the elderly. A total of 13 partners from Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Italy, the Czech Republic, Austria, and Germany participated in the project. The following materials in the field of innovations for seniors were created within the project: Toolbox Senior Business Engagement, Handbook on Co-Creation & Open Innovation Methods for Smart Elderly Care, a regional action plan, and regional reports to summarize the findings of the co-creation based needs assessment process. The project was co-financed from the Interreg Central Europe programme, amounting to €2,593,039 (Figure 23 depicts innovative elderly care and Figure 24 shows partners addressing the topic).



Figure 23. I-CARE-SMART Innovation in Elderly Care.



Figure 24. Partners Presenting Outcomes.

4.2.2. SKHU Ambassadors project: Active Ageing— Create a cross-border team of ambassadors in order to improve the quality of life for Slovak and Hungarian seniors

Another example of cooperation in the social field is the project “Active Ageing—Create a cross-border team of ambassadors in order to improve the quality of life for Slovak and Hungarian seniors—SKHU Ambassadors”. It was implemented throughout the Interreg SKHU programme, presenting an innovative approach primarily aimed at improving the quality of life for seniors. The project focused on supporting their health, physical activity, and socialization through the creation of cross-border services and the establishment of an Active Ageing Centre. The total budget of €195,942 covered the following:

- Bank of Kindness: an online platform through which seniors and institutions, based on volunteering, can provide help to those who need it the most
- Active Ageing Centres: the establishment of two senior centres where visitors can spend their free time, learn, and engage in various creative or physical activities while also making new contacts (Figures 25–28 show activities of the Active Ageing Centre in Košice)
- Ambassadors team: creating a senior ambassadors team on the Hungarian and Slovak border



Figure 25. Crafts Made by Seniors.



Figure 26. Cooking Course



Figure 27. Awarding Certificates to Seniors.



Figure 28. Opening of the Active Ageing Center in Košice.

4.2.3. DigiCare4CE project: Digital transformation of long-term care facilities for older people

Our commitment to social responsibility is also reflected in the international project DigiCare4CE, which is aimed at helping to increase the level of digitalization in long-term care facilities for the elderly (Figures 29 and 30). It is supported and implemented within the Interreg Central Europe programme and financed by the European Regional Development Fund with a budget of €2,184,181. A total of 10 partners from Slovakia, Germany, Austria, Italy, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Poland are participating in its implementation in the years 2023 through 2026.



Figure 29. VR Headset for Therapy in Long-term Care Facilities.



Figure 30. Personnel of Long-term Care Facilities Using the VR.

4.3. Educational topics

Education is a continual process at any age and that is why the Via Carpatia EGTC also focuses on this issue. The project "Let's Improve the Environmental Responsibility of the Pupils!" contributed to environmental awareness and responsibility amongst primary and secondary school pupils in the Košice region. One of the outcomes of the project was the development of the educative online game EcoHero (logo shown in Figure 32). The result of the project was an improvement of the overall awareness of students in the field of ecology, as well as in waste recycling, waste management, separate collection of waste, circular economy, and sustainable development (Figure 33). The project was implemented with the financial support of the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development, and Informatization of the Slovak Republic with a total budget of €47,158.



Figure 32. Logo of EcoHero Game.



Figure 33. Awarding Certificates to Students in Ecology.

4.4. Green topics

We are always working on bringing interesting and useful projects to the region, especially those focused on the environment and sustainability. Among them is Safety4TMF, which works on improving the safe handling of mining waste to better protect nature, and REHEATEAST, which promotes renewable energy and more efficient heating systems. These efforts support a greener and healthier future for the region, along with other initiatives described below.

4.4.1. CITYCIRCLE project

The development of our territory is facilitated especially when we also focus on topics that have economic importance. The CITYCIRCLE project facilitated innovation and technology transfer and improved services and business models in peripheral cities. By providing the tools and knowledge associated with the circular economy (depicted in Figures 34 and 35), the project enabled a new generation of innovative solutions in Central European urban ecosystems in the long term. The project was financed by the Interreg Central Europe programme with a total budget of €2,001,705.



Figure 34 Composters Provided to Secondary Schools, Circular Economy Initiatives.



Figure 35. Handbook Developed for CITYCIRCLE Project.

4.4.2 Young4Climate project

We implemented projects with green themes because they are an integral part of our effort to ensure the long-term health of the planet and sustainable environment for current and future generations. The significant project Young4Climate received a grant from Norway of €373,603 and it is co-financed by the state budget of the Slovak Republic, which contributed €56,050. The goal of this project is to increase awareness of climate crisis adaptation and mitigation by implementing a series of innovative activities aimed mainly at students at 62 secondary schools in the Košice region, helping them to understand the climate agenda and preparing them to fight the climate crisis (for example, Figure 36, the installation of green walls at a secondary school). This was successfully featured in the online game *Young4Climate*, which focused on raising awareness about green themes.



Figure 36. Green Walls Unveiled at a Secondary School.

4.4.3. REHEATEAST project

Switching to clean and renewable energy is important for protecting the environment and reducing dependence on fossil fuels. REHEATEAST is an international project implemented within the framework of the Danube Region Interreg programme and it is funded by the European Regional Development Fund. The total budget of the project is €2,214,691. The REHEATEAST project aims to contribute to reducing the demand for fossil energy in district heating systems in the Eastern Danube Region while promoting the use of renewable energy (for example, Figure 37 shows heat pumps enabled through cooperation between the public and private sectors). The pilot of the project consists of GeoMap, an interactive visual tool that displays key data layers relevant to the Košice region. It helps users easily explore and analyze important indicators such as the layout of the DHC pipeline network and local infrastructure. This map supports better decision-making, raises awareness, and improves planning by offering clear and accessible information on the topic of renewable sources.



Figure 37. Heat Pumps as Part of Renewable Energy Solutions.

4.4.4. Safety4TMF project

Tailing ponds represent a significant environmental concern, as they are frequently neglected yet demand focused attention and remediation. The Safety4TMF project aims to provide coordinated measures for the prevention and disaster management of waste material (tailings) derived from excavation and ore extraction in the Danube region, with the goal of preventing environmental disasters while ensuring permanent safety conditions and measures in cooperation with various stakeholders. The project emphasizes the importance of cooperation among multi-level governance actors, including authorities, municipalities, first responders, academia, and others. By promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange through training, workshops, conferences, and peer-review visits, the project fosters transnational cooperation to address TMF-related risks. The total budget of the Safety4TMF project is €2,458,381.

4.4.5. MOUNT GREENFRA project

Protecting nature and using natural resources in a smart and sustainable way is the key to building a better future for people and the environment. The MOUNT GREENFRA project, with a total budget of €1,379,008, focuses on the restoration of natural resources and their sustainable use to create a healthier and more resilient environment for current and future generations. Through the development of green infrastructure, effective rainwater management, and innovative solutions, the project contributes to protecting nature and improving the quality of life in the cross-border region. Beyond its environmental goals, the project places strong emphasis on education and community involvement. It engages children from kindergartens as well as students from primary schools, secondary schools, and universities to learn about the importance of sustainability.

5. Impact of the Projects

The implementation of international projects has a direct and long-term impact on regional development. By carefully selecting project themes such as education, environment, mobility, or social innovation, regions can respond to local needs more effectively and create targeted solutions. Projects often introduce new approaches, tools, or services that improve the quality of life for residents, strengthen local institutions, and make the region more resilient and attractive for future investments. In this way, project implementation is not just about fulfilling program requirements. It becomes a strategic instrument for shaping a smarter, greener, and more inclusive regional environment.

Positive points of projects:

- **Environmental and Climate Education Initiatives:** The Via Carpatia EGTC has implemented several initiatives aimed at raising environmental and climate awareness, particularly among students in the Košice region. Projects such as "Let's Improve the Environmental Responsibility of the Pupils!" and Young4Climate focused on educating young people about recycling, waste management, sustainable development, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Interactive tools, like the EcoHero online game, made learning engaging and accessible. In addition, the REHEATEAST project promoted energy efficiency by supporting the use of renewable energy and waste heat in district heating systems, contributing to greener and more sustainable regional development.
- **International Collaboration:** The WEROPE—We are Europe project fostered cooperation among several European countries, aiming to fight poverty and promote solidarity and volunteerism. It shared best practices and knowledge across countries, strengthening social cohesion.
- **Economic Development through Innovation:** The CITYCIRCLE project supported innovation and technology transfer in peripheral cities, focusing on circular economy solutions. It helped improve urban ecosystems and services, promoting long-term sustainable development.
- **Risk Management and Environmental Safety:** The Safety4TMF project focused on waste material management from mining activities, preventing environmental disasters through multi-level governance and stakeholder cooperation in the Danube region.

Weak Points of the Projects:

- **Limited Scope of Implementation:** The Young4Climate project had a limited geographical reach, impacting only schools in the Košice region. Expanding it could increase its impact.
- **Financial Constraints:** Projects like WEROPE—We are Europe had limited budgets, which may have restricted their scope and effectiveness. Larger budgets could have allowed for more comprehensive activities.
- **Challenges in Multi-Sector Collaboration:** The Safety4TMF project required coordination among multiple stakeholders, which can be challenging due to differing interests. Effective collaboration is the key to project success.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** Ensuring the continued success of projects like CITYCIRCLE after completion is important for maintaining the benefits of innovative solutions.
- **Potential for Lack of Immediate Impact:** Projects such as REHEATEAST may take time to show visible results, making it crucial to manage expectations and demonstrate short-term achievements.

6. Future Directions for EGTC Development

Our goal is to create a viable and prosperous environment for all people who live in our regions and to be an active player in the transformation of our regions into modern and competitive places where people enjoy life and have all the conditions necessary for personal growth. The results of hard work on these goals often appear years later. We have become accustomed to this fact and therefore nothing will stop us from creating other successful stories in the form of new projects. We are determined to be a catalyst for positive change and an engine of development in our regions. We believe that in cooperation with all our partners, we will achieve a real impact via positive change in our regions. Inclusive and participatory approaches are the key to success. We listen to the opinions and needs of our citizens and involve them in decision-making processes. We are proud of our work and enthusiastically look to the future, ready for the next challenges and opportunities that it will bring.



Figure 38. Team of Via Carpatia EGTC.



Figure 39. Director of Via Carpatia EGTC Julianna Máté.

7. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to demonstrate the value of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) in fostering development and integration in cross-border regions. Our case study of the Via Carpatia EGTC offers a concrete example of how these organizations can generate lasting benefits. A significant contribution to regional development is made by EGTCs. Since its establishment in 2013, the Via Carpatia EGTC has brought more than €19 million in investments to the region. These funds have strengthened local economies, enhanced social infrastructure, and fostered equal opportunities through improvements in education, healthcare, and cultural life. The support for over 1,140 jobs during this time has further promoted social stability and improved quality of life for residents. Additionally, Via Carpatia EGTC plays a crucial role in improving policy coordination across borders. Through the submission of 91 projects, of which 45 were successfully implemented with a total budget exceeding €30 million, Via Carpatia has supported better planning, infrastructure modernization, and innovation that align with both local and European development strategies.

One of the key benefits of EGTCs is their ability to overcome administrative and legal barriers between member states. By fostering long-term partnerships with more than 600 organizations across Europe, Via Carpatia has built bridges between institutions and stakeholders, facilitating smoother cooperation and the sharing of best practices in project implementation and governance. The positive impact of EGTCs on cross-border cooperation is evident. The trust-based relationships established through this mechanism have led to the exchange of knowledge, strengthening of mutual capacities, and creation of joint visions for sustainable territorial development. Cross-border projects have not only brought economic growth but have also improved access to education and health services, supported cultural initiatives, and reinforced community ties. The organization's effectiveness is reflected in its ability to produce measurable, practical results. The effectiveness of the Via Carpatia EGTC is underscored by its financial productivity: for every €1 invested in the organization, an average of €35 is returned to the region in the form of development projects. This multiplier effect highlights the efficiency and impact of EGTCs in turning strategic visions into tangible results for communities. Through this comprehensive overview, we have shown that EGTCs such as Via Carpatia are not only functional tools of European territorial cooperation, but also catalysts for inclusive and sustainable regional development.

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Digitization in Higher Educational Institutions as a Catalyst for Cross-border Cooperation

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This article explores the concept of “digitization” and the influence of information technologies on the provision of educational services and the activities of universities in Ukraine and the EU. We provide an analysis of plans for the digitalization of education in the EU and review the advantages and disadvantages of the introduction of remote (online) education, as well as the ways in which the digitalization processes taking place in education in the EU countries and Ukraine affect cross-border cooperation among higher educational institutions. We offer some proposals for the development of digitalization of cross-border cooperation.

Key words: digitization, higher education institutions, academic mobility, contract, cross-border cooperation.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent full-scale war in Ukraine have shown how digitalization processes help to make various services available even in crisis and emergency situations. These processes did not bypass the sphere of education and the activities of higher educational institutions, which are active participants in cross-border cooperation. For the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, the issue of cross-border cooperation is a priority, and higher educational institutions can be an expert platform for inter-state dialogue and the exchange of experience at various academic levels (students, graduate students, and teachers), both of which will ultimately contribute to the technological development of various states.

Ukraine borders seven countries: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Russia, and Belarus. The total length of the Ukrainian border is just under 7,000 kilometers. As part of our research, we will focus on cross-border cooperation between higher education

institutions in Ukraine and four neighboring European countries—Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania.

This research is based on a systematic approach that includes a set of methods for studying the digitalization of educational services provided by higher education institutions as a catalyst for cross-border cooperation. In particular, the following methods were used: the historical method (clarifying changes in the processes of legal regulation of academic mobility in Ukraine and individual European countries and revealing what changes have occurred in education under the influence of global digitalization); the desk research method (allowing us to analyze various cross-border cooperation programs and identify which elements of digitalization were applied); the field method (helping to find out what agreements were concluded at Uzhhorod National University for cross-border cooperation with other European universities); the formal-dogmatic method (allowing us to clarify the

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concept of digitalization and its impact on education); the dialectical method (allowing us to identify trends in cross-border cooperation of universities under the influence of digitalization); the comparative method (playing a key role in identifying differences in the legal regulation of educational services in Ukraine and European countries, as well as changes made to legislation under the influence of digitalization); and the forecasting method (allowing us to develop specific proposals that will improve the activities of educational institutions within the framework of digitalization and cross-border cooperation). The application of these methods systematically and in combination led to the formation of our conclusions and proposals.

In the European scholarly literature, one can find many focused publications on the digitalization of different levels of education. In 2019, the "Digital Education Vision for the European Schools System" (DEVES) was published, including the main future steps for the improvement of digital competence, which is key for both students and teachers as well as for the modernization of schools (Schola Europaea 2019). Subsequently, a more detailed report was published, which gave an overview of trends in the digitalization of school education and proposals for policies and strategy development (European Commission 2019). The aforementioned publications reveal certain trends and problems in the digitalization of education at the level of the school system, but do not cover the specific features of schools in border regions, including linguistic and cultural features, nor how digitalization affects these features.

In addition, the EU has published a systematic review entitled "Digital Education—Factors that Contribute to Success", which reflects the analysis presented in the DEVES and contains a number of recommendations. It highlights the importance of policies to support the digital transformation of higher education and research as envisaged in the European Strategy for Universities, as well as in various commitments to the European Research Area. The European University Association (EUA) strongly recommends starting a policy debate on the principles underlying this transformation at the European level and on the goals it is meant to achieve. It is vital to develop value-based approaches and to ensure that the university's administrative and academic staff have appropriate digital skills, including digital pedagogy, that are based on open and ethical standards for new digital technologies (Digital Education 2022). While there are quite important conclusions regarding the technical improvement of the material base at the university, the development of technical skills among staff and teachers, and most importantly, the value orientation of all transformations and changes, there is no analysis or recommendation list regarding cooperation between universities within the EU and beyond European borders, in particular within border regions.

A comparative study of cooperation between European universities and individual universities outside the EU, including Ukrainian universities, concluded that "blended learning", whether hybrid or Hyflex-learning, is important to overcome the fixation on face-to-face physical education compared to face-to-face online education, as well as to introduce a wider range of learning opportunities and methods. However, the authors noted the problem of political and financial support for both the development of institutional strategy and capacity building—in particular, European and international exchange and cooperation, staff development, and institutional development (Gaebel et al. 2021). At the same time, the aforementioned report analyzed only seven universities in Ukraine and their cooperation, and did not address the possibilities and aspects of cross-border cooperation for Ukrainian universities. In light of this, our study is innovative and unique, as it analyzes the impact of digitalization on cross-border cooperation between universities in Ukraine and European universities within border regions. Proposals have been developed to improve the mechanisms that facilitate cross-border cooperation between higher education institutions in the context of global digitalization in order to create a single expert online platform: intergovernmental dialogue, the exchange of experience at different academic levels (students, postgraduates and teachers), the optimization of academic mobility and the simplification of the systems to recognize diplomas and confirm qualifications.

The Concept of "Digitalization" and its Impact on Educational and Other Activities of Higher Education Institutions in Ukraine and the EU

Digitization has especially accelerated under the influence of globalization processes. The Cambridge Dictionary defines digitization as "the use or association of digital signals with computer technology" or "the representation of information in terms of numbers (0s and 1s)" (Cambridge Dictionary 2025). Wikipedia notes that when digitization is defined, it is "the process of converting information into a digital (i.e., computer-readable) format, resulting in a representation of an object (image, sound, document, or signal) by generating a series of numbers that describe a discrete set points or samples" (Digitization 2025). In scholarly articles, European researchers use the term "digitalization" more widely to mean "people's ability to use digital services", while in education it translates into "the practice of teaching and learning remotely from algorithm-based ways of working" (Armila 2022).

In Ukraine, both terms—"digitization" and "digitalization" are also used in parallel. At the same time, this occurs primarily among scholars. Some use the term "digitalization" to denote processes in electronic

governance (Digitization in Ukraine) and management enterprises (Veretennikova 2021, 42–43), or in analyses of the impact on society and youth (Omelchuk 2020, 296–300). Other scholars specifically use the term “digitalization” when studying the provision of various services (Svitlak 2021) or application in the public administration system (Savchenko 2022).

When analyzing such terms as “digitization” and “digitalization”, Mihrovska concludes that “digitization” is a synonym of “digitalization” in translation (Mihrovska 2021). We can agree with this position, because the analysis of the content of scientific publications showed that the terms “digitalization” and “digitization” are used in the vast majority of cases for the same processes that occur under the influence of digital transformations and technological development.

At the same time, it is worth noting that in Ukraine, at the level of state authorities, the term “digitalization” prevails, for example, the digital portal “Diya” (Digital Transformation n.d.). In addition, the First Educational Information System (EIS) portal was connected to the leading Automated Information Complex of Educational Management (AICEM), and on July 3, 2023, a corresponding agreement was signed that will improve the e-bookkeeping system and optimize data collection, avoiding repeated paper submissions to the information-communication systems (Digitization of Education). In the EU, the term “digitalization” is also used at the official level. Thus, the first Education Digitalization Action Plan was approved in 2018 (Digital Education 2018–2020). Taking into account the above, we used the term “digitalization” in this study.

The first thing that comes to mind when defining the term “digitalization of education” is online learning. Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the provision of educational services remotely. At the same time, a number of professions require full-time training in order to acquire the necessary practical skills. The conducted study showed that the number of applicants who completed a full online training course if it was free was only 15 percent, and in the case of payment, 45 percent (Yachmenyk 2023). At the same time, among the main problems are the quality and oversight of online education. At the same time, distance education opens up new opportunities for training people with special needs and creates a technical basis for the development and implementation of joint courses of higher education institutions of different states, which can stimulate and improve the quality of educational services by providing them within the framework of cross-border cooperation.

On September 30, 2020, the EU adopted a new plan for the digitalization of education for the period 2021–2027 (Digital Education 2021–2027). The adoption of this plan was preceded by thorough research by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),

which as of 2018 showed that on average, fewer than 40 percent of educators in EU countries are ready to use digital technologies in education, more than a third of 13-to-14-year-olds who were studied lacked basic digital skills, and a quarter of low-income households do not have access to computers. Further research revealed that 95 percent of respondents believe that the COVID-19 pandemic is a turning point for the use of technology in education and training (European Digital). Similar processes took place in Ukraine, where the COVID-19 pandemic led to the rapid digitalization of educational services and remote access to training and scholarly research.

The Digital Education Action Plan (2025) in the European Union is an updated policy initiative that reflects common approaches to the implementation of high-quality, inclusive, and accessible digital education. This plan aims to strengthen European cooperation in the field of digital education in order to, on the one hand, overcome the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, and on the other, create new educational opportunities for teachers, students, researchers at various levels—national, European, and international.

The Digital Education Plan in the EU provides for the implementation of the following priority directions:

- 1) promoting the development of a highly effective digital education ecosystem through: structured dialogue with member states regarding digital education and skills; proposals for recommendations on key factors that contribute to successful digital education and training; recommendations for blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education; European Digital Education Content Framework; connectivity and digital equipment for education and training; plans for digital transformation of educational and training institutions; ethical recommendations for the use of artificial intelligence and data in teaching and learning for teachers;
- 2) increasing digital skills and competencies for digital transformation through: general guidelines for teachers and educators on developing digital literacy and combating misinformation through education and training; updating the European Digital Competence Framework to include artificial intelligence and data-related skills; European Digital Skills Certificate (EDSC); recommendations for improving the provision of digital skills in education and training; cross-national data collection on students’ digital skills; digital opportunities internship; participation of women in STEM, etc.” (Digital Education 2021–2027)

An important step for the implementation of these initiatives was the creation by the European Commission of the European Center for Digital Education, which aims to strengthen cooperation and exchange in the

field of digital education at the level of EU member states (European Digital).

Digitization and Cross-Border Cooperation of Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Mobility

The digitization of education in EU countries and Ukraine also affects the process of cross-border cooperation of higher education institutions. Taking into account the provisions of Art. 1 of the Law of Ukraine "On Cross-Border Cooperation" (On Cross-Border 2004), higher educational institutions are participants in cross-border cooperation, which can be carried out for various purposes—in particular, for "establishing and deepening economic, social, scientific, technological, ecological, cultural, and other relations". The Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" does not mention cross-border cooperation; rather, it notes the possibility of academic mobility, which allows not only study, but also teaching, internships, and other scholarly activities in various educational and other academic institutions within Ukraine and abroad (On Higher Education 2014).

Thus, higher educational institutions, in accordance with the legislation and their statutory documents, can enter into agreements on cooperation and partnership with other educational, scientific, or research institutions, as well as with other participants of cross-border cooperation. Cooperation is possible for the implementation of joint educational and scientific projects, conducting cross-border research, academic mobility, joint events (conferences, round tables, seminars, etc.), and the exchange of scholarly and other information.

An important component of cross-border cooperation between higher education institutions is academic mobility at different academic levels. In order to guarantee academic mobility, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which allows students to confirm qualifications and educational components, was implemented in Ukraine. This was a logical decision following the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the European Region dated April 11, 1997 (Convention on Recognition 1997). Based on the provisions of this Convention, the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" contains a number of norms that mention and grant the right to academic mobility (Articles 1, 4, 13, 44, 46, 57, 62, 74, and 75). The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine issued a separate resolution entitled "Issues of the National Information Center of Academic Mobility" (The Issue 2011).

Currently, the National Information Center for Academic Mobility (ENIC UKRAINE) is tasked with the following: provision of unhindered access to information regarding the integration of the national education system into the European educational space; provision of information

and clarification regarding academic mobility, as well as recognition of educational documents; verification of the authenticity of the educational document issued by Ukrainian and foreign educational institutions; revision of inquiries regarding the establishment of equivalence for qualifications awarded by an educational institution based on the document on the education of foreign nationals; preparation of drafts of bilateral and/or multilateral intergovernmental agreements on the recognition of qualifications; promotion of educational services provided by Ukrainian educational institutions abroad; implementation of international academic exchange programs for pupils, students, and postgraduates; and organizational provision of training, internships, or advanced training of Ukrainian citizens in educational institutions of other states (National Information).

Similar institutions were created in Austria and other EU countries. Thus, in Austria, for citizens of the European Union or the European Economic Area, as well as citizens of Switzerland, access to regulated professions is regulated by the EU Directive on professional recognition (Directive 2005/36/EG). It provides rules for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications and thus ensures free access to the labor market of the EU member states. On July 12, 2016, a new Act on the Recognition and Evaluation of Qualifications Obtained Abroad (AuBG) entered into force, establishing new procedures for the evaluation of professional qualifications and education. It stated that persons entitled to asylum and persons entitled to subsidiary protection who lost their certificates or educational certificates during the flight through no fault of their own should be able to prove their qualifications through alternative procedures (e.g. practical or theoretical exams, selective tests, technical discussions, or work samples). Digital technologies are actively implemented in this process and an online recognition portal is provided (Berufsanerkennung n.d.). The specified portal contains detailed information on the application process, including information on procedures, competent authorities, and required documents, as well as procedural costs related to the recognition of education and qualification documents.

The Hungarian Center for Equivalence and Information of the Department of Education operates in Hungary. Hungary has been a member of ENIC since 1994 and of NARIC since 1997, and the Hungarian Equivalence and Information Center (HEIC) has since been performing the tasks of the ENIC/NARIC office in Hungary. Until 31 December 2006, the HEIC was a department of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Since January 1, 2007, it has been a part of the Department of Education. The main task of the HEIC is the recognition of certificates and degrees obtained abroad, but it also provides information on Hungarian and foreign education systems and issues certificates of Hungarian qualifications for use abroad. Since the opening of borders in the early 1990s, it has become easier to move between countries

and, as a result, the number of applicants wishing to have their degrees or qualifications recognized in Hungary has increased. The growing number of applicants forced the creation of a central office in 1993, the main task of which was to recognize higher education qualifications obtained abroad, as well as to facilitate the mobility of teachers and students by providing information. At that time, the legal basis for HEIC's activities was the Higher Education Act of 1993 and Government Decree No. 47/1995 on the Recognition and Nostrification of Foreign Qualifications, Degrees, and Diplomas Obtained in Higher Education Institutions Abroad.

Due to the overlap of jurisdiction of various laws regulating the recognition of foreign degrees and professional qualifications, as well as the overlap of the competence of various institutions and administrative bodies, the need to draw up a new consolidated law on recognition arose. In December 2001, the Hungarian Parliament passed Act No. 100 of 2001 on the Recognition of Foreign Certificates and Degrees, which entered into force on January 1, 2002. Title III of the Act, which regulates recognition under EU law, entered into force only after Hungary became a member of the European Union (May 1, 2004). This Recognition Act, which has been amended several times since its inception, regulates all aspects of the recognition of foreign certificates and degrees in Hungary in accordance with international principles (ENIC/NARIC Hungary n.d.).

A National Information Center was also created in the Slovak Republic. Its tasks are performed by the Diploma Recognition Center (CRD) of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sports of the Slovak Republic. The CRD is part of the ENIC (European Network of Information Centers) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centers) networks and acts as a support center for the recognition of professional qualifications in accordance with the EU Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications. In the case of study abroad, official recognition in Slovakia of the following types is possible: professional recognition (or recognition of professional qualifications), in the case of qualifying for a profession; and academic recognition (extends to continuing education or for any other purpose, with the exception of practicing a regulated profession, for which the level of education or the equivalence of a specialty is determined. All documents are subject to recognition, except for Czech ones, which are automatically equated to Slovak documents due to a bilateral agreement). In addition, in the case of Slovak diplomas and other CRD education documents, apostilles and the super-legalization of documents are possible (Centre for Recognition n.d.).

In Poland, the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchanges (NAWA) was established on October 1, 2017 to coordinate state activities that contribute to the process of internationalization of Polish academic

and research institutions. Its mission is to promote the development of Poland in the field of scholarship and higher education, and its main goals for the period up to 2027 are as follows: strengthen the international cooperation of scholars in the Polish system of scholarship and higher education; strengthen the international cooperation of Polish universities and scholarly institutions; increase the number of foreign students in Polish universities; spread information about the Polish system of higher education and scholarship; and expand international communities of people familiar with the Polish language and culture (The Polish National n.d.).

In the Czech Republic, NARIC is an integral part of the international center ENIC-NARIC, and carries out the following main activities: cooperates with national information centers of other countries; collects information on academic recognition and mobility; provides advice and information about the education system of the Czech Republic; promotes the mobility of students, teachers and researchers; supports the implementation of the Lisbon Convention; cooperates with higher education institutions of the Czech Republic and other interested parties; organizes seminars and workshops on recognition of foreign education; and participates in international projects (ENIC-NARIC Czech Republic 2025).

Digitization already contributes to the activities of the network of Information Centers, which are called upon in various states to promote academic mobility and recognition of diplomas in accordance with the Lisbon Convention. A fairly informative site of the network has been created (<http://enic-naric.net/>), which allows interested parties to get information about the existing network of centers in different states, as well as to find their current contacts. At the same time, in the future, it would be beneficial to create unified online services for several countries within the framework of cross-border cooperation, which would allow requests for information about academic mobility, students, post-graduate students, teachers, and diploma recognition or confirmation of qualifications.

In Ukraine, higher educational institutions are currently developing regulations to promote academic mobility. For example, the Uzhgorod National University separately approved the "Regulations on the Procedure for Recognition (Re-Enrollment) of ECTS Credits for Participants of Academic Mobility Programs at the State Higher Educational Institution 'Uzhgorod National University'" (Regulations 2019) and "Regulations on Academic Mobility of Students at the Uzhgorod National University" (Regulations 2016). On August 31, 2020, the Academic Council of Chernihiv Polytechnic National University approved the Regulation on Academic Mobility of Participants in the Educational Process of Chernihiv Polytechnic National University (Regulations 2020). A similar provision was approved at the Dnipro National University (Regulations 2018),

the Ukrainian Catholic University (Regulations 2020), and other post-secondary institutions.

Academic mobility within the academic period is enabled by the conclusion of agreements between institutions of higher education on international academic mobility. For example, the Uzhgorod National University concluded a memorandum of understanding with the Environmental University of Bucharest (Romania), which provides for joint scientific research and the exchange of teachers and students, joint scientific seminars and conferences, academic mobility of teachers and students, the exchange of publications, etc. (Memorandum 2023). Similar areas of cooperation, including academic mobility, are also defined by the memorandum of understanding between the Uzhhorod National University and the University of Pitesti (Romania) dated December 21, 2022 (The Memorandum 2022). In 2017, an agreement on scientific and cultural cooperation was concluded between the State East European University in Przemyśl (Poland) and the Uzhgorod National University, which provided for the possibility of concluding additional agreements on joint research and didactic projects, and also provided for cooperation through joint research, conferences, information exchange, educational programs, literature, and the exchange of scientific and pedagogical workers, graduate students, and students within the framework of the ERASMUS+Ukraine program (Agreement 2017). Educational and scholarly cooperation is fleshed out in the agreement between the Pomeranian Academy in Slupsk (Poland) and Uzhgorod National University dated June 7, 2019 (Agreement 2019).

In addition, contracts and memorandums regarding the signatories are signed at the level of the individual structural divisions of higher educational institutions. Thus, an agreement on cooperation was concluded between the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Department of Sociology and Social Work of the State Higher Secondary School "UzhNU", and the Faculty of Pedagogy, the Department of Social Work of the University named after J. Komenko in the city of Bratislava (Slovak Republic) (Agreement 2018). This agreement provides for the exchange of teachers, researchers, and students, as well as the joint organization of courses, practices, conferences, seminars, joint master's and undergraduate programs, and the organization of exchanges and other forms of cooperation. Similar norms of cooperation are laid down in the agreement between the Faculty of Social Sciences of the UzhNU University of Applied Sciences and the Faculty of Social Sciences of Marie Curie Skłodowski University in Lublin (Poland) (Agreement 2019). In addition, the Faculty of Law of UzhNU University of Applied Sciences concluded agreements on long-term international cooperation with the Faculty of Law, Canon Law, and Administration of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland), the Faculty of Law of the Masaryk University (Brno, Czech Republic), the Faculty of Law

of the Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia), the Law Faculty of Trnava University in Trnava (Slovakia), the Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic), and others.

Digitization and Cooperation of Higher Educational Institutions in Scholarship and Implementation of Cross-Border Projects

There are already successful examples of cross-border cooperation on the implementation of individual projects with the participation of universities. We analyzed supported projects within the framework of two programs: "Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Program 2007-2013" and "Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC Program 2014-2020". This research showed that within the framework of the "Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Program 2007-2013", out of 31 supported projects in which the Transcarpathian region was included, only two projects involved Uzhhorod National University. One of the projects was called "Space Emergency System" - Cross-Border System for Prediction of Natural Disasters Incidents on the Basis of Exploitation of Satellite Technologies in Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine"; its implementation dates January 1, 2013-October 31 2015, with a total budget of EUR 537,610.79. Within the framework of this project, it was planned to establish a monitoring and warning system in real time with the aim of reducing the damage from natural disasters, including through satellite technologies (This Is the Website 2007-2013). The goal of the second project, "Interactive Institutional Cooperation: History, Traditions and Culture Without Borders", was the strengthening of cultural and historical ties in the border regions. Along with the state higher educational institution "Uzhhorod National University" (Ukraine), the County Museum of Satu Mare (Romania) participated (Interactive Institutional Cooperation 2025).

The program "Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC Program 2014-2020" provided for three rounds of tenders. Projects in the last round had to be completed by no later than Fall of 2023. The analysis of all three tenders showed that in the first round of the "Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC Program 2014-2020", only four projects were selected and none involved institutions of higher education.

In the second selection of 46 projects supported under the program, higher education institutions are involved in nine, of which eight are direct, and one through a structural division (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Hospitals and the University Hospital). Regarding the territorial distribution of the institutions of higher education involved, universities from Romania participated in seven projects (Babes-Bolyai University, Technical University of ClujNapoca, Stefan cel Mare

University of Suceava, and the North University Center of Baia Mare), from Hungary, in six projects (Budapest University of Technology and Economics, University of Nyíregyháza, University of Miskolc and the Structural Division, University Clinic), from Ukraine, in seven projects (Uzhhorod National University, Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas, and Institute of Geological Sciences of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine), and from Slovakia, in five projects (Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice and Technical University of Košice). Our analysis of institutions of higher education also showed that the most projects were implemented with the participation of Technical University of ClujNapoca and Technical University of Košice (four projects each), Uzhhorod National University, Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas, and University of Miskolc (three projects each), Babes-Bolyai University and North University Center of Baia Mare were involved in two projects, other universities were involved in one project (Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, and University of Nyíregyháza), as well as university units (University Hospital) and other scientific institutions (Institute of Geological Sciences of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine). The total fund for these nine projects amounted to €6,040,507; ten universities, two structural divisions of universities, and one research institution were involved.

In the third competition of the program "Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC Program 2014-2020", out of 30 supported projects, higher education institutions were involved in six, of which one project was implemented by a structural unit of the university (University Hospital), one project was implemented exclusively by universities without involvement partners from the public sector or from the authorities (the "NSDNeuro" project with the participation of the State University "Uzhhorod National University" and the University of Debrecen with a budget of €763,757). A territorial analysis of the institutions of higher education involved shows that universities from Hungary were involved in three projects (two universities, University of Miskolc and University of Debrecen, and one university unit, University Hospital), from Ukraine, four projects (State University "Uzhhorod National University" and Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas), and from Slovakia, two projects (Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice and Technical University of Košice). Universities from Romania were not involved. Our analysis of institutions of higher education showed that largest number of such projects was implemented with the participation of the Uzhhorod National University (three projects), while other institutions implemented one project each (Technical University of Košice, Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas, University of Miskolc, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, University of Debrecen, and

University Hospital). The total funding for all projects amounted to €3,781,496. Six universities and one structural unit of a university were involved (The 3rd Call for Proposals n.d.).

The analysis of four competitions held within the framework of the programs "Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013" and "Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC Program 2014-2020" showed positive dynamics. In the first program, two projects were supported with the participation of the university, while 15 projects were supported under the second program in three competitions. As a percentage of the total number of supported projects, under the program "Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013" with the participation of universities, 6.4 percent of projects were supported, and under the program "Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC Program 2014-2020", 18 percent were supported. When comparing the two programs, the growth of projects involving the participation of institutions of higher education was 12 percent.

In a meaningful analysis of projects involving the participation of universities, digitalization creates conditions for their proper organizational and technical support, since first the COVID-19 pandemic and then the full-scale war in Ukraine made adjustments to the free mobility of various project participants—both the main performers as well as experts and beneficiaries. The use of various digital tools, including platforms and services for online collective communication, holding seminars and other events, made it possible to successfully implement the specified projects. At the same time, the directions and goals of projects between higher education institutions are diverse. For example, the project "Introduction of New Standards and Technologies of Surgical Treatment of Diseases of the Central Nervous System in the Cross-Border Region 'NSDNeuro'" with the participation of the State University "Uzhhorod National University" and the University of Debrecen (budget €763,757) provided for joint training for neurosurgeons using innovative neuronavigation systems purchased as part of the project, training for student and teaching youth, and health care specialists, which resulted in conducting exchange visits, forming new standards of medical care, and improving the material and technical base of both project participants (Departments of Neurosurgery of Debrecen University and Regional Clinical Center of Neurosurgery and Neurology in Uzhgorod) (Implementation of New Standards 2025).

The project "Cross-Border Network of Energy Sustainable Universities" (2020), which was implemented from October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2021, with the participation of Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas (Ukraine), Technical

University of Košice (Slovakia), University of Miskolc (Hungary), Technical University of ClujNapoca, and North University Center of Baia Mare (Romania), aimed to overcome the effects of climate change through energy efficiency and sustainable development tools, including cooperation, support, and the exchange of experience. Among the key measures were the implementation of an educational and research site with real costs, the identification of bottlenecks (physical and IT infrastructure, management model), and the construction of a management system with IT solutions for online monitoring of energy consumption and losses by universities (Cross-Border Network).

The project "Regional Center for Training and Monitoring of the Environmental Impact of Electrical Installations", which was carried out in partnership by two universities, the North University Center of Baia Mare and the Ivano-Frankivsk Technical University of Oil and Gas (March 1, 2020–February 28, 2022), tried to solve the problem of environmental protection from various forms of negative impact of electricity in the cross-border territory. During the project, the following measures were identified: environmental education, conducting an information campaign on the impact of electricity on the environment through surveys and exchange of experience, including the identification of common elements and differences in systems for assessing the impact of electrical installations on the environment; the training of 120 students/masters (60 from each country) regarding the transboundary impact on the environment of production, transportation, distribution and use of energy; the formation of a joint information system on indicators of electromagnetic pollution, the impact of radiation, sounds and vibration of electrical installations in the cross-border region; and the development of cooperation between various organizations in this area (Regional Center n.d.).

In the project "Energy Recovery from Municipal Solid Waste by Thermal Conversion Technologies in the Cross-Border Region", which was carried out by the North University Center of Baia Mare, the Ivano-Frankivsk Technical University of Oil and Gas, and the Technical University of Košice from November 1, 2019 to October 31, 2020, the main goal was to bring together experts from prestigious universities to explore the possibilities of managing solid household waste through the thermal treatment method, as well as to raise awareness, create databases with waste characteristics, and develop a software application ("Electronic Monitoring Platform") for data management relating to the administration of heat treatment of waste (Energy Recovery n.d.).

As part of the project "Expansion of the Existing Space Emergency Protection System for Monitoring Dangerous Natural and Man-Made Geoprocesses in the Cross-Border Territory of Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine" (2025), implemented from December 2019 through May 2022, geodetic surveys were planned for

the cross-border territory, along with the development of a methodology for the use of existing infrastructure in spatial and temporal modeling of water vapor content in the atmosphere, and the formation of a risk map on a special platform. Five partners were involved in the implementation of the project: Uzhhorod National University (Ukraine), Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice (Slovakia), Technical University of ClujNapoca (Romania), Budapest University of Technology and Economics (Hungary), and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (Hungary) (Expansion).

The project "New Energy Solutions in the Carpathian region", implemented from January 2020 through December 2022, aimed to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy sources through education and practical activities in communities for the sustainable use of natural resources in the border regions of Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. The project's main activities included: raising awareness of environmental protection among residents of 12 communities from four border regions; developing the energy concept, including the use of renewable energy; conducting exercises and training sessions for the staff of the Energy Training Center and laboratories on energy efficiency and renewable energy; installing a system of solar panels and heat pumps for heating the premises and heating the water in the pool of the Burevisnyk sports complex; developing research on energy audits and energy management using new technologies and innovations for local communities and locations, etc. Six partners participated in the implementation of the project: Uzhhorod National University (Ukraine), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (Hungary), Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava (Romania), NGO "Center for European Initiatives" (Ukraine), Technical University of Košice (Slovakia), and Niredgaz University (Hungary) (New Energy Solutions 2025).

At the same time, a substantive analysis showed that no project was aimed at the development of digital technologies in the field of cross-border cooperation. The latest digital technologies have become tools for the implementation of individual projects (creation of platforms, websites, promotion of events, etc.), and also helped in the organizational aspects of project implementation, first during the COVID-19 pandemic, and later throughout the war in Ukraine.

Conclusions

Modern risks caused by possible pandemics, hostilities, and other emergency situations urge increased digitalization of cross-border cooperation between institutions of higher learning in order to create a single expert online platform, including intergovernmental dialogue, the exchange of experience at different academic levels (between students, postgraduates, and teachers), the optimization of academic mobility,

and the simplification of the system of recognizing diplomas and confirming qualifications.

The priority areas of cross-border cooperation between institutions of higher education regarding the digitalization of education and scholarship are:

- inter-state dialogue and communications to improve the digital skills of participants in educational and scientific activities, as well as awareness of digital security;
- exchange of experience and development of best common practices in the implementation of blended learning;
- development and implementation of joint training courses in a mixed format (remotely, face-to-face through digital tools);
- guaranteeing accessibility in the field of higher education;
- improvement of the technical capabilities of educational and scientific research in border regions;
- development of joint concepts of cross-border digitalization of border regions, and based on them, development of plans for digital transformation of institutions of higher education;
- formation of ethical recommendations regarding the use of artificial intelligence and data in scholarly research and education;
- formation of unified platforms for international data collection, exchange of information on educational services in different states within the framework of cross-border territories;
- formation of unified electronic libraries and databases in border regions.

For the development and transformation of education and science in educational institutions of Ukraine, it is very important:

- 1) to regulate at the legal level the possibility of dual education with double diplomas, for obtaining education at two universities within the border territories (simultaneously at a Ukrainian university and an institution in the EU; currently such a process is not regulated at the legislative level);
- 2) to strengthen the capacity of universities to introduce digital technologies into the educational process and to participate in the preparation and implementation of cross-border projects for building digital infrastructure.

Thus, global digitalization can not only propel processes of cross-border cooperation at the level of institutions of higher education, but also can promote the unification of standards in the field of education based on common values, overcoming barriers caused by borders.

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The Role of Cross-Border Cooperation in Democracy Promotion Between Slovakia and Ukraine: The Zakarpattia (Transcarpathia) Region

Tatiana Shaban

This paper argues that cross-border cooperation practices stand as a vehicle of Ukraine's bottom-up integration with the EU, ultimately helping to grow public trust in democratic governance in Ukraine. By looking at the case of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia, this paper shows how cross-border cooperation practices are developing between two neighbouring states and how mutual trust between the border communities and with their local and national authorities has been established across the border. The cross-border cooperation policy of the European Union is a reasonably new policy for Ukraine. Therefore, best practices established by the neighbouring EU states have been of great significance for Ukraine from both political and territorial perspectives, and in relation to the Ukrainian state's progress towards integration into Europe.

Introduction

The role of borders in democracy promotion has been studied considerably by border and democracy scholars. However, what do we know about democracy promotion across borders between the European Union (EU) states and Ukraine? Ukraine and Slovakia have considerable relationships among border communities, but we do not know much about their character and how sustainable they are. This paper questions cross-border cooperation (CBC) trends on the Slovakia-Ukraine border in Zakarpattia region, and, mainly, it raises the research question of how efficient Slovak involvement and participation in Ukrainian democratic development, including cross-border governance, has been since August 1991 when the Ukrainian state gained its independence. The paper contributes to the wider literature on the EU's policies for efficient border governance in

broader Europe by examining and highlighting important factors that develop the basis for democratic cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine at different levels and with multiple actors.

The Zakarpattia region (Figure 1) is a unique territory within the Ukrainian state. It is Ukraine's most western territory and borders four EU member states at once: Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and Poland. To answer the main question, this paper proceeds in four steps. First, it introduces Slovakian-Ukrainian cooperation at the EU and local levels. Second, it provides a brief literature review of recent academic debates on EU regionalisation and its border governance, which have paid extensive attention to the development of its CBC activities. Scholarly debates provide a conceptual

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Figure 1. Zakarpattia Oblast of Ukraine (Red). The region is also known as Transcarpathia or Carpathian Ruthenia . Source: TUBS, Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zakarpattia_in_Ukraine.svg

framework for the EU as a transformative power and as a good governance actor. These help explain Slovakia's external performance in promoting democracy, security and welfare in the border region. Finally, the paper examines the relationship of Slovakia and Ukraine by looking at the development and progress of specific programs and instruments employed in Zakarpattia region. In addition, it analyses the territorial and security challenges Slovakia and Ukraine encounter on the ground. It is remarkable that there is little research done on Slovak-Ukrainian border cooperation in the field of democracy promotion. This paper aims to fill that gap by looking at socio-economic and political developments in the Zakarpattia border region.

Methodology

This paper uses a regional approach, which looks at interactions among various stakeholders who can make an impact and contribute to decision-making at various state and non-state levels. By helping countries to focus on common challenges, a regional approach has the potential to enhance confidence among partner countries, thus promoting security, stability, and prosperity. According to the European Commission (henceforth, the Commission), the concept of *European governance* encompasses five principles of good

governance—i.e., openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence—in a comprehensive framework for consistent policies associating civil society organizations and European institutions (Commission of the European Communities 2001, 10). The change that is occurring within the understanding of the concept of governance is nuanced by the emergence and importance of cross-border cooperation outside the EU. Therefore, EU border politics comprises a complex range of programmes, policies and imaginaries of political community in which borders are used as resources for different specific aims.

CBC has a significant local dimension where cooperation develops between regions that are closely interconnected. Since May 2004, Ukraine has had direct border connections with three EU member countries: Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. The Law of Ukraine "On Cross-Border Cooperation" (2004) defined the legal, economic, and organizational principles of Ukrainian cooperation in the border regions. As it is defined in the law, CBC is a sequence of actions aimed to establish and intensify economic, social, scientific, technical, environmental, cultural, and other relations between territorial communities and their representative bodies, local executive authorities of Ukraine, and similar public institutions of other states. Thus, the European

Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of the EU was not just about the integration scenario, but also about managing the existing cultural, political, and religious differences through CBC and exchanges so that each side can learn and acquire knowledge about the other.

This paper does not focus on democratic development covering immigration and human rights debates for it has been published broadly in the literature (i.e., Liikanen et al. 2016), including a number of the most recent media publications. It mainly studies the EU and Slovakia's good governance initiatives and programmes, covering welfare, border management, and security issues in order to analyze their role in the democratic development of the Ukrainian state. Cross-border cooperation and partnership is described in accordance with the definition used by the Association of European Border Regions as "neighbourly cooperation in all areas of life between regional and local authorities along the border and involving all actors" (2000). Moreover, in the EU, CBC activities actively contribute to transforming the operation of power across various levels of governance, and a "new mode" of governance emerges from this development. This form of governance incorporates a new style of decision-making that is dependent on non-hierarchical and mutually interdependent relationships aimed at building consensus among various actors whose interests may differ. Border scholars also investigate the proliferation of borders in contemporary societies by examining the role of multiple agents, networks, and forces in shaping or challenging them (Newman & Paasi 1998; Paasi 2001; Van Houtum 2005).

Ukrainian Zakarpattia and Slovakia: Different paths towards European integration

In the 1990s, two neighbouring countries, post-Socialist Ukraine and Slovakia, shared a common history. Both had been under a communist regime for much of the 20th century and at the end of the Cold War experienced similar political and economic ambitions. Since the 1990s, Ukraine saw itself as a European state actor and sought to move into the European political mainstream. In 1997, it signed a Charter on Distinctive Partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization establishing a framework for cooperation and consultation in various areas. Yet, it was not ever seriously considered to become an EU member (Verdun & Chira 2011) until Russia launched a war with Ukraine in 2022. The Slovak Republic, which came into existence on 1 January 1993, after the 'Velvet Revolution' and the 'Velvet Divorce',¹ had a very different path towards European integration. Once it was accepted as an accession country to the EU, it went through enormous political, economic, social, and cultural transformations (Bitušiková 2002) in order to become a member state in 2004.

At the bilateral level, the ENP provided a framework for the strengthening of the Partnership and Cooperation

Agreements and the Association Agreements with its Eastern European partners (Commission of the European Communities 2004). The EU-Ukraine Visa Liberalization Dialogue (VLAP)² was launched on 29 October 2008 and presented to Ukraine on 22 November 2010. The VLAP for Ukraine also required that the government implement specific national reforms. However, the EU itself had relatively low leverage in Ukrainian regions in those days. Given that Ukraine preserved Soviet administrative divisions without democratic self-government, the highest leverage was exercised by the Council of Europe. Its norms focused on the local level which had been important for sub-state institutional reform in Western Ukraine and the Ukrainian territory in general.

Zakarpattia region (Oblast') has been characterized by geographical exclusivity, poor historical links with Ukrainian statehood, the independence of local politicians, ethnic groups' aspirations for autonomy, and the ambitions of local elites with sufficient financial independence, including the relatively limited influence of Russia in the region (Kaľan 2014; Tokar 2016, 2022). Slovakia, and more specifically Prešov and Košice autonomous counties of the Slovak republic, has a border of almost 100 kilometres with Ukrainian Zakarpattia (Vegeš 2004). Zakarpattia's main city, Uzhgorod, is located directly at the border with Slovakia and very near the Hungarian border. The majority of the local population on the Slovakian-Ukrainian border is comprised of a group known as the Carpatho-Rusyns.³ In 2007, this border became part of the EU's Schengen Area.⁴ Most notably, major energy pipelines⁵ pass from Russia into the EU through Slovakia-Ukraine borderlands. Regarding the multilateral dimension of Ukrainian-Slovakian partnership, cooperative efforts were mostly meant to address challenges that had an integral cross-border character and could have consequently been addressed at the regional level. For example, under the terms of the EU response to Covid-19, assistance was provided as part of the official development cooperation activities of the Slovak Republic under the Slovak Aid brand. Through these activities, Slovakia joined the broader EU initiatives (the so-called Team Europe) aimed at supporting partner countries, including Ukraine, in their fight against the new coronavirus. In financial terms, the value of the material humanitarian aid was €186,000 (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic n.d.). A large part of its transport costs was financed through the EU Emergency Response Coordination Centre. As a result, the strategic importance of regional cooperation lay in the fact that while supplementing national policies and promoting cross regional cooperation and integration, it dealt with issues that were common to both partners (Tokar 2012). In that way, it brought together people from the partner countries and helped them to engage in discussions and exchange appropriate views and experiences.

Literature Review

Cross-border cooperation and democracy

Cross-border cooperation (CBC) policy has been an important element of the EU's regional policy since its formulation. According to Perkmann, it aims to bridge countries, civilisations, and continents and involves a certain stabilization of cross-border contacts, that is, institution-building, over time (2003, 156). It is also assumed that with time, CBC breaks down barriers to deeper political and social integration, and creates new development opportunities through communication, ideas, and synergy (Scott 2006). Like other social and cultural processes, borders can be contested, subverted, and dismantled, opening up new spaces for inclusion, solidarity, and democracy (Mogiani 2024). However, some scholars argue that the different objectives of the EU regional cooperation agenda have been mutually contradictory and contained both elements of potential regional partnerships and exclusionary and discriminatory aspects (Scott 2009; Angelovi 2014; Liikanen et al. 2016). In addition to differentiation and coordination problems, Paasi (2001) notes that the dominating hegemonic identity of the EU tends to suppress other voices. Dimitrova suggests that there are grounds to look at the integration motivation of the ENP with pessimism due to distrust, the EU's self-interests (or those of its member states), geopolitics, and a perception of power asymmetries which undermine the networking function of borders and can be seen as damaging to effective cross-border governance and border transcendence (2010). Consequently, the 2014 Ukrainian crises seriously challenged the EU's integration project and questioned its legitimacy as a new kind of international actor and an effective crisis manager. Furthermore, following the revision of the ENP in the autumn of 2015, official EU documents argue for the first time that the neighbourhood is a geopolitical space and there is a need for the EU to engage in conflict resolution in the region (European Commission 2015).

The international community as a whole, as well as both Western and Central Eastern actors, played an important role in the process of shaping Ukrainian governing structures. The Association Agreement (AA) and Free Trade Cooperation Agreement (DCFTA)⁶, the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and other legal acts of the EU and the Council of Europe formed the basis for regional integration. They envisaged the setting up and deepening of direct contacts between Ukrainian regions and countries which were either members or candidate members of the EU. The development of those contacts was in line with the directions specified in the Agreement with the aim of transferring the focus of the integration process from central bodies of executive power to regions, to bodies of local self-government, and to territorial Hromadas (Ukrainian communities) in order to secure the widest possible cooperation

and integration with the EU and its member states. According to Strážay (2010), the shared values and common interests of participating countries enable them to cooperate in a number of areas, while the borders as such are considered to be a linking point, not a divisive one. In 2009 the Eastern Partnership (EaP) of the EU was launched by 27 EU member states and the six partner countries⁷—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine—with the adoption of the Prague Declaration as a specific Eastern dimension of the ENP. As a result, the EaP opened up the scope for more involvement of non-state actors in multilateral settings, in order to contribute to processes of regional social integration and to the sharing of experiences to enhance democratisation processes.

Europeanisation and governance

The literature on Europeanisation suggests that the EU exerts important transformative power outside its borders. The concept of 'Wider Europe' implied increasing openness and inclusionary politics where neighbourhood relationships could be jointly negotiated between the EU and its regional partners (Commission of the European Communities 2003; European Commission 2009). It was launched with the objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours to the south and east, and of strengthening the prosperity, stability, and security of all countries concerned. The concept served as the basis for the European Neighbourhood and the Eastern Partnership policies. In other words, the overall objective of the policy was to draw both old and new neighbours closer into the EU's political, economic, and cultural realm, short of full membership. In a reorganised EaP initiative, the 'more for more' principle was further strengthened, systematically providing more support in expertise, twinning, and technical and financial assistance in proportion to the achievements and effectiveness of implementation to date. Better functioning institutions were intended to give Ukraine stronger *de facto* sovereignty and the confidence to choose its own form of strategic identity. New priorities, such as border management and a focus on multilateral initiatives under the EaP, signalled the continuation of a region-based approach (Simão 2013; 2017; Slavkova 2015) and recognition of shared values, common traditions, and histories among neighbours in its shared borderland. It is also important that the features of community appear, such as trust, undisputable social norms, and the local nets of organizations which increase the efficiency of the regional and local community (Putnam 1993; Perkmann 2003). The creation of these communities is a result of activities aiming at satisfying mutual needs, and their space is determined by the net of ties between inhabitants and associations. As a result, more actors are engaged in border-related activities and management. Moreover, in light of regional conflicts and threats (Haukkala 2003; Sasse

2008; Schimmelfennig 2009; Börzel & van Hüllen 2011; 2013; Papadimitriou et al. 2017; Chlôn 2017) to the international order that seem to require joint efforts by the international community in response, the Commission called for a comprehensive approach⁸ to the management of external conflicts and crises.

In addition to security matters, scholarly research claims that improved governance in the neighbourhood remains crucial to its economic growth (Åslund 2015). In Ukraine, the EU provided constant financial and political support to public administration reform, regarded as central to country's democratic consolidation (Youngs 2009). From 2011 onward, the EU initiated various forms of governance in its external neighbourhood—supporting local initiatives, diversifying stakeholders, and speaking to all levels of society—from business communities, local authorities, educational circles, and civil society to government-level officials and civil servants (Casier 2013; Solonenko 2009). Through the conclusion of bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements, the EU created preferential trade relations with third countries and promoted processes of economic, political, and social transformation. Slovakia aimed to achieve 'good governance' standards in respect of the functional quality and effectiveness of democratic institutions.⁹ Ever since the beginning of Slovak involvement in the Eastern neighborhood, the majority of the Slovak governing elite and intellectuals have frequently highlighted that Slovakia's experience of democratic transition and Euro-Atlantic integration was an asset in understanding and helping its Eastern neighbours (Najslova 2011, 101). In addition, the Visegrad¹⁰ (also known as the 'Visegrad Four' or simply 'V4') countries provided many forms of assistance to Ukraine and its people. Ukraine received more attention in the foreign policy of the Slovak Republic because the Visegrad countries agreed to provide sponsorship and assistance to Ukraine with reforms (Plenta 2017, 5).

The transition experience of Slovakia

The EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe started their dual transition process from planned economy to market economy and from single party state to democracy at the end of the Cold War. In Slovakia itself, democracy promotion became the solution to the economic and political destabilization of the former Yugoslav and Soviet republics in the region. Therefore, Petrova suggested that it could be expected that in both Ukraine and Belarus, Slovakia would be most interested in supporting the governing institutions as the most efficient way to stabilize these regions and promote Slovak economic expansion there (Petrova 2015, 140). Slovakia was responsible for energy security and reform of the security sector; the Czech Republic assisted with civil society, media, and education; Poland covered decentralisation and public finance reform, and Hungary helped in supporting small and medium

enterprises as well as Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement implementation (Visegrad Group 2014). According to Petrova, Poland and Slovakia were two of the most active democracy promoters in Ukraine (2012; 2015).

Slovak domestic discourse accepted that a democratic and free neighborhood with good governance corresponds more to the Slovak national interest than one which is poor, unstable, and conflict-ridden (Najslova 2011). During the 20th century, this area was governed by six different entities (the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, the Soviet Union, and Ukraine) with complex and occasionally shifting borders. Various nationalities lived together in a heterogeneous area that was also characterized by a mixture of major religions and ethnicities: Orthodoxy, Greek Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Calvinism, Protestantism, Judaism, and Roma (Tanaka 2006, 65). Together, these features characterized the area as "a mosaic zone of ethnicities, cultures and religions" and "a microcosm of new Europe" (Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association 2001, 6, 11). The only exception to this are the Carpatho-Ukrainians (also known as the Carpathian Ruthenians or Rusyns) of the far-west Zakarpattia Oblast' who speak their own distinct East Slavic language. When analysing the Ukraine-Slovak regions it is possible to state that these border regions are among the most economically underdeveloped ones (Angelovič et al. 2011). Since the early 1990s, Transcarpathians have become increasingly dependent for economic survival on crossing the borders westwards, primarily into Slovakia and Hungary. According to Benč (2014), cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine had been primarily determined by external factors and, to a far lesser extent, by local and regional initiatives, opportunities, and partnerships. Certain cross-border initiatives have survived in bad as well as good times through their personal commitment and long-term cross-border partnerships at the local level, but there are just a few examples of these (Lačny et al. 2019). Academic debates emphasise that in the absence of strong formal institutions, informal networks and decision-making play a crucial role (Solonenko 2015). In the end, such partnership activities endorsed the development of good governing practices at the local and regional levels through the exchange of experience, ideas, and best practices in Ukraine. Domestic agents of change and lobbying activities by civil society actors in the shared neighbourhood were supported through various trans-governmental initiatives and regional and inter-regional cooperation programs, mainly in education (Tempus, Erasmus Mundus), transport and border assistance, institution-building (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange, TAIEX, and Support for Improvement in Governance and Management, SIGMA¹¹), and twinning and investment.

Slovak and EU Regional Programs and Instruments: Slovakia as a 'Friendly Pragmatist' in Ukraine

Ukraine is the only Eastern European country with which Slovakia shares a border, albeit a relatively short one at 97 kilometres long. The vision for the current 2014–2020 CBC programme of the Hungary–Slovakia–Romania–Ukraine region stated that “in 2030 the area along the borders of Ukraine with the three members states of Hungary, Slovakia and Romania will be a cooperative cross-border region that efficiently functions and works together” (Hungary–Slovakia–Romania–Ukraine n.d.). This programme has four objectives, six priorities, and EU funding totalling €81,347,200. Thus, CBC contributes to the overall objective of progress towards ‘an area of shared prosperity and good neighbourliness’ (Article 8, the Treaty on European Union) between EU member states and their neighbours. What characterises the current CBC programmes and makes them a unique cooperation mechanism is the participating countries’ strong commitment and ownership based on balanced partnership between the participating countries on either side of a border. Member states and neighbouring countries have an equal say in the programs’ decisions and joint projects receive funding only if implemented by partners on both sides.

Ukraine was one of Slovakia’s Official Development Assistance project countries as part of the EaP programmes, which focused on support of the democratic and reform process in Ukraine. Slovakia provided its experience with political and economic transformation through financial support of projects prepared and implemented together by Slovak and Ukrainian organisations in Ukraine (Buchtová et al. 2016, 74). There were several research projects, activities, and conferences regarding cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine as well. However, there was no institution carrying out regular and independent research on Slovak–Ukrainian relations with a focus on cross-border cooperation and issues (SFPA 2016). Since the early 1990s, Transcarpathian Ukraine became increasingly dependent for economic survival on crossing the borders westwards, primarily into Slovakia and Hungary. Likewise, Eastern Slovakia was one of the most underdeveloped regions of Slovakia and the EU in terms of social and economic aspects, lacking necessary infrastructure. The character of the borderland between 1990 and 2004 depended particularly on the policies of the national governments of the Slovak Republic and Ukraine and the interests of national actors that influenced the policies of their governments and ultimately the framework between the two countries that controlled the common border. The Dzurinda Government (1998–2006) in Slovakia saw Ukraine as an important neighbor and partner. The key issues which were always addressed included economic cooperation, democratic development, state-building, energy security, and Ukraine’s European integration ambitions. To confirm

the above, the Slovak Strategy stated that unless the level of relations between the EU and Ukraine were to change, no major developments in the institutional terms for Slovakian and Ukrainian CBC development on the bilateral and regional levels could occur (Plenta 2017). However, in 2000, Slovakia introduced a visa regime for the citizens of Ukraine (along with Russia and Belarus) in order to harmonize its national visa policy with the EU. As a result, the introduction of the visa regime had a negative impact on bilateral Slovak–Ukrainian relations (Vorotnyuk 2016, 10). In addition, the accession of Slovakia to the EU in 2004, including the application of the Schengen Agreement, led to an important change in the character of the border. It reduced or limited the capacities of the Slovak government to regulate the border with Ukraine while strengthening the EU’s influence on the nature of the Slovakia–Ukraine border. It created new obstacles to cross-border cooperation, limiting the movement of persons through the border due to the introduction of a restrictive visa regime for Ukrainian citizens.

In the period of 2007 to 2013, the Hungary–Slovakia–Romania–Ukraine ENPI CBC Programme¹² was implemented on the external border between participating EU member states and Ukraine. The Programme offered a wide range of opportunities to potential beneficiaries through its four priorities: economic and social development, enhanced environmental quality, increased border efficiency, and supporting people-to-people cooperation. In parallel, it envisaged a reinforcement of bilateral cooperation at various levels, i.e., of relations with neighbours through the negotiation of AAs, DCFTAs, visa liberalization, cooperation in the field of energy, support to social and economic policies, and assistance aimed at strengthening institutional capacities in order to meet the requirements of negotiated agreements. Also, the EaP set up a network of civil society organizations in the EU and partner countries. Assistance in this area provided administrative and financial support for cross-border cooperation across the region and sub-regions between civil society organizations. According to Slovakia’s official development strategy, “Slovakia’s comparative advantages as a new donor, including mainly its experiences with the transition to democracy and market economy backed by its knowledge of the territory of priority countries, represent the most notable added value that Slovakia may bring to the donor community” (Slovak Agency 2009, 12). Also, in the wake of the European integration, Slovakia launched National Conventions for European Integration in Moldova and Ukraine, developed by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association to institutionalize public debate in EU-related issues based on the partnership of governmental, non-governmental and business organizations, and the Centre for Experience Transfer from Integration and Reforms from the accession process, later transformed into Sharing Slovak Expertise, a development tool, of the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation and the

Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava. Using standard tools and additional financial capacity, the International Visegrad Fund¹³ started with flagship projects aimed at promoting the Slovak Democratization and Transformation experience, developing regional cooperation, and supporting civil society.

In 2003, the Slovak government included Ukraine (and Belarus) in its framework for the official development assistance program of the Slovak Republic, and after the Orange revolution, it adopted a Proposal for Assistance to Ukraine which consisted of more than 40 activities. Those actions were supported through Slovak and EU funding programmes, which facilitated contact-building between local and regional actors within Ukraine (Committee of the Regions 2011). Out of all the Eastern European countries, Ukraine received the most long-term attention from Slovakia's government at a number of different stages. According to the Intergovernmental Agreement of the Slovak Republic and Ukraine on Cross-Border Cooperation (in force as of 29th January, 2001) and the Protocol from the Second Meeting of the Slovak-Ukraine (Ukrainian-Slovak) Intergovernmental Commission for Cross-Border Cooperation (Protocol 2005), the Transcarpathian, Lviv, and Ivano-Frankivsk Regions of Ukraine and two Self-governing Regions of Slovakia, Prešov and Košice, were identified as regions involved in CBC between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine. Since then, non-governmental organisations, regional institutions, and towns/villages on both sides of the border became the main engine of CBC.

The Carpathian Mountains play a major part in the oblast's economy, making the region an important tourist and travel destination with many ski and spa resorts. Major attractions of the region are Ukrainian castles, of which the most notable are the castles of Uzhgorod and Mukachevo. Zakarpattia Region is situated in the Carpathian Mountains of Western Ukraine, the only Ukrainian administrative division which borders upon four countries: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. In the area, a major source of water for the population is river water and groundwater. These rivers cross borders, so their protection from contamination is very important. The hydrographic network of the region consists of 152 rivers which belong to the Tisza river basin. However, rivers of the basin are polluted, in particular through illegal waste storage, and consequently need to be protected; such pollution also leads to a bad quality of drinking water (water treatment plants are also outdated and need to be reconstructed). In their turn, the Slovak regions situated adjacent to these borders are characterised by beautiful landscapes and forests. Prešov Region also has considerable potential for tourism and recreation, as it owns 358 cultural-educational facilities (Draft Joint Operational Programme 2015, 86). Four of the seven sites listed in the UNESCO World Heritage list in Slovakia are located in the

territory of Prešov region: Bardejov Town Conservation Reserve, Wooden Churches of the Slovak part of the Carpathian Mountain Area, Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Levoča, and the associated cultural monuments. Prešov Region is witnessing a growing interest in the areas of renewable energy resources, green technologies, and energy efficiency. Košický Region is considered to be the second largest region in the Slovak Republic. The city of Košice is the second largest city in Slovakia and has a range of cultural and historical monuments (the Slovak Karst National Park, caves of Aggtelek Karst, and Slovak Karst Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians which are both trans-boundary UNESCO World Heritage Sites).

However, compared to other neighbouring countries, cooperation between local Slovak governments and Ukraine was the least efficient. One of the problems was the reluctant attitude of the local Slovak authorities to cooperate with Ukrainian partners due to issues arising in the relations with Ukraine (Mrinska et al. 2012, 181). During the Yanukovich presidency (2010–2014), Slovakia, following Poland's example, intensified its political dialogue with Ukraine. At the same time, Miroslav Lajčák, who served as a Foreign Minister of Slovakia during two terms (2009–2010; 2012–2020), stated in the presence of Organisation of Economic and Cooperation Development (OECD) Council members that it is important to focus primarily on how to assist Ukraine rather than how to weaken Russia. He also noted that Slovakia was going to make a €25,000 voluntary contribution to the OECD project for fighting corruption in Ukraine. The Revolution of Dignity in 2014 re-enforced Ukraine's strategic importance for Slovakia, while Russia's annexation of Crimea and its military involvement in the Donbas region changed Slovakia's security focus (Marusiak 2013). According to Badida (2014), the gas map of Europe had been gradually changing, to the disadvantage of Slovakia. It started to move towards a greater geopolitical logic in relation with Russia. Slovakia's biggest support to Ukraine came in the form of energy security¹⁴ at its own cost almost without EU resources. Following the 2009 gas crisis,¹⁵ an interconnection with the Czech Republic was constructed which made reverse gas flow technically available for Ukraine. As a result, gas supplies from Russia were cut by 40 to 50 percent after Slovakia started to supply gas to Ukraine via the reverse flow mechanism at the end of 2014 (Plenta 2017). That contributed to Ukraine's energy security and saved up to \$3 billion according to Ukrainian government estimates.

Ukraine and Slovakia took part in ENPI CBC programmes through two financial periods: 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 (ongoing). The Neighbourhood Programme "Hungary-Slovakia-Ukraine" covered a population of about 11 million inhabitants. This programme aimed at strengthening economic and social integration in the cross-border region (Figure 2) through infrastructure

development and support of local initiatives. Its total EU funding amounted to €27.8 million, with €23.8 million coming from European Regional Policy resources and €4 million from the Tacis programme for Ukraine. The Hungary–Slovakia–Romania–Ukraine (HUSKROUA) ENI CBC Programme of 2014–2020 is one of 16 CBC programmes on the external borders of the EU, implemented under the European Neighbourhood Instrument. Its goals were to promote economic and social development, enhance environmental quality, increase border efficiency, and support people-to-people cooperation. The programme area is located on the Hungarian–Slovak–Romanian–Ukrainian border, and among others includes four territorial units in Slovakia and Ukraine: Košický and Prešovský regions in Slovakia and Zakarpattia, Ivano–Frankivska and Chernivetska regions in Ukraine. The programming area covers 32 percent of Slovak Republic and six percent of Ukraine. It includes approximately 599 kilometres of joint border with Ukraine, which covers fully the Slovak–Ukrainian (98 kilometres) and Hungarian–Ukrainian (135 kilometres) borders and partially the Romanian–Ukrainian border (366 kilometres). The HUSKROUA total funding had a budget of €68.6 million.

As an example of a cross-border cooperation case study, the Vyšné Nemecké–Uzhorod border crossing point was planned for reconstruction in order to increase border efficiency (Duleba et al 2023, 248). However, while activities on the Slovak side of the border were successfully implemented, the Ukrainian part of the project was another story. Due to long-lasting problems

with public procurement procedures and other obstacles with re-organizations of partners between 2013 and 2016, the Commission conducted an assessment of six border infrastructure projects related to Border Crossing Points at the Ukrainian borders with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania in 2017 and recommended suspending the implementation of these projects (European Commission 2018). In the end, the Zakarpattia Customs Office planned to completely finalize this large infrastructure project from the state budget of Ukraine.

Overall, Slovakia's regional support enhanced cooperation between relevant justice actors and institutions across the regions, and, to a more limited extent, with the EU. In the justice sector, Slovak cooperation with Ukraine was mainly aimed at supporting national reforms of the judiciary systems and at developing the institutional and administrative capacities of the justice administrations at the national level through the Action Plans. In addition to the above, in the ENP East region, a specific platform for dialogue on democratic governance, was established between the EaP countries and the EU and in cooperation with the Council of Europe; multilateral seminars were conducted to discuss electoral standards, judicial reform, the fight against corruption, and more. As a result of these activities, professional and personal relations were established (Jaresko 2017) among legal and judicial professionals in the Eastern region, and with Europe. Recognising the overall success of the first program, the Government Office of the Slovak Republic decided to continue



Figure 2. Strengthening Economic and Social Integration in Western Ukraine's Cross-border Region. Source: Mycyk (2024), © Dentons.

to support of CBC with Ukraine in the period from 2014 to 2020¹⁶ within the Good Governance and CBC programme, with the allocation of €8,500,000 from the EEA Financial Mechanism and co-financing of €1,500,000 from the State budget of the Slovak Republic. The Programme objective was to improve the integrity and accountability of public administration. Within the Programme the Area "Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Judicial System, Strengthening Rule of Law" was managed by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, and the second Programme Area "Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency" by its Government Office.

On July 3, 2020, material humanitarian aid in the total amount of €83,902 was sent from Slovakia to Ukraine. In this way, Slovakia responded to Ukraine's request for assistance in connection with the mitigation of the consequences of the devastating floods that affected the Western regions of Ukraine on from June 22 to 24 of 2020. The floods destroyed more than 130 bridges and 430 kilometres of roads. The assistance was provided as part of the official development cooperation of the Slovak Republic under the SlovakAid brand on the basis of a specific request from Ukraine. A large part of the transport costs was financed through the EU Emergency Response Coordination Center. To add, the Regional Fund for the Support of Entrepreneurship (RFSE) was one of the main and regular participants in the Regional Programme for the Support and Development of Entrepreneurship in Ukraine. Within the Programme, the RFSE organized free-of-charge seminars and round-tables for small-scale enterprises on a quarterly basis and maintained a 'hotline business consultation' facility. CBC financing also came from external sources, either the EU budget, the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, the International Visegrad Fund, or other donors subsidising it. For instance, from Norway, a financial mechanism has supported 33 projects of cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine totalling €10.8 million (Úrad vlády Slovenskej Republiky 2016). There are several examples of increased aid cooperation between different Slovak and Ukrainian institutions after Russian intervention in Eastern Ukraine. Probably one of the most visible examples of the Slovak Republic's assistance to Ukraine was the provision of recreation for Ukrainian children, and recovery and rehabilitation stays for wounded soldiers (Buchtová et al. 2016, 75). However, there remains a need to create an environment for countries to create their own regional and local instruments to support cross-border cooperation.

Conclusion

The EU's neighbourhood is complex and far from being stable. In Ukraine, significant progress occurred in many areas of transition; however, much work remains

to be done, especially in the field of regional development and governance where many legacies of the Soviet model remain. Ukraine was one of the biggest recipients of Slovakia's transformation aid in the field of political and economic reform. Slovak civil society also played an important role in Slovakia's democracy assistance and transformation aid to Ukraine. However, the Slovak contribution to strengthening governance through regional programmes was rather limited, reflecting minimal resources allocated to these areas of cooperation and lack of overall coherent EU strategy to address problems through concrete actions. Before 2007, in the Eastern region, there was no clear policy framework to support civil society and relatively small amount of funds allocated to regional civil society programmes. This lack of support for civil society involvement explains to some extent the limited results of the EU programmes in Ukraine. Citizens in Ukraine were not well prepared to exercise effective control over politicians and bureaucrats, neither at the central nor at the local level. People seeking something to which they were entitled by law thought they had to offer money or other benefits to get service of the expected quality.

To conclude, the role of border-adjacent regions in the Slovak-Ukraine borderland in international cooperation is of great significance from both political and territorial perspectives, and with regard to the course of European integration of the Ukrainian state. Notwithstanding these limitations and the ongoing war, policy-makers in Slovakia perceive Ukraine as a successful example of transformation and EU integration. The EU and its member states' assistance have introduced, increased, and reinforced the level of understanding of EU norms and values on the part of the government, civil actors, and society at large in Ukraine.

Notes

- 1 The Czecho-Slovak Federal Republic was peacefully dissolved as a result of the agreement between the parliaments and governments of the Czech and the Slovak Republics in 1992.
- 2 VLAP included four blocks of benchmarks related to document security, including biometrics; border management, migration and asylum; public order and security; and external relations and fundamental rights. The benchmarks concerned both the policy and institutional framework (legislation and planning) and the effective and sustainable implementation of this framework.
- 3 The Carpatho-Rusyns are a distinct ethnic group, indicating 'people of the Rus'—East Slavic people who share a similar language, faith, and identity (Magocsi 2015; Batt 2002).
- 4 Slovakia joined the EU and became a member of NATO in 2004. In the same year, it signed the Schengen agreement, and in December 2007 it started implementing the (Schengen) Convention.
- 5 The Druzhba energy pipeline splits into two branches in Mazyr (Belarus) and goes to Poland and Ukraine. From Ukrainian territory, it passes to Slovakia which is among

- the largest Russian gas transit countries. The Slovak gas transmission system operator is Eustream A.S..
- 6 Currently, the AA provides a new legal framework for bilateral EU-Ukraine relations after being ratified by all 28 EU member states on September 1, 2017. Substantial parts of it have been applied provisionally since 1 November 2014 and 1 January 2016 for the DCFTA. In June 2017 the visa liberalisation process was finalised. As of 11 June 2017, the visa obligation for citizens of Ukraine who hold a biometric passport and want to travel to the Schengen zone for a short stay was abolished (Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission, last update 19/04/2018).
 - 7 The EaP aimed to support Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in advancing to a market economy, sustainable development, and good governance. It was built on the framework of the ENP and designed to "accelerate political association and further economic integration" (Council of the European Union 2009, 6) in several areas, including governance, trade, migration and border management, energy, and the environment, between the EU and its partner countries.
 - 8 The EU comprehensive approach towards crises is understood as providing security and building up a security community based on liberal democracy and a market economy, and not just management of the conflict itself.
 - 9 Generally, the Central Eastern European countries are now considered consolidated democracies, even though they still face governance problems such as corruption, lower levels of political accountability, issues with transparency, as well as wider problems like public apathy towards politics and weak civil societies. In some countries, most notably Hungary, and to a lesser extent Romania and Slovakia, recent democratic rollbacks are also evident (Szent-Iványi & Kugiel 2020).
 - 10 The V4 reflects the efforts of four Central European countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary) to work together in a number of fields of common interest in the broader context of European integration, which prioritize strengthening the rule of law, the efficiency of national government and local governments, the transparency of public procurement, the reduction of state regulation, and the fight against corruption.
 - 11 SIGMA is a joint initiative of the Commission and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, principally financed by the EU. It focuses on strengthening public management in areas such as administrative reform, public procurement, public sector ethics, anti-corruption, and external and internal financial control.
 - 12 The Programme entered into force on 23 September 2008, after the approval of the European Commission. It allocated €68,638,283 in ENPI funding for the seven years. As a result, 46 new projects were approved for funding in the framework of the HUSKROUA ENPI CBC Programme, requesting about €17 million in co-financing from the ENPI, complemented by state co-financing of the three member states and the contributions of the Applicants and Partners.
 - 13 Information about Visegrad is also available here: <http://visegradfund.org/home/>.
 - 14 A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) enabling gas flows from Slovakia to Ukraine was signed by the pipeline operators concerned, the Slovakian company Eustream and the Ukrainian company Ukrtransgaz (Memo, 13 May 2014). Along with the MoU the companies signed a Framework Interconnection Agreement laying out the technical details: the existing and unused Vojany (Vojany-Uzhgorod) pipeline at Veľké Kapušany (Budince cross-border interconnection

point) on the Slovakian side was planned to be modernised during a short construction period.

- 15 Ukraine stopped buying Russian gas directly in November 2015. It started importing gas from Poland via backhauling since January 1 and planned to launch virtual reverse flow from Hungary later that year, according to the Gas Transmission System Operator of Ukraine. Russia's Gazprom opposed backhauling practices, but in December 2019 signed a new five-year gas transit agreement with Ukraine.
- 16 The Joint Operational Programme (JOP) for implementation of the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC Programme 2014-2020 was approved by the Commission Implementing Decision no. C (2015) 9180 on 17 December 2015. The JOP receives €74 million in EU funding from the ENI as well as from the European Regional Development Fund (Draft Joint Operational Programme 2015, 64).

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EU-Ukraine Cross-Border Energy Cooperation: Trends and Directions for Post-War Reconstruction

Iryna Yaremak

This paper is dedicated to exploring the essence of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and the EU countries in the energy sector. The enhancement of such cooperation became possible after Ukraine joined the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity, as the border regions gained broader opportunities for reconstructing existing and building new international power lines. This, in turn, creates new opportunities for energy cooperation and accelerates Ukraine's European integration. In the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the policy vector of cross-border cooperation has shifted towards regional projects in the humanitarian, military, and energy sectors. The present study contains an overview of the Ukrainian energy sector and the cross-border power transmission system, an analysis of the destruction of Ukraine's energy infrastructure, and an assessment of what will be needed for its restoration. This study addresses several European Union countries bordering Ukraine and connected by international power lines: Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia. It would appear that Ukraine and its neighboring EU member states have significant potential for cooperation in the energy sector. Finally, we identify the main venues of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and EU countries in the energy sector.

Keywords: cross-border cooperation, energy sector, power transmission lines, European integration, electricity.

Introduction

The problems of cross-border cooperation currently occupy a central place in the politics of European countries, which is explained by the increasing interdependence of national economies and a renewed understanding of the importance of integration in the context of international relations disrupted by the war in Ukraine. Cross-border interactions (economic, social, scientific-technical, environmental, cultural) between Ukraine and European Union (EU) member states are now determined primarily by military-political factors.

Moreover, Ukraine's European integration is taking place in conditions of large-scale Russian intervention.

The EU is carrying out a number of ad hoc activities supporting Ukraine, as well as preparing for its post-war reconstruction process. European cities and regions are also able to participate in these activities and reconstruction. Existing and new partnership agreements with Ukrainian local and regional authorities (LRA) can be used for this purpose, as well as the experience of active territorial cooperation, including through EU-funded programs. Agreements with Ukrainian partners have been concluded mainly by cities and regions from countries that are in close proximity to Ukraine. Territorial cooperation of Ukrainian LRAs with European partners in 2022 is shown in Figure 1.

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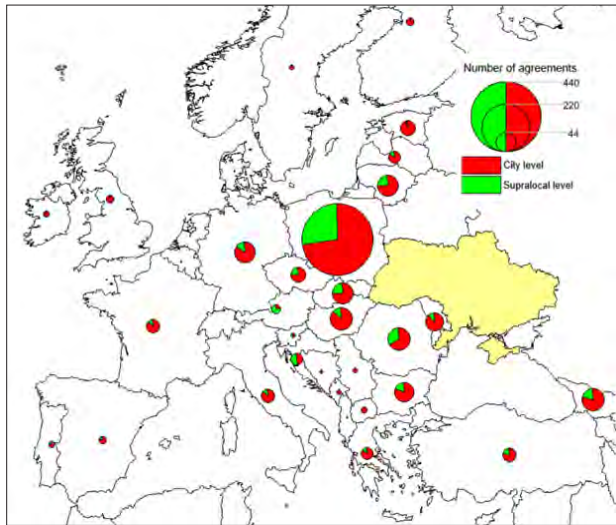


Figure 1. Territorial Cooperation of Ukrainian LRAs with European Partners in 2022. Source: Smętkowski et al. (2023, 21), © European Union.

Most partnership agreements with Ukrainian LRAs were concluded by Polish local governments. The other main EU partners of Ukrainian cities were of similar importance as measured by the number of agreements signed. At the local level, Hungary came second (7%), not least because of its strongly developed contacts with the Zakarpattia Oblast inhabited by a significant Hungarian minority. In addition to Hungary, the other two EU countries bordering Ukraine—Slovakia (5%) and Romania (5%)—each had around 30 partnership agreements. Regional and local partnerships between Ukraine and EU countries in 2022 are shown in Figure 2.

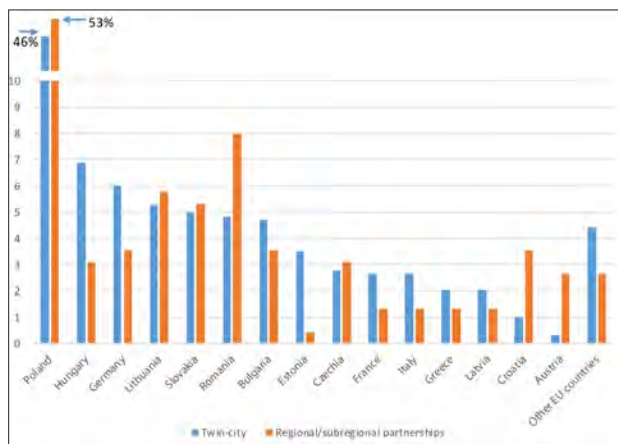


Figure 2. Regional and Local Partnerships Between UA and EU Countries (% of total), 2022. Source: Smętkowski et al. (2023, 22), © European Union.

As a matter of fact, European Union programs and instruments are an important source of funding for territorial cooperation both within the EU and with neighbouring countries, including Ukraine. Sectoral

integration covers a wide range of areas of territorial cooperation, from energy to the digital market and ecology. Under current wartime conditions, security and military-technical cooperation have been prioritized. At the same time, there is a need to prioritize specific sectors of European integration, which, on the one hand, should become additional “drivers” of internal socio-economic transformations, and on the other hand, accelerate Ukraine’s integration into the EU in its most important areas. The EU has prioritized security of the energy supply in its cooperation with the Ukrainian energy sector. The task for developing cooperation in the energy sector between the EU and Ukraine is to ensure the stability of the energy supply, enhance the energy security of the region, promote economic growth, and facilitate Ukraine’s integration into European energy markets.

This research aims at reviewing both the current state of cooperation between Ukraine and EU countries in the field of energy, and Ukraine’s accession to the ENTSO-E and the use and expansion of its transit potential. The main research tasks include analyzing past experiences, as well as assessing future potential and opportunities for cooperation between the EU and its Ukrainian border regions in the energy sector. The first section of this paper provides an overview of the Ukrainian power sector and the cross-border transmission system. Due to the constant threat of rocket fire from the north-eastern border, the Ukrainian energy system experiences significant destruction of energy facilities within the Unified Energy System of Ukraine. Consequently, this section analyzes the destruction of Ukraine’s energy infrastructure and assesses the needs for its restoration. The second section examines the essence of cross-border cooperation in the energy sector between Ukraine and neighboring countries. Throughout this research, several European Union countries bordering Ukraine and possessing international power lines, including Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia, are analyzed. The third part is dedicated to defining the main venues of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and EU countries in the energy sector.

1. Overview of the Ukrainian Power Sector

This part presents the generating capacities of the Unified Energy System of Ukraine. Electric power engineering includes all types of power plants and grid management. Electricity production in Ukraine is based on the use of nuclear energy (NPPs), coal, fuel oil, natural gas (TPPs), hydroelectric power (HPPs), pumped-storage hydroelectric power plants (PSPPs), solar energy (SEPs), and wind energy. The National Power Company (NPC) Ukrenergo is the transmission system operator (TSO) for electricity in Ukraine (Ukrenergo 2024). The total installed capacity of power plants in the Unified Energy System of Ukraine as of December 31, 2021 (excluding the energy generating facilities of the

Crimean power system and the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions) amounts to 56.247 GW, of which 49.7% is accounted for by thermal power plants (including TPPs, CHPs, and block stations), 24.6% by nuclear power plants, 11.2% by hydroelectric power plants and pumped-storage hydroelectric power plants, and 14.5% by power plants operating on renewable energy sources including wind power plants, solar power plants, and bioenergy power plants. The dynamics of the installed capacity structure of the power stations of the Unified Energy System of Ukraine, excluding the temporarily occupied territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions, is presented in Table 1.

Major generating capacities of the Unified Energy System of Ukraine (as of December 31, 2021) are concentrated at: 4 nuclear power plants; 10 hydroelectric power plants on the Dnipro, Dniester, Southern Bug rivers, as well as on the Tereblia and Rika rivers (Tereblia-Ritska hydroelectric power plant); 12 thermal power plants and 3 turbo generators, as well as 3 large combined heat and power plants (CHPs); RES plants (including stations using biofuels).

An overview map of power plants in Ukraine is shown in Figure 3. According to the figure, thermal power plants and hydroelectric power plants are the most numerous. However, the majority of electricity in Ukraine is generated by nuclear power plants. Additionally, renewable energy sources are developing, primarily represented by solar and wind power plants.

The pre-war (2021) total generation of the power system in Ukraine was 158 TWh. The generation was composed of the following: nuclear 86.2 TWh (55%); coal 36.5 TWh (23%); natural gas 14.3 TWh (9%); hydro 10.3 TWh (7%); solar 6.6 TWh (4%); wind 2.8 TWh (2%); biofuels and waste 0.8 TWh. There was an import/export balance of 2.0 TWh net export (1.5 TWh imports 3.5 TWh exports) (World Nuclear Association 2024).

Since 2014, the northern cross-border neighbor of Ukraine, the Russian Federation, has employed military tactics involving attacks on civilian utilities and energy

infrastructures. These tactics intensified on October 10, 2022, leading to significant damage to transmission and distribution (T&D) infrastructure and posing risks to the stability of power systems. These actions directly affect the operational conditions of energy facilities. In this regard, the installed capacity mix of power plants in Ukraine has decreased by more than 50%. Accordingly, losses of installed capacity of power plants in Ukraine in 2021, 2022, and 2023 are illustrated in the Figure 4.



Figure 3. Overview Map of Power Plants in Ukraine. Source: BiuroPTPiREE (2022). © Energia Elektryczna.



Figure 4. Losses of Installed Capacity of Power Plants in Ukraine. Source: author's adaptation from Cooperation for Restoring the Ukrainian Energy Infrastructure Project Task Force (2023b, 4).

Table 1. The Dynamics of the Installed Capacity Mix of the Power Plants of Ukraine, GW. Source: table adapted from National Council for the Recovery of Ukraine from the Consequences of the War (2022, 16).

| Type of power station | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Hydroelectric power plants (HPPs)/pumped-storage hydroelectric power plants (PSPPs) | 6.2 | 6.2 | 6.2 | 6.3 | 6.3 | 6.3 |
| RES plant | 1.0 | 1.2 | 1.7 | 4.7 | 6.7 | 8.1 |
| Combined heat and power plants (CHPs) | 6.5 | 5.9 | 6.1 | 6.1 | 6.1 | 6.1 |
| Thermal power plants (TPPs) | 24.6 | 24.6 | 21.8 | 21.8 | 21.8 | 21.8 |
| Nuclear power plants (NPPs) | 13.8 | 13.8 | 13.8 | 13.8 | 13.8 | 13.8 |
| Total | 52.1 | 51.7 | 49.6 | 52.7 | 54.7 | 56.2 |

Regarding the electricity transmission system managed by NPC Ukrenergo, it comprises 23,600 km of overhead lines and 141 substations with voltages ranging from 110 to 750 kV. Prior to the beginning of March 2022, the power system of Ukraine consisted of two parts (see Figure 5): the main part synchronized with the power systems of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Baltic States (96% of the Integrated Power System (IPS) of Ukraine), and a small part (4%, Burshtynska Island) integrated into the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E).

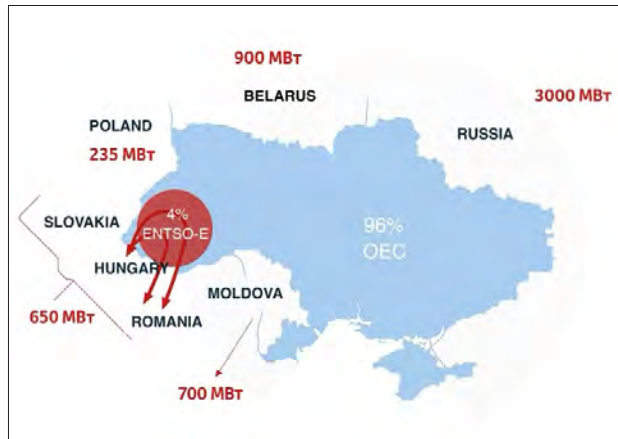


Figure 5. The Two Parts of the Ukrainian Power System (pre-2022). Prepared by the author.

Electricity was exported from the "Burshtynska Island" to Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania. With the introduction of a new electricity market model in Ukraine on 1 July 2019, it became possible to import electricity to the island's trade zone (see Figure 6), as well as to the main part of the IPS of Ukraine (from Belarus, Russia, and Moldova) (Bajs 2021).

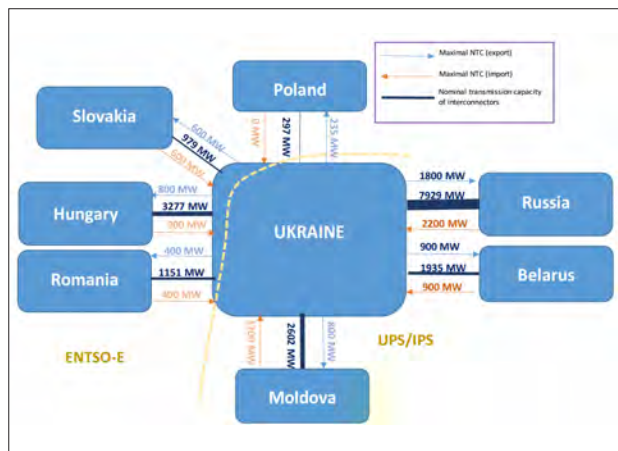


Figure 6. Nominal Transmission Capacity of the Interconnectors at the Ukrainian Borders and Maximum NTC Values (Maximum Permitted Exchanges). Source: Bajs (2021, 50). © Energy Community.

The issue of expanding the ENTSO-E synchronous zone due to the connection of the IPS of Ukraine was raised in 2005. Ukraine expressed its desire to follow European standards by signing the Agreement on the Conditions for the Future Interconnection of the Power System of Ukraine with the Power System of Continental Europe and adopting its new energy strategy in 2017. A chronology of events regarding the integration of Ukraine's energy system into the European energy system is presented in the Executive Summary of Studies for Synchronous Interconnection of Grids of Continental Europe and Ukraine/Moldova (Ukrenergo n.d.). During this time, the power units of Ukrainian nuclear power plants, thermal power plants, combined heat and power plants, and hydroelectric power stations were tested. A mathematical model of the energy systems of Ukraine and Moldova was created, based on which the ENTSO-E TSO Consortium conducted research on the static and dynamic stability of the energy systems of Ukraine and Moldova when operating with the Continental Europe network. The research results have demonstrated the technical feasibility of synchronization. Ukraine joined the unified energy system of Continental Europe ENTSO-E on March 16, 2022, one year ahead of schedule. The energy systems of Ukraine and Moldova are fully synchronized with the Continental Europe ENTSO-E energy grid.

Currently, ENTSO-E, the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity, is the association for cooperation between European transmission system operators (TSOs). The 40 member TSOs, representing 36 countries, are responsible for the secure and coordinated operation of Europe's electricity system, the largest interconnected electrical grid in the world (see Figure 7) (ENTSO-E 2023).

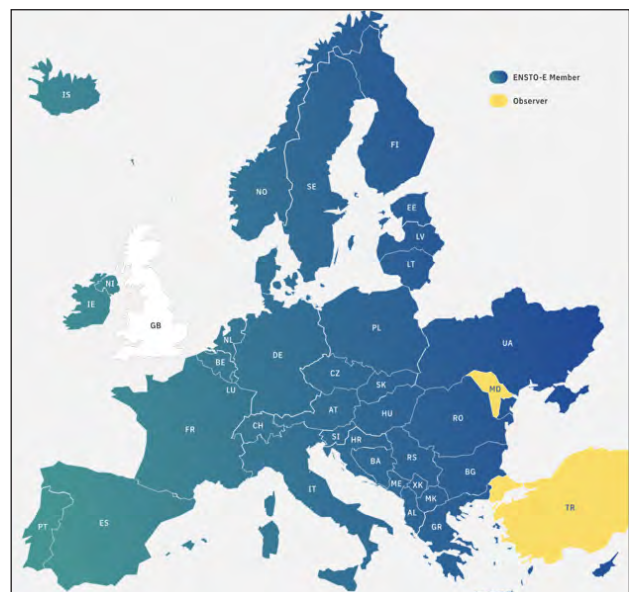


Figure 7. ENTSO-E Members as of December 2023. Source: ENTSO-E (2023). © ENTSO-E.

One of the greatest opportunities that Ukraine gained after synchronization with the Continental European network (ENTSO-E) was the export of electric energy. Typically, Ukraine's surplus energy system now has opportunities to sell excess electricity to neighboring Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, and Moldova. After two years of synchronous operation between the energy systems of Ukraine and Europe, the export of electricity to neighboring countries amounted to three million MWh, with imports from European countries reaching one million MWh (Ukrinform 2024). Significant destruction caused by the aggressor has affected both the country's internal energy balance and the prospects for selling energy to EU countries. Ukraine's export potential has significantly diminished.

The following part draws the readers' attention to damage in the power sector, which has faced persistent attacks on its infrastructure since February of 2022. Intensified assaults starting in early October 2022 inflicted widespread damage nationwide. Ukraine's energy infrastructure has since endured multiple attacks, including cyberattacks on energy companies, causing significant damage to the integrated energy system, including power generation and transmission infrastructure (see Figure 8).

The electricity production and transmission sectors have suffered the most from Russian aggression. From October 2022 to February 2023, the Russian Federation launched large-scale attacks on electricity facilities. Regular shelling of energy infrastructure

continued in frontline regions. In early June 2023, Russia destroyed the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Station, with direct losses estimated at \$586 million. Rebuilding a similar capacity station will cost approximately \$1 billion. According to the Third Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment prepared by the World Bank, the Government of Ukraine, the European Union, and the United Nations (2024), the power sector has suffered the largest share of wartime damage, amounting to \$7.5 billion USD. Within this sector, the generation segment has incurred the most damage at \$4.9 billion USD, followed by the transmission segment with \$2.15 billion USD in damages. The damage to the power distribution sector is estimated at approximately \$430 million USD, though this figure does not include assets in territories temporarily not under the control of the Government of Ukraine (see Figure 9).

Revenue decline is happening as a result of assaults on energy infrastructure, mass displacement, economic downturn, and rising poverty. Revenue losses are worsened by decreased collection rates, especially near the front line. The power sector has lost \$31.97 billion, with recovery needs totaling \$40.4 billion over 10 years, including green transition efforts and EU alignment. The highest needs are in Zaporizska, Kharkivska, and Donetsk oblasts. So far, \$1.73 billion has been disbursed, and \$3.19 billion committed (World Bank et al. 2024). Fulfilled needs include repairing power transmission equipment, constructing protective infrastructure, establishing transmission connections, installing voltage-regulating devices, restoring hydropower plants,

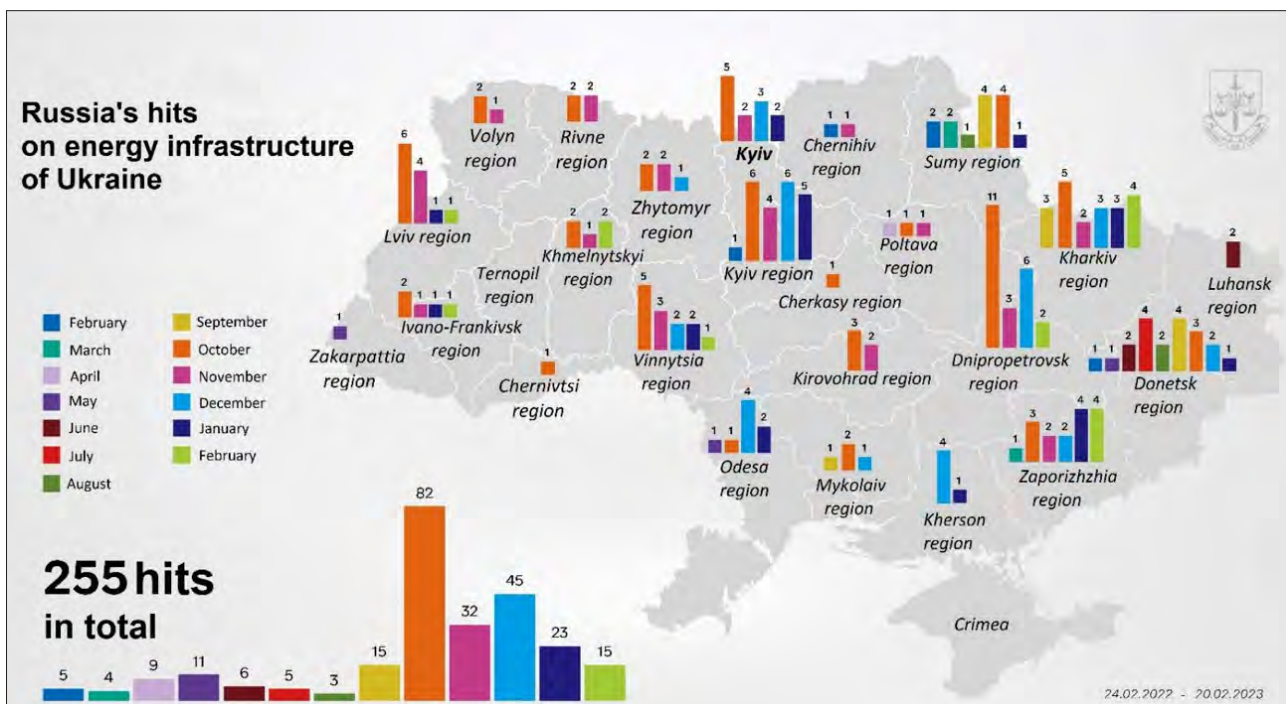


Figure 8. The RF's Hits on Energy Infrastructure of Ukraine. Source: Cooperation for Restoring the Ukrainian Energy Infrastructure Project Task Force (2023a). © International Energy Charter.

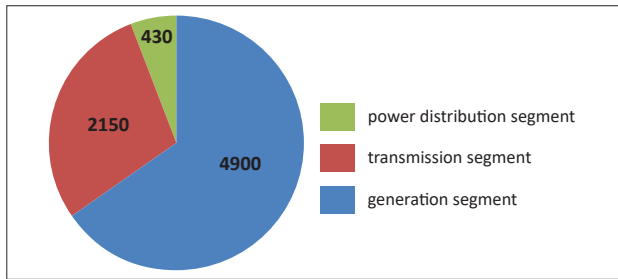


Figure 9. Direct Infrastructure Damage to Electricity Facilities, in Millions of Dollars. Prepared by the author.

setting up distributed generation facilities, and procuring for the heating season. As of February 2024, Russia has not achieved its main objective of inflicting continuous and irreparable damage to the infrastructure for political purposes. It is worth noting that since February 2022, Ukraine has received a lot of help in renovating its power system from different international donors. A major part of it was provided by the Ukraine Energy Support Fund (Energy Community Secretariat n.d.-a) established by the Energy Community Secretariat (Energy Community Secretariat n.d.-b) in 2022. This initiative is part of broader efforts led by the Energy Community, an international organization that brings together the EU and its neighbouring countries to create a pan-European energy market.

2. Cross-Border Cooperation Between Ukraine and the EU Countries in the Energy Sector

This part highlights the role of borders, the state, and trends of EU-Ukraine cross-border energy cooperation. In today's conditions, cross-border cooperation in

Ukraine serves simultaneously as a tool for the development of border areas and as a driving force for the implementation of its European integration aspirations through the prism of European state and societal interaction. Cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in the energy sector is one of the important directions of sectoral European integration, which has developed dynamically. Recently, due to Russian missile attacks, it has gained decisive importance. Ukrainian energy infrastructure facilities have been targeted by Russia since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, and since October 2022, the Russians have been on a course to completely destroy it; "50% of Ukraine's energy infrastructure has been damaged—Russia must be held accountable", says Herman Galushchenko (Ministry of Energy of Ukraine 2023a). The successful synchronization of Ukraine and Moldova's electricity grids with the European Energy Network of Transmission System Operators (ENTSO-E) ensured grid stability for Ukraine and facilitated the import/export of electricity. The benefits for Ukraine were evident: enhanced investment opportunities and alignment with European energy standards, both of which are appealing to investors. For the EU, this marked a significant shift in the regional energy landscape, introducing Ukraine as a robust and dependable electricity supplier. Against the backdrop of the energy crisis resulting from Russia's war, Ukrainian electricity to the EU was poised to bolster energy security, diversify markets, and provide energy with neutral carbon emissions. On the whole, energy cross-border cooperation is a productive means of ensuring internal stability in the conditions of a large-scale war, as well as a tool for integration into the EU internal market.

The amount of electrical energy generated in Ukraine and Ukrainian border regions—Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary—during 2022 is shown in Figure 10 (Energy Institute 2023). Based on the analysis of

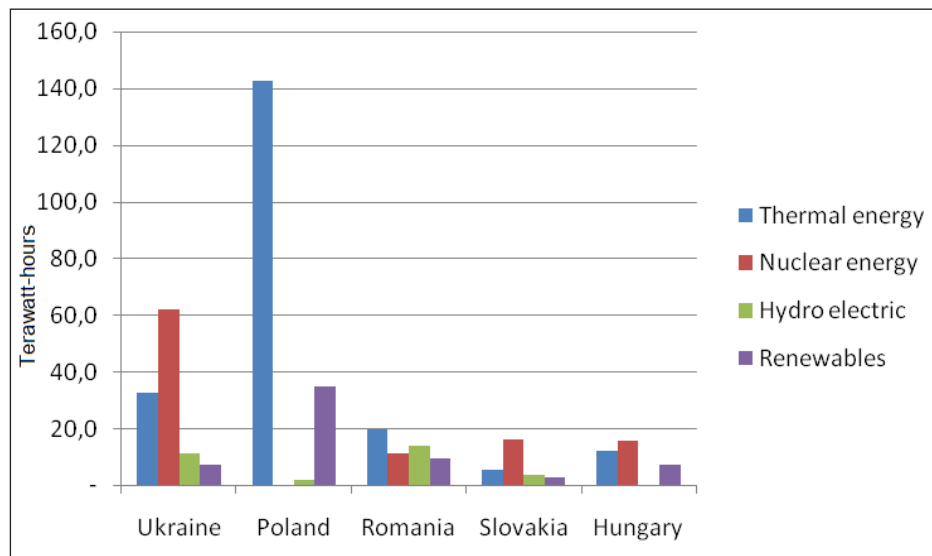


Figure 10. Electrical Energy Generated by Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary. Prepared by the author.

statistical data, it was established that, as of 2022, Poland produces the largest amount of electrical energy. However, a significant share of electrical energy in Poland is generated at thermal power plants, and therefore it has high-carbon greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, Poland is also a leader in the generation of green electricity.

In particular, the development of renewable energy sources is also notable in Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary. As for Ukraine, currently, more than 70% of the electricity produced in the country is low-carbon in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. This achievement is attributed to a high proportion of nuclear and hydrogen generation, as well as an increasing share of renewable energy sources. Consequently, Ukraine can supply neighboring EU states with affordable and low-carbon electricity. An important factor in this regard is the availability of international power transmission lines, which are illustrated in Figure 11.

The number of existing cross-border transmission lines to Ukraine's neighbors, classified by voltage class, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of existing cross-border transmission lines to Ukraine's neighbours, by voltage class. Prepared by the author.

| Country | Transmission lines, voltage class kV | | | | | |
|------------|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| Ukraine to | 750 kV | 400 kV | 330 kV | 220 kV | 35 kV | Total |
| Poland | 1 | | | 1 | | 2 |
| Slovakia | | 1 | | | 1 | 2 |
| Hungary | 1 | 1 | | 2 | | 4 |
| Romania | 1 | 1 | | | | 2 |

Hence, the presence of cross-border electricity transmission lines and the integration of Ukraine's energy system with ENTSO-E enable close cooperation with neighboring countries in the energy sector. Figure 12 illustrates the magnitude of imported and exported electrical energy to neighbouring countries in 2023. According to analytical data from the leading consulting company Exploration & Production Consulting (EXPRO Consulting 2024), for the entire year of 2023, the majority of electricity imports came from Slovakia, accounting for 69%. Ukraine exported the most electricity

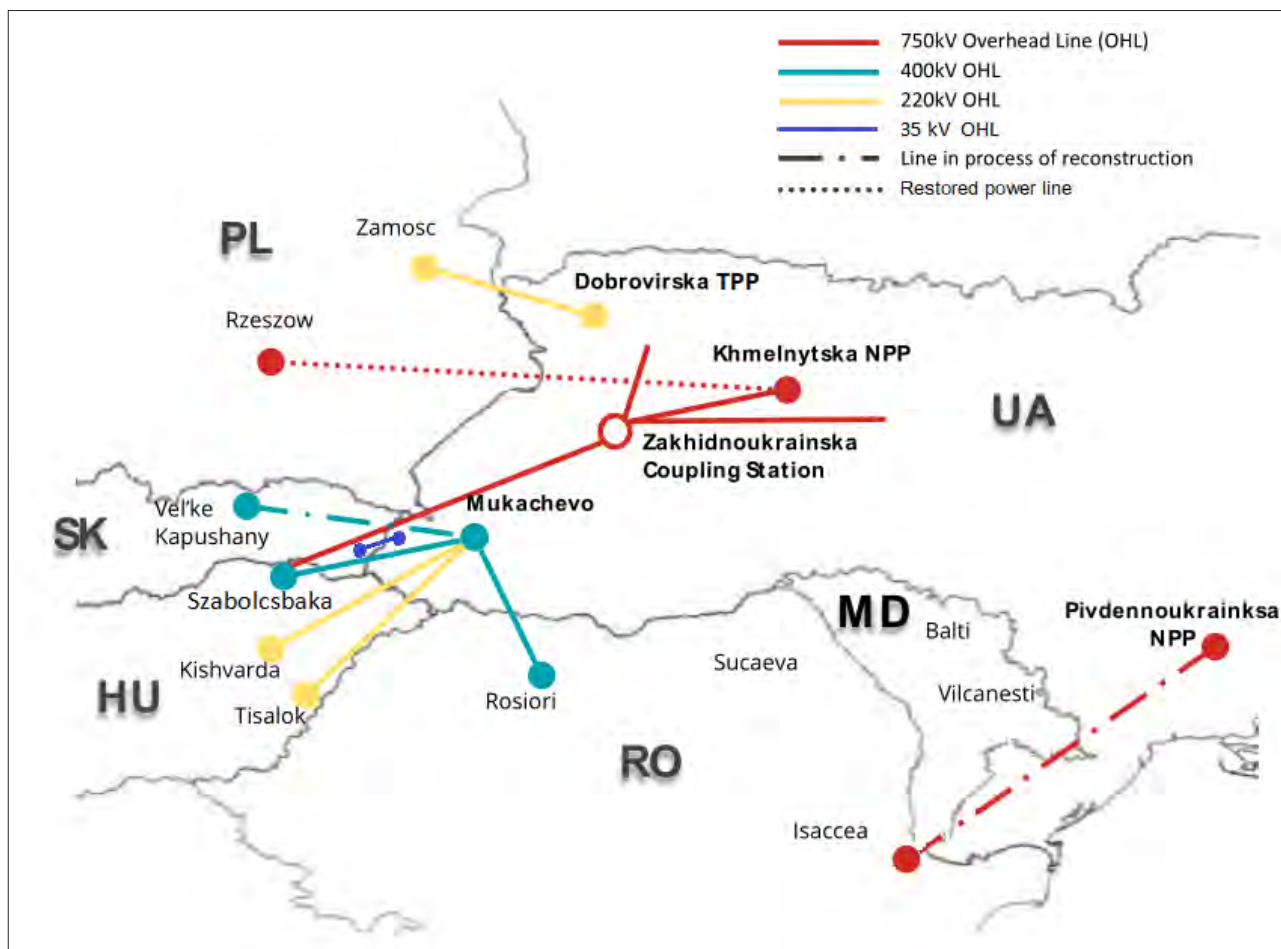


Figure 11. Transmission Lines Between Ukraine and Neighbouring EU States. Prepared by the author.

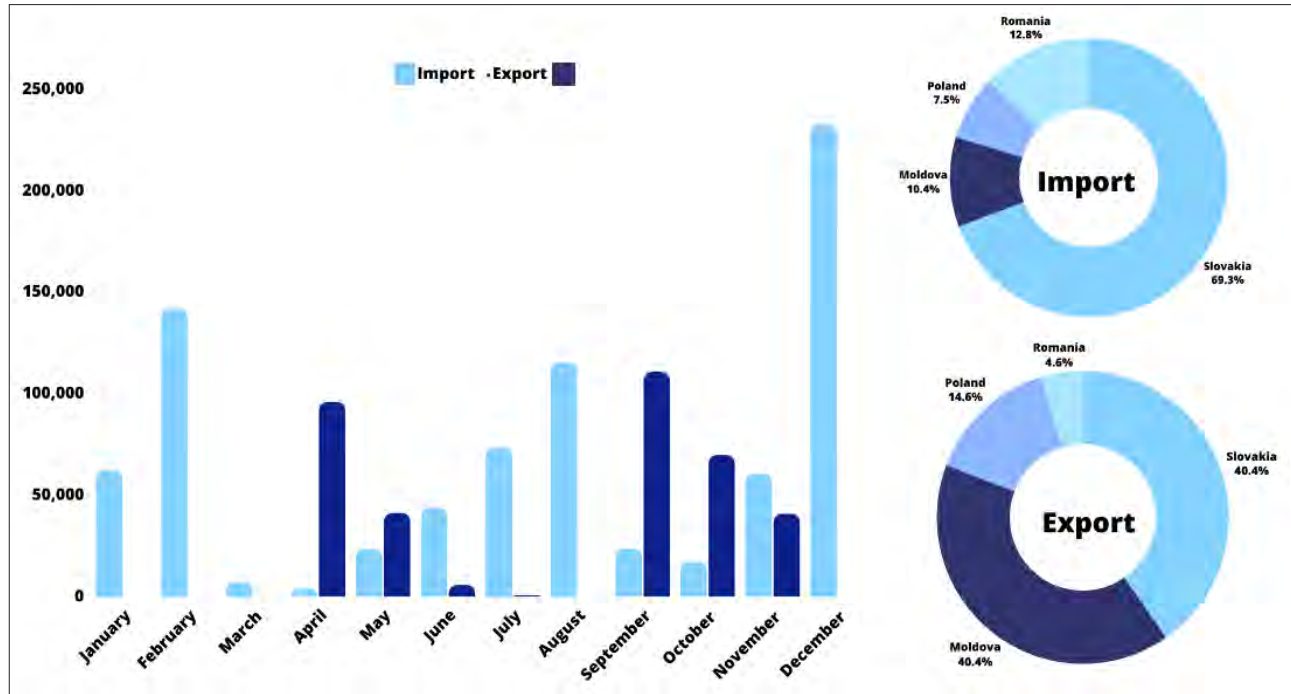


Figure 12. Import and Export of Electricity in 2023, MWh. Source: EXPRO Consulting (2024). © EXPRO Consulting

to Moldova and Slovakia, each accounting for 40% of the total electricity exports. There was no import or export of electricity between Ukraine and Hungary. In total, for the entire year of 2023, the volume of imports amounted to 806.4 thousand MWh, and exports totaled 366 thousand MWh.

2.1 Cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Poland in the energy sector

By highlighting the cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Poland in the energy sector, it must be noted that there are two cross-border power transmission lines between Ukraine and Poland at voltages of 220 kV and 750 kV (see Table 3).

Table 3. Cross-border Transmission Lines Between Ukraine and Poland. Prepared by the author.

| Transmission lines, voltage class kV | Ukraine | Poland |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|
| OHL 750 kV | Khmelnyska Nuclear Power Plant | Rzeszow |
| OHL 220 kV | Dobrotvirska Thermal Power Plant | Zamostia |

The 220 kV overhead cross-border power transmission line from Dobrotvirska Thermal Power Plant (UA) to Zamostia (PL) was the first export line between the Soviet Union and the former Polish People's Republic,

from which the "Mir" energy system (the Union of Energy Systems of the socialist bloc) originated. This 220 kV power transmission line connects substations in Zamostia (PL) and Dobrotvir Thermal Power Plant (UA). The line was operational for the needs of the Polish power system even before the war and Ukraine's synchronization with the continental European energy system. The maximum permissible export capacity of the line is up to 235 MW.

The 750 kV cross-border power transmission line from Khmelnytsky Nuclear Power Plant (UA) to Rzeszów (PL) lay dormant as of the early 1990s. However, in May 2023, Ukraine and Poland restored this line, which spanned nearly 400 km, with over 70% traversing Ukrainian territory. Connection to the main power grid occurred through an open distribution device at a Ukrainian energy facility, where the majority of the work was concentrated. Here, Ukrainian-generated electricity is converted to the European standard voltage of 400 kV for transmission to Europe. The project's total cost amounted to 350 million hryvnias, with essential equipment provided at no cost by Polish partners. Commissioning of that line augmented Ukraine's export potential by 25 to 30%, significantly reducing Poland's reliance on Russian gas and coal. Operating in synchronous mode, the line is accessible to all participants in the Ukrainian and European markets.

It should be noted that transboundary cooperation between Ukraine and Poland in the energy sector is of great importance for ensuring the energy security of

both countries. With the aim of expanding transboundary cooperation, in February 2024, the construction of three major power transmission lines to Poland was announced. These new transboundary lines are Novovolynsk (UA)–Chełm (PL), Lviv (UA)–Krosno (PL), and Drohobych (UA)–Krosno (PL). Additionally, Ukraine and Poland signed a memorandum of cooperation in the energy sector on March 28, 2024 (Ministry of Energy of Ukraine 2024). The implementation of this document will enable: the development of joint programs and projects of common interest aimed at restoring energy infrastructure affected by war, as well as steps towards greater integration of energy markets; collaborative work in the development of climate-neutral technologies and the expansion of distributed generation; and ensuring energy security through market integration, the development of climate-neutral generation, the formation of projects of common interest, and the development of interstate crossings.

2.2 Cross-border cooperation between Ukraine with Slovakia in the energy sector

Power systems of Ukraine and Slovakia are interconnected with two cross-border power transmission lines operating at voltages of 400 kV, Mukacheve (UA)–VelkeKapusany (SK), and 35 kV, Uzhhorod 2 (UA)–Sobrance (SK) (Table 4).

Table 4. Cross-border Transmission Lines Between Ukraine and Slovakia. Prepared by the author.

| Transmission lines, voltage class kV | Ukraine | Slovakia |
|--------------------------------------|------------|---------------|
| OHL 400 kV | Mukachevo | VelkeKapusany |
| OHL 35 kV | Uzhhorod 2 | Sobrance |

It is worth mentioning that the length of the 400 kV high-voltage line is 42 km on the territory of Ukraine and 11 km on the territory of Slovakia. Currently, ongoing reconstruction is being conducted on the international power transmission line between Ukraine and Slovakia. The reconstruction and modernization of the electrical interconnector "Mukacheve–Vel'keKapusany" were initially scheduled for completion by the end of 2028. However, in January 2024, both countries agreed to expedite the reconstruction process. These initiatives are expected to significantly enhance the capacity for electricity import and export. Through the reconstruction and upgrading of existing overhead lines (OHL) between Slovakia and Ukraine, along with related substations, transmission capacity is projected to increase by 30% between the Slovak and Ukrainian power systems. This project's implementation is anticipated to bolster system stability within the region. The removal of existing constraints on power flows between the Slovak and Ukrainian power systems, as well as between the Hungarian, Romanian, and Ukrainian power

systems, will have implications for pricing and conditions within the European electricity market. Ultimately, the reconstruction of the electrical interconnector will contribute to bolstering the energy security of both Slovakia and Ukraine. Additionally, there is a 35 kV power transmission line between Ukraine and Slovakia, Uzhhorod 2–Sobrance. This line has a low capacity of 10 MW. Strengthening bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and the Slovak Republic in the field of electric power engineering involves: developing the interconnection of energy systems between Ukraine and the Slovak Republic, and further exploring the potential of the Mukacheve–Vel'keKapusany interconnector as the next step after the successful synchronization of Ukrainian networks with the European continental network ENTSO-E (Communications Department of the Secretariat of the CMU 2024); activating cooperation in the field of nuclear energy, and supporting missions of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in monitoring nuclear safety and security at nuclear power plants within the territory of Ukraine; organizing cross-border transportation of hydrogen by road; and developing border areas through the implementation of projects of mutual interest in energy efficiency, alternative fuel utilization, decarbonization, and renewable energy.

For this purpose, a Roadmap for cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia was signed in April 2024 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2024). The strategic area of bilateral cooperation in this Roadmap is energy security. The Parties agreed to the need to maintain and develop interconnectivity of energy systems between Ukraine and the Slovak Republic, guaranteeing non-discriminatory access to the Ukrainian energy market for Slovak energy companies, increasing the transparency of data exchange, eliminating the non-systemic tax burden imposed on cross-border trading, launching common energy projects to diversify energy sources and reduce dependence on Russian energy resources wherever possible, ensuring a high level of energy efficiency and development of renewable energy sources, as well as increasing the resilience of energy systems in Ukraine and the Slovak Republic and European energy security. Collaboration between Ukraine and Slovakia in the energy sector is already of significant importance for both countries. Furthermore, in April 2024, Ukraine and Slovakia agreed to establish a working group to deal with the diversification of nuclear fuel supply to nuclear power plants. That action aimed at further mitigation of Russian leverage in order to balance Russian influence.

2.3 Cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Romania in the energy sector

There are two cross-border power transmission lines between Ukraine and Romania, operating at 400 kV and 750 kV respectively (see Table 5).

Table 5. Cross-border Transmission Lines Between Ukraine and Romania. Prepared by the author.

| Voltage level (kV) | Ukraine | Romania |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|
| 400 kV | Mukacheve | Roshior |
| 750 kV | Pivdennoukrainska Nuclear Power Plant | Isaccea |

The 750 kV overhead line from Pivdennoukrainska Nuclear Power Plant (UA) via Isaccea (RO) to Varna (BG) was initially part of the "Mir" energy system development, connecting three countries: the USSR, Romania, and Bulgaria, with a complex crossing of the Danube River. Constructed for exporting electricity to Romania and Bulgaria, the line gradually deteriorated after the dissolution of the USSR. The importance of enhanced cooperation between the energy systems of Romania and Ukraine was highlighted when Ukraine and Romania discussed the implementation of agreements on the restoration of an international overhead power line between the 750 kV South Ukrainian NPP and the 400 kV Isaccea substations in August 2023. This project is of great importance for increasing the capacity of cross-border grids, as well as enhancing the reliability of electricity supply to consumers in the southern regions of Ukraine and removing restrictions on the output of renewable energy generation capacity in these areas (Ministry of Energy of Ukraine 2023b).

The sole operational power transmission line between Ukraine and Romania is the 400 kV line between the Mukachevo and Roshior substations. The line has a capacity of 200 MW. The 76 km stretch of the 400 kV power line extends mainly through agricultural land in the Zakarpattia region to the state border with Romania. In 2018, reconstruction of this power line was carried out. During the maintenance, 36.87 km of lightning protection cable (23.5 tons), line hardware, and porcelain insulators were replaced. These works represent an important component in enhancing the reliability of cross-border connections in conditions of synchronous operation with ENTSO-E networks. Ukraine and Romania closely cooperate in the energy sector. As a result, from 2020 to 2022 the Cross-Border Cooperation Smart Energy project was implemented (Uzhhorod National University 2022). Main project outcomes include: increased usage of new technologies and innovations in the field of renewable energy, achieved through promotion and support of research and innovations in a sustainable manner in the border regions of Ukraine and Romania; and establishment of a robust platform for joint research actions and studies (including procurement of related equipment) in the field of renewable energy and resource efficiency.

To conclude, deepening the energy sector partnership between Kyiv and Bucharest would not only boost regional security and facilitate a smoother energy

transition, but could also yield economic dividends. In 2022, Romania offered Kyiv significant support, exporting electricity and helping to stabilize the Ukrainian system when Russian airstrikes plunged much of Ukraine into darkness. The bulk of Romanian power generation is concentrated in the southeastern region of Dobrogea, which possesses an excess of renewable output that cannot be easily transported to other regions. Unless major investments are made to reroute flows northward, Romania will not be able to build additional offshore wind capacity in its share of the Black Sea region. One option would be to export some of the excess generation to decongest the system. Southern Ukraine's region of Odessa, which shares a border with Romania, has a supply deficit and needs to import electricity to cover demand, particularly in a postwar scenario where its industrial base would be rebuilt.

2.4 Cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Hungary in the energy sector

The highest quantity of cross-border power transmission lines is situated between Ukraine and Hungary (see Table 6).

Table 6. Cross-border Transmission Lines Between Ukraine and Hungary. Prepared by the author.

| Voltage level (kV) | Ukraine | Hungary |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 750 kV | Zakhidnoukrainska | Szabolcsbaka |
| 400 kV | Mukacheve | Szabolcsbaka |
| 220 kV | Mukacheve | Tiszaok |
| 220 kV | Mukacheve | Kishvarda |

The 750 kV cross-border power line between the Zakhidnoukrainska (UA) and Szabolcsbaka (HU) substations is of significant importance for the transportation of electricity. It is part of the 750 kV corridor 'Vinnytsia-Zakhidnoukrainska-Albertirsha,' which was one of the ambitious projects of the USSR to implement the 'Mir' energy system and extended to the geographical center of Hungary. The length of the transmission line is 479 km. Currently, the line is one of the main connections of the UES of Ukraine with operators of the ENTSO-E transmission system. From 2017 to 2020, Hungary cut the Zakhidnoukrainska-Albertirsha line, installing a new 750/400 kV Szabolcsbaka substation and leaving only 19 km of the line on its territory to the Ukrainian border, which operates at a voltage class of 750 kV. The Szabolcsbaka-Albertirsha section has been converted to a voltage of 400 kV. The 400 kV cross-border power line is located between the Mukacheve (UA) and Szabolcsbaka (HU) substations. The length of the line is 26.5 km from the 400 kV Mukacheve substation to the state border with Hungary. In 2020, the reconstruction of this transmission line was completed, with the replacement of conventional lightning protection cables with optical fiber ones to provide optical

telecommunication links. This reconstruction allowed for the transmission of relay protection commands and emergency automation, as well as for the creation of an E-highway (Electronic Highway, a data transmission network of ENTSO-E transmission system operators) towards Hungary.

In 2020, reconstruction was completed for the 220 kV cross-border power lines between the Mukachevo (UA)–Kishvarda (HU) and Mukachevo (UA)–Tisalok (HU) substations, including the installation of telecommunication equipment to connect the telecommunication networks of Ukrenergo with those of ENTSO-E partner countries. Thus, the reconstruction of the Transboundary Power Transmission Lines between Ukraine and Hungary has ensured a modern level of communication between the facilities of the Western Energy System of Ukrenergo and has allowed for the integration of Ukrenergo's telecommunication networks with the networks of ENTSO-E partner countries. Commercial electricity exchange with Hungary has not taken place since February 2022, however, the transition to European electricity trading rules has allowed this exchange to resume. Specifically, in February 2024, Ukrenergo conducted the first joint auctions for the allocation of access to international interconnectors between Ukraine and Hungary on the European universal allocation platform JAO (Joint Allocation Office). Ukraine began commercial electricity exchange with Hungary according to European rules.

3. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Analysis of the capacity of the respective cross-border power transmission lines between Ukraine and Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania, as well as an assessment of electricity imports and exports in 2023, indicate close cooperation between Ukraine and neighboring countries in the energy sector. Additionally, implementing the project to construct a new fiber-optic communication line has provided a modern level of communication between Ukrenergo's energy system facilities and has allowed for the integration of Ukrenergo's telecommunication networks with the cross-border networks of ENTSO-E partner countries (Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary).

Based on the research conducted on the state of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and EU countries in the energy sector, it has been established that there is a need to increase the volume of export and import operations as well as the throughput capacity of cross-border power lines. Increasing the volume of export operations and the throughput capacity of interstate crossings to 7.5 GW is possible through:

- with Poland—the construction of an additional 400 kV power line;
- with Romania—by rebuilding the 750 kV cross-border

transmission line from the Uzhnoukrainska (South Ukrainian Nuclear Power Plant) to Isaccea and retrofitting the double-circuit 400 kV Primorska-Isaccea power line;

- with Hungary—by removing balancing constraints and increasing the load on the 400 kV Mukacheve–Szabolcsbakacross-border transmission line;
- with Slovakia—by retrofitting the double-circuit 400 kV Mukacheve–VelkeKapusanycross-border transmission line.

To enhance cross-border cooperation, it will also be necessary to achieve “full” integration of the energy markets of Ukraine and the EU in the post-war period. To accomplish this, it is necessary to realize the export potential of Ukrainian nuclear energy; develop distributed energy generation, particularly from renewable sources, with equipment production in Ukraine; and establish a storage system for the complete cycle of energy.

Given the uncertainty of the duration of hostilities, and the continued risk of further destruction and the loss of Ukraine's control over infrastructure facilities, full stabilization of the situation in the energy sector is impossible at least until the end of the war. Therefore, the priority tasks for the short term are:

- preservation of the integrity of the United Energy System (UES) of Ukraine and prompt restoration of its facilities after each attack;
- elimination of territorial imbalance in the production and consumption of electric and thermal energy;
- restoration of fuel and energy supply to areas with destroyed infrastructure;
- development of backup, in particular between neighbouring states, and autonomous networks and systems that can be used in the event of a system accident;
- provision of continuous supply of energy resources across the western border of Ukraine in volumes sufficient for consumers;
- ensuring the reliable and safe functioning of currently operational energy facilities.

To implement these tasks, Ukraine needs international assistance, including from neighboring countries, and quick actions towards integration with the EU energy markets in the following directions:

- supply of equipment for the transmission and distribution of electrical energy, primarily high-voltage, and exclusively at the request of operators and generating companies, for replacement of equipment damaged as a result of hostilities;
- expansion of the capacity of international crossings with Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary to increase the reliability of the operation of the UES of Ukraine;

- unification of the day-ahead market and the intra-day market of Ukraine with the Single Day-ahead Coupling and Single Intraday Coupling markets to obtain the possibility of exporting electricity;
- supply of cogeneration units, gasoline and diesel generators, and energy storage and energy storage systems for guaranteed energy supply to consumers, especially critical infrastructure facilities, in the event of a system failure;
- guaranteeing the physical safety of the Zaporizhzhia NPP and returning control, in particular, control of its airspace.

Therefore, speaking about the further tactical and strategic prospects of cooperation across EU-Ukrainian borders in the field of energy and speeding up the European integration of Ukraine, it is worth highlighting the following priority directions:

- restoration of the Ukrainian energy industry based on new technologies and deepening of its integration into the European energy system (National Council for the Recovery of Ukraine from the Consequences of the War 2022; Communications Department of the Secretariat of the CMU 2022);
- creation of a national system of trading quotas for greenhouse gas emissions (European Commission n.d.);
- increasing energy efficiency (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2022);
- development of the sector of renewable energy sources (State Energy Efficiency and Energy Saving Agency of Ukraine 2022);
- creation of a hydrogen industry;
- combating climate change, reducing GHG emissions (Omelchenko et al. 2022);
- implementation of the European Green Deal (International Energy Agency 2025).

The author submits the following proposals to improve Ukraine-EU cross-border energy cooperation:

- implement a set of measures for further liberalization of electricity markets for the future increase in electricity trade with EU countries. As a result, consumers from Central and Eastern Europe will start paying less for electricity;
- increase the capacity of the inter-network connection with neighboring Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. As a result, Europe will annually save 5 billion cubic meters of gas used for electricity production;
- during large-scale reconstruction of Ukraine after the end of the war, the demand for electricity in the country may increase sharply. When the Ukrainian economy requires more energy, the connection with ENTSO-E will have to be put into reverse mode, and Ukrainian companies will start importing energy from the EU. The effect of the restoration of the Ukrainian energy demand will affect the entire region—for

European manufacturers it is an opportunity to increase and diversify production;

- expanding cooperation with European and global energy structures. Ukraine is now an associate member of the International Energy Agency (IEA), which gave Ukraine the opportunity to participate in the development of policies for global energy markets;
- reformatting of the energy sector of Ukraine within the framework of the European Green Deal. Ukraine's energy transition should be based on a powerful nuclear sector, an increase in wind and solar energy, and hydropower production;
- define an ambitious goal to reduce GHG emissions by more than 70% by 2030, compared to 1990, primarily by revising the goals for industries, increasing the share of RES in the electricity, transport, and heat supply sectors. (Climate goals should be revised after the war, but they should not be less ambitious given the growing importance of energy security and energy independence from fossil fuels);
- provide conditions for the development of the hydrogen industry of Ukraine, owing to EU investments. It is necessary to introduce relevant EU norms and standards into the legislation of Ukraine;
- actively introduce the criteria of sustainable development in the process of post-war reconstruction of energy facilities and infrastructure with a focus on the effective use of energy resources and "green" technologies. Revitalization of the energy industry should be based on innovation and development of smart networks. When developing a recovery concept, the carbon-neutral component is important;
- identify implementation of the energy efficiency policy, the development of renewable energy—including the use of hydrogen and biomethane—as well as decarbonization, which are components of the European integration process, as priority areas;
- jointly with the EU, start the process of determining and demanding subsequent compensation for damages and payment of appropriate reparations by the aggressor, in particular in the energy sector.

Therefore, an analysis of Ukraine's power sector and cross-border transmission system highlights both challenges and opportunities, emphasizing the urgent need for deeper cooperation with neighboring EU countries. The destruction of approximately 50% of Ukrainian power plants due to ongoing military aggression underscores the critical role of cross-border energy trade and integration with ENTSO-E in ensuring stability and supporting post-war reconstruction. In this context, strengthening partnerships with Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia not only enhances energy security and mutual economic benefits, but also accelerates the transition to a more resilient and sustainable energy system. Looking ahead, post-war cooperation should prioritize energy efficiency, renewable energy development, hydrogen technologies, distributed energy

generation, and climate change mitigation. Aligning these efforts with the European Green Deal will not only advance Ukraine's European integration, but also reinforce its strategic role in the regional energy market, fostering a stable and interconnected energy future.

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PORTFOLIO

Chief Editor's Choice

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Divided Landscapes

Viviana Mejía Cañedo and
Guillermo Arias Camarena

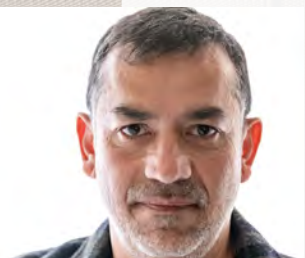
Summary

The U.S.–Mexico border is not only a line of control over human mobility but a wound inflicted on the living world, fragmenting habitats and silencing ecosystems. **Divided Landscapes** brings together the visual and written work of photojournalist Guillermo Arias Camarena and historian Viviana Mejía Cañedo to examine the environmental and symbolic violence of the border. Arias's photographs (selected from his collection, *El muro y el paisaje destruido / The Wall and the Destroyed Landscape*) reveal the stark imposition of border infrastructure on fragile ecologies. Mejía's essay (first published here) situates these landscapes within longer histories of geopolitical asymmetry, displacement, and resistance. The portfolio invites readers to see the border as a contested site, certainly of violence, but also of memory, resistance, and the possibility of reimagining division as dialogue.

Bios



Viviana Mejía Cañedo holds a PhD in History from the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas at Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. She is the author of *Fall by the Way: Migration Legislation and Psychiatric Institutions in California in Relation to Mentally Ill People of Mexican Origin, 1855–1942* (City of Mexico, 2019). She currently coordinates the undergraduate History program at the Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, and is a Level I member of Mexico's National System of Researchers (SNII). Her primary area of research focuses on Mexico–United States migration. Learn more: <https://www.uabchumanidades.com/academicos-administrativos-fhycs/dra.-viviana-mejia-cañedo>



Guillermo Arias Camarena is a Mexican photojournalist with over three decades of experience documenting major social, political, and humanitarian issues across Latin America. He has worked with international agencies such as Agence France-Presse, The Associated Press, and Xinhua News Agency, covering events including the Central American migrant caravans, presidential elections, and the Mexican Drug War. His projects *El cerco (The Fence)* and *The border wall and the destroyed landscape*, both supported by Mexico's National System of Art Creators, examine the U.S.–Mexico border as a lived and contested space and the destruction left by the border wall construction, and have been exhibited and published internationally. Arias has received numerous awards, including the Visa d'Or Paris Match News award (Visa pour l'Image), Istanbul Photo Awards, POY Latam prizes, and the Walter Reuter German Journalism Prize. Learn more: <https://www.guillermoarias.com/about>



Deteriorated US-Mexico border wall at Friendship Park before been replaced, in Playas de Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico, on February 16, 2023. United States authorities announced they resume this week, border wall construction at the iconic Friendship Park with the replacement of primary and secondary barriers in a .03 mile stretch on their southwestern border with Mexico.



Aerial view of a section of the US-Mexico border wall and El Berrendo/Antelope Wells border crossing, Chihuahua state, Mexico, on August 3, 2023.



The sunlight reflects over a section of the US-Mexico border fence in Tecate, Baja California state, Mexico, on February 22, 2019. A winter storm left cold temperatures, heavy rains and even snow on the mountains in Baja California state and northwestern Mexico.



Construction crews work on a new section of the US-Mexico border wall at El Nido de las Aguilas, eastern Tijuana, Baja California state, on January 20, 2021, in Mexico.



Hills are seen through the US-Mexico border wall at El Berrendo, Chihuahua state, Mexico, on August 3, 2023.



Aerial view of a hill on the desert crossed by a section of the US-Mexico border wall near San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico, on September 19, 2022.



A section of the US-Mexico border wall is seen in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Arizona state, United States, on September 27, 2022.



An unfinished section of the US-Mexico border wall and blasted hills are seen at Guadalupe Canyon east Douglas, Arizona state, United States, on September 20, 2022.



A new section of the US-Mexico border wall is seen from La Rumorosa, Baja California state, Mexico, on September 28, 2022. President Donald Trump's administration built 458 miles of border wall, most of it in places with some type of pre-existing barrier. According to environmentalists and advocates, the destruction left on the landscape by the construction of these new border wall systems has deeply altered some of the richest ecosystems in North America and, instead of stopping illegal crossings, has created new paths for smugglers.



A reinforced section of the US-Mexico border wall is seen near Pueblo, Ca. on February 13, 2024.

Divided Landscape

Stretching for more than three thousand kilometers, from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, runs a line of tension: the border between Mexico and the United States. This space has undergone increasing militarization and physical segmentation through the construction of walls, fences, and technological control systems designed to stop unauthorized migration flows. However, the border wall is not just made of steel or concrete; it is a wound on the land and a symbol of the asymmetries that define the relationship between the two countries.

Guillermo Arias's images capture the abrupt interruption of ecosystems, the contrast between what was once ecological and social continuity, and the persistence of life despite efforts to divide it. The Mexico–United States border crosses deserts, mountains, rivers, valleys, and coastal zones that form one of the richest and most diverse biological corridors in North America. The construction of physical barriers has disrupted migratory routes of animal species—such as the pronghorn, jaguar, Mexican gray wolf, and many birds—that depend on free movement for their survival. The infrastructure also causes the removal of native plants, soil compaction, habitat fragmentation, and noise and light pollution in previously protected areas. Nature, with no voice in the political debate, pays the price for decisions made in distant centers of power.

Arias's work expresses one of the deepest paradoxes of the border project: while official discourse insists on the need to reinforce national security and control human mobility, it systematically ignores the impact such policies have on the ecosystems they cross. Decisions are made thousands of kilometers away, with no ethical concern for non-human life. There are no protests from destroyed plants or displaced species. Cracked deserts, disoriented birds, and eroded soils have no seat in Congress. Their exclusion from the debate is not just symbolic—it is structural. In the dominant geopolitical logic, nature is a space to conquer, an inert mass that can be divided, fenced, or sacrificed in the name of an abstraction called sovereignty.

The border is not only a geographical line: it is a test of our relationship with the living world. When decisions are imposed without listening to those who inhabit the

territory—both human and non-human—a form of violence is perpetuated that will eventually come back to affect us all. The border is a space where power decides who gets to live and who must die in the name of sovereignty. But it is also a space of resistance. Binational communities, civil organizations, shelters, and human rights collectives have emerged in response to the suffering caused by the border, defending the right to mobility, refuge, and dignity.

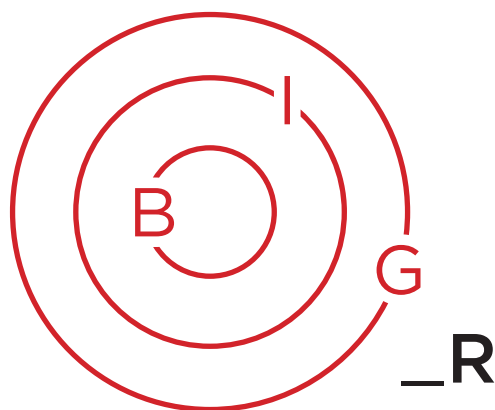
These photographs show landscapes crossed by structures foreign to their geography; mountains and deserts fragmented by barriers that follow geopolitical, not natural, logics. They also show human presence: footprints, offerings, open windows in the walls, sealed doors. Each of these marks is evidence of a contested memory, of a history that refuses to be locked behind walls.

History shows that borders are social constructions that can change. They can be reimagined as bridges, as meeting points and negotiation spaces, as contact zones where difference is not seen as a threat but as a possibility. For that, we need to question the paradigm that shapes current border policies. Instead of spending billions of dollars to strengthen division, we could invest in cross-border cooperation, mutual recognition of rights, and stronger cultural and economic ties that acknowledge the interdependence between Mexico and the United States. Climate change, humanitarian crises, and global health and mobility challenges demand common responses—not fragmented solutions.

Far from solving the problems it claims to address, the border wall makes them worse. It is a material expression of fear, of institutionalized racism, and of a worldview that favors force over solidarity. But it is also a mirror that forces us to see ourselves: what kind of societies are we building when we choose separation as our answer?

The images of the wall, in all their rawness, are also an aesthetic testimony. They reveal a poetics of interruption—a tragic beauty that does not hide the pain, but makes it visible. As we look at these wounded landscapes, we cannot—and must not—look away.

These photographs are not just a record; they must be a call to collectively imagine a future where borders are not scars, but thresholds.



POLICY

BIG_Review showcases policy briefs and reports with a particular emphasis on the translation of academic research into plain-language policy suggestions designed for diverse audiences. Each issue features research focused on borders and border policy, but re-imagined for non-academic stakeholders in government, civil society, and the private sector. All policy reports undergo at least two double-blind peer reviews, drawing on the expertise of our Editorial Board and a wider network of border policy specialists, subject to the discretion of the Chief Editor. The policy section is edited by Claude Beapre, Alan Bersin, and Ben Rohrbaugh, and is open to submissions from researchers and policymakers of all backgrounds.

BIG partners with Korea Customs Service and the World Customs Organization to train and educate customs officials from non-OECD countries through scholarships to attend BIG Summer Institutes and promote high-quality policy reports through open-access publication with *BIG_Review*.





POLICY REPORT

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The Evolution of the Customs Profession and Institution in Canada, 1988–2018: From Customs Inspector (CI) to Border Services Officer (BSO)

Hubert Duchesneau

The policy paper From Customs Inspector to Border Services Officer discusses how significant political, economic, security, and migratory events of the 1988–2018 period have shaped Canadian border policies, significantly widening the scope of the Customs mandate and ultimately changing the nature of the border. The paper offers the unique perspective and insight of a seasoned border management practitioner, having served regionally as front line officer, nationally as director in policy roles, and internationally as Canada's senior border services representative at the European Union (EU) in Brussels. It examines the transformation of the customs institution and culture as a result of the creation of the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) in 2003; and the arming of front line officers in 2006. Finally, the paper explores the evolution of the customs profession and its practices, notably how the recruitment and training of front line officers developed to support these institutional and cultural transformations.

Introduction

The border management environment has evolved rapidly in the last thirty years. The Canada–US Free Trade Agreement in 1988, the coordinated terrorist attacks on the USA in 2001, operations for welcoming 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015 and 2016, and new emerging threats such as the COVID pandemic have all increased the need to adapt Canadian border policies and the customs institution and profession, including, importantly, the recruitment and training of Customs and border management frontline professionals.

The Customs Inspector (CI) role became Border Services Officer (BSO) in 2003 with the creation of the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA); economic, public safety, and national security responsibilities were added to the original fiscal role. Border management work is increasingly carried out ahead of the physical border to better identify and manage risks and requires international Customs cooperation, private sector partnerships, and interagency and intergovernmental collaboration at both local and national levels.

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Moreover, the Canadian Customs administration has experienced in less than 10 years (1999–2006) three major institutional transformations: first, evolving successively from the Department of National Revenue, Customs and Excise into a semi-autonomous agency competent in both customs and tax issues in 1998; second, in 2003 from the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) towards an integrated border management organization, the CBSA, part of the Government of Canada's Public Safety portfolio; and finally, in 2006 while the agency was still consolidating into the CBSA, the implementation of the government's decision to equip front-line Border Services Officers and other enforcement officers with a duty firearm (approximately 7,000 officers), signaling a real cultural shift for an administration dating back to Confederation.

Using a chronological approach, this paper is divided into five parts. Part one puts the article into the context of customs and border management research and education in Canada covering the period of 1988 to 2018, notionally from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the Canada-USA-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA). The second part discusses how significant political, economic, security, and migratory events from 1988 to 2018 have shaped Canadian border policies, significantly widening the scope of the Customs mandate and ultimately changing the nature of the border. The third part examines the transformation of the customs institution and culture as a result of the implementation of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) in 1998; the creation of the CBSA in 2003; and the arming of front-line officers in 2006. The fourth part explores the evolution of the customs and border management profession, notably how the recruitment and training of front-line officers developed to support these institutional and cultural transformations. Finally, the fifth part provides a case study of the CBSA International Liaison Officer Cadre (ILO)—a new border management role—with an exploration of how the '*pushing the border out*' approach is made operational in the field to secure and facilitate international travel and trade flows.

Part 1. Context

The article fills a gap in the scholarly literature related to Customs and border management in Canada and the unprecedented evolution of its profession and institution between 1988 and 2018. Despite dating from Confederation in 1867, and despite its presence in most parts of Canadian territory given the extent of its mandate, the Customs administration is paradoxically one of the least known federal departments.

Numerous publications dealing with the Canada-US border and border security policies post-2001 have appeared. For instance, in *Border: Canada and the U.S.*

and *Dispatches from the 49th Parallel* (2003), James Laxer examined the changing nature of the Canada-US border, the national identities question, the idea of continentalism, and the lives of the people on both sides of the border. Meanwhile, Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, in *Borderlands: Comparing Border Security in North America and Europe* (2007), provided a comparative analysis of eleven border security policies in seven states in North America and Europe, including Canada, on the impact of human activities on both sides of these borders.

In *Border Security, Trade and Travel Facilitation* (2010), Geoffrey Hale and Christina Marcotte studied the challenges the 2001 terrorist attacks pose for the Canadian government in terms of border management policies. Conversely, the documentary series *Border Security: Canada's Front Line* (2012–2014) contributed to better educate the Canadian public about the broad enforcement mandate of the CBSA in terms of customs, security and safety, irregular migration, and tax laws. From a historical point of view, Dave McIntosh in *The Collectors: A History of Canadian Customs and Excise* (1984) "tells the story of those people who have written Customs history from Confederation to the end of the 70s".

This article offers the unique perspective and insight of a seasoned border management practitioner during the period from 1988 to 2018, having served regionally as Customs inspector, nationally as trainer, manager, and director in both trade and enforcement capacities, internationally at the World Customs Organization (WCO), and as Canada's senior border services representative at the European Union (EU) in Brussels. Although the article is aimed primarily at Customs and law-enforcement practitioners, it will also be an invaluable tool for legislators, academics, and researchers interested in public administration regulatory and enforcement organizations, customs and border management administrations, international trade facilitation, and border security practices. It could also be of interest for historians and policy and decision makers interested in the evolution of the Canadian Customs profession, institution, and operating model.

Part 2. Impact of Political, Economic, Security and Migratory events on Customs and Border Management Policies, 1988–2018

The 80s: The collector and gatekeeper years

In the 1980s, Revenue Canada, Customs and Excise was a tax collector, a protector of economic Canadian interests against the injurious effects of dumped imported goods, and a critical player in combatting Customs fraud and drug enforcement. Customs' priority was the fiscal mandate (revenue collection including Customs and excise duties, sales and excise taxes) and de facto,

enforcement of highly taxed smuggled goods such as alcohol, cigarettes, tobacco, and jewellery. Revenue Canada, Customs and Excise regulated traveller and goods flow at points of entry (PoE), at the land border, in airports, marine ports, railway stations, and mail processing centers. Front-line Customs inspectors (CI), as described by Widdowson (2006), were gatekeepers. The border was then a line of demarcation between two countries, punctuated by POEs. Travellers' and goods' admissibility was determined through a verbal declaration for the traveller and a paper declaration for the importer at the PoE.

Given the cross-border nature of its activities, Customs had an important international dimension. In the 1980s, Customs and Excise had an office in Brussels, Belgium and was active at the Customs Cooperation Council (CCC, which it joined in 1973), where it contributed to the development of simplified and harmonized customs procedures worldwide. It also had teams of anti-dumping investigators in both Brussels and Tokyo fighting against unfair competition to Canadian industry. To take an analogy from the World Customs Organization (WCO) *Customs Orientation Programme for Policy Makers* (1994), it was the time of "*Customs for Customs*", a Customs organization based on a legal rationale, giving priority to processes over results (see Table 4 for a comparison between the management of Customs in the 1980s vs. the 21st century). The international trade policies of Canada in the 1980s were aimed primarily at maximizing the advantages offered by an open border. This period was marked by major national and international changes which would shape Customs and international trade practices for many years ahead. On the national front, the *Charter of Rights and Freedom* in 1982 and a new *Customs Act* in 1986—the previous one dating from Confederation—were adopted. On the international front, the adoption of the *GATT Valuation Code* in 1985 replaced the *fair market value* (FMV) used until then to determine the Customs value for taxation purposes. 1988 saw the introduction of the international *Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System* (HS) of the CCC, which itself transformed into the WCO in 1995. The HS combines in a single integrated instrument the descriptions required for Customs tariffs, statistical nomenclatures, and transport classifications. Nowadays, the HS is used by 98% of global trade.

In *Border Security, Travel and Trade Facilitation*, Geoffrey Hale and Christina Marcotte (2010) highlight two other major changes which have contributed to significantly shaping border management policies in Canada, namely: the economic deregulation of the trucking industry which expanded from the US to Canada in the 1980s and the *Canada-US Free Trade Agreement* (CUSFTA) in 1988. Those changes opened the doors to trans-border trade by trucks; the rapid increase in use of multimodal containers accelerated

the integration with marine transportation of goods in trucks and rail networks. Customs operational decisions were guided by the *Customs and Excise Statement of Operating Principles* (1985). The Statement was based on "the principle that the vast majority of its public is willing to comply with the law, when informed, and when the law is applied in an equitable, uniform and responsive manner" (Customs Inspector, Customs and Excise Canada Bulletin 1985). Thus, the emphasis in promoting compliance with Customs and Excise regulations was on education. To that end, Customs and Excise worked notably with trade associations, which in turn disseminated information to their members.

The 90s: The free trade years

The economic role of customs saw increasing momentum in the 90s, as those years were marked by free trade agreements (FTA) and transformations in customs and trade multilateral institutions. Canada Customs and Excise thus contributes to economic development and facilitates investments and better access for Canadian businesses on international markets. In 1994, CUSFTA was extended to Mexico with the signing of the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA). The World Trade Organization (WTO) became the global successor to the *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade* (GATT) in 1995. That same year, the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC) became the *World Customs Organization* (WCO). The 90s were also characterized by the beginning of globalization. The international mobility of goods, people, capital, information, and technology was increasing steadily. This mobility benefitted both legal and illicit trade as criminals explored more integrated markets and the freer movement of people to transport goods, people, and money across borders. The preeminent illegal activities by organized criminal groups were tobacco smuggling and drug trafficking. Profits often served to finance other illegal activities such as the smuggling of firearms, the production and smuggling of synthetic drugs, and human trafficking.

In signing the *Canada-United States Shared Border Accord* in February 1995, the two governments committed to collaborate on a great number of border management projects, to promote international trade; facilitate the movement of people; fight against smuggling, drugs, the irregular movement of people, and the reduction of cost to the two governments and the public (Government of Canada 2015). International trade and tourism, the lifeblood of the Canadian economy, were prominent among the priorities of the government under Prime Minister Jean Chrétien (1993–2003). Major initiatives such as *Team Canada* strengthened travel and border management collaboration efforts with US authorities aimed at the promotion of Canadian competitiveness in trade, international investments, and tourism. Those initiatives had a direct impact on

Canada Customs' priority activities. Subsequently, the advent of electronic transmission and the increase in international trade volume and new logistical models such as 'just in time' (JIT) manufacturing, container transportation, and the development of express courier services opened the door for the *Customs Blueprint* (1998) and *Investing in the Future: The Customs Action Plan 2000–2004* (CAP).

The Customs Action Plan: Customs client services and risk management

The Customs Blueprint and Action Plan (1998) "gives a new perspective and vision for border management and trade administration". This approach is based on risk assessment and the principle of advanced information. Thus, Canada Customs was able to offer streamlined treatment to low risk travellers and importers, and focus its enforcement effort on travellers and importers presenting both known and unknown risks. In addition, it could impose administrative sanctions in case of infractions against the *Customs Act*, the *Customs Tariff*, and their implementing regulations. Those sanctions could also be imposed for infractions with regards to international trade agreements.

The notion of the 'border' also evolved in the 90s. Canada Customs expanded the border and the clearance points towards importer and exporter premises, thus implementing a post-clearance audit (PCA) system carried out by specialized auditors (AU, a professional category in the Canadian public service). Customs decisions are based on self-assessment, and compliance is achieved through transparency and relationship with the importer through published information, education, guidelines, and policy development. Customs dog handlers started using Labrador retrievers (less intimidating than German Shepherds as they often operate in crowds), and expanded their targets to the detection of explosives and currency. They were supported by intelligence officers and investigators based both in the regions and at headquarters. The end of the 90s was also shaped by important public administration reforms at the international level. In 1999, the Customs and Excise Department became, in the context of the New Public Management (NPM), Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA), a semi-autonomous customs and tax agency attached to the department of National Revenue. The Canadian government was envisaging "a different public service", inspired by the NPM, which advocated an organizational culture centered on private sector practices and an approach grounded in a managerial rationale rather than a legal approach. The overall objective focused on the following areas: service improvements—one-stop shopping, single-window access to services, single business registration numbers; operational efficiencies; integration of common corporate and program functions; savings reinvested in program enhancements and re-engineering initiatives;

streamlined operations and the elimination of overlap and duplication; business process improvements; common and shared databases for client information; and enhanced compliance—improved targeting of non-compliance, based on the theory that the same people and companies would be non-compliant across customs, goods and services tax (GST), and tax.

September 11, 2001: Tipping point towards more security at and beyond the border

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 transformed border management policies in North America, and all over the world, overnight. Prior to that date, as Laxer underlines in *The Border: Canada, the U.S. and the Dispatches from the 49th Parallel* (2003), the George W. Bush administration stated that the border environment had "relied heavily on two vast oceans and two friendly neighbours for border security". The terrorist attacks and their aftermaths continue to dominate the Canada-US relationship and led to border security overshadowing trade and economic questions in border management. Shortly after, on December 12th, Canada and the US signed the *Smart Border Declaration*. The Declaration notably expanded border management cooperation practices, such as *integrated border enforcement teams* (IBET) at the local level including the CBSA, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), provincial police forces, and their American counterparts. At the international level, the terrorist attacks altered the way countries evaluate security threats. The line between national and international security became increasingly indistinguishable. The WCO, at the suggestion of the United States Customs and Border Protection Service (US CBP) and the CBSA, inter alia, developed and launched the Framework of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade (SAFE Framework). The SAFE Framework provides baseline international standards to secure and facilitate global trade and heralds a new approach to risk management, Customs cooperation, and partnerships with the private sector.

In 2007, the *Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative* (WHTI) drastically changed the management of the Canada-US border. The WHTI requires all travelers, including US citizens traveling in the Americas, to show a valid passport, passport card, or other approved secure document to establish their identity and nationality in order to enter or exit the United States.

Beyond the Border Action Plan: A Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness

Ten years later, a new border management policy, based on the '*pushing the border out*' approach was adopted: *Beyond the Border Action Plan: A Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness* (2011). The Plan revolved around a security and economic competitiveness approach based on a common

perimeter, where the two countries not only work at the border, but *beyond the border*, i.e., outside Canada. The approach was to seek to identify high-risk people and goods as early as possible in the supply chain continuum, using common risk assessment and the exchange of information and intelligence to collaborate against violent extremism, facilitate international trade, and fight against transnational crime. The Plan also aimed to strengthen collaboration on national security investigation, to improve protection and resilience of cross-border critical infrastructure and cyber-security, preparation for safety and health threats, and management of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear emergencies. Table 1 shows the evolution of the Canadian Customs mandate from 1988 to 2018.

Alan Bersin, United States Customs and Border Protection Commissioner (US CBP) from 2010 to 2015, described in “Lines and Flows: The Beginning and the End of Borders” (2012) a new vision of the border and its management. Bersin observed a paradigm shift in the perception of the border since September 2001: “[i]n today’s world, the border can no longer be considered a purely physical barrier which separates nation states but as the flow of people and the movement of goods on a global scale both legally and illegally” (390). Bersin proposes a two-pronged approach for its implementation: a risk and threat management approach based on advance information and, collaboration of all border agencies at the local, national, and international level. CBSA revamped its traditional risk management approach to “*pushing the borders out*” through the development and implementation of pre-screening, intelligence and enforcement agreements, and arrangements designed to interdict high-risk people, goods, and

conveyances at source. Underlying CBSA’s approach is the recognition that in an interdependent world, most of CBSA’s issues—transnational organized crime, terrorism, international trade, and others—can be addressed most effectively by working collaboratively with foreign governments, Customs and law enforcement agencies, the private sector, and other government agencies in a “whole of government approach”.

The arrows in Figure 1 show the international travel and trade flows managed by Customs and border agencies. Table 2 shows through the border continuum that Canada Customs work increasingly took place ahead of the border—abroad or beyond the border—to identify and manage risk as early as possible before it arrives at the physical border. *Advanced Passenger Information* and *Passenger Name Record* (API/PNR), *Advanced Commercial Information* (ACI) and the CBSA National Targeting Center (NTC) were the fundamental tools to support the fight against terrorism and organized crime on one hand and the facilitation of international travel and trade on the other. The continuum also stretched inland to carry out post-clearance audits at importers’ premises. By working effectively across each dimension of the continuum, Customs officers could control who and what had the right to enter and exit, and under what conditions.

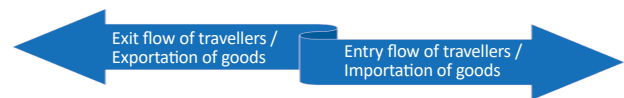


Figure 1. International Travel and Trade Flows Managed by Customs and Border Agencies. Source: prepared by the author.

Table 1. Evolution of the Canadian Customs Mandate from 1988 to 2018. Source: prepared by the author, adapted from Duchesneau (2019, 13–14).

| | 1980s | 1990s | 2000–2018 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Revenue Collection | Revenue collection at importation (Customs duty, Excise duty, Sales Tax, Excise Tax) | | |
| | Enforcement of Customs and tax fraud | | |
| Economic/Trade Facilitation and Compliance | Protect national economic interest against unfair foreign competition (tariff enforcement, import measures, quota enforcement, antidumping, etc.) | Promote economic development, investment and international market access of Canadian products | |
| | | Ensure compliance with free trade agreements. Support business competitiveness, ensuring compliance with trade policies set by the WTO | |
| Societal Protection, Health and Safety Customs administers more than 90 acts and international agreements on behalf of other government departments, provinces, and territories including international trade agreements | Protection of society (drugs, pornography, illegal immigrants, terrorists, weapons, diseased plants and animals, etc.) | Countering irregular migration | Fight against environmental and public health threats, consumer protection, cultural, and natural heritage |
| | | | Protect against risk of phytoparasites, invasive alien species |
| | | | Protect food safety, plant and animal health, and Canadian resource base |
| | | | New threats, opioid crises (e.g., Fentanyl) and other public health issues (e.g., Avian flu, COVID-19) |

Table 2. Border Continuum Source: prepared by the author, adapted from Duchesneau (2019).

| Abroad | At the Physical Border | Inland |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities that occur prior to departure of people, goods, and conveyances abroad Identify, mitigate and respond to threats and manage risks before they reach the physical border Advanced Passenger Information / Passenger Name Record (API/PNR) Advance Commercial Information (ACI) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities that occur at the physical points of entry (POE) and exit points in Canada 119 land border crossings 13 international airports 20 International marine ports 3 courier processing centers 3 postal processing Centers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities that occur in Canada Post-clearance audits (PCA) at importer premises to decongest the border National Compliance Plan where targeted verifications are determined through a risk-based, evergreen process Removal of non-admissible persons |

Part 3. Institutional Transformations

Canada Customs managed three major institutional transformations in less than 10 years (1999–2006). It evolved from a Customs, excise, and international trade administration—Revenue Canada, Customs and Excise—to a semi-autonomous integrated Customs and tax administration—the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency—part of the National Revenue Department in 1999. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, it became the CBSA in 2003, an integrated border management service, part of the Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness portfolio (now, Public Safety), along with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), and the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS). Moreover, in 2006, CBSA was tasked over a ten-year period to implement the *Arming Initiative*, aiming to equip 7,000 front-line officers with a side arm, train them, and ensure their qualification and certification. With this initiative, CBSA (Customs) became the second most important armed enforcement agency in Canada.

The extent of these changes in such a short period of time are unprecedented in the customs and border management institutional world. By comparison, the United Kingdom went from a Customs administration (HM Customs and Excise) to a Customs tax agency (HM Revenue and Customs, 2005), then a border agency in seven years without the organizational change and the arming of front-line officers at the same time.

Given the lessons learned by the experience of their Canadian and UK counterparts, the Australian Government gave itself one full year to implement the Australian Border Force in 2015, regrouping the Customs and immigration enforcement functions into the Ministry of the Interior.

The Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (1999): The New Public Management (NPM)

The customs institution as part of a semi-autonomous income tax agency lasted four years, from 1999 to 2003. The transition from department status to that of an agency was facilitated in 1994 when the two

departments were merged by legislation into one department: Revenue Canada. Administrative consolidation brought together the 14,000 full-time equivalent employees in Customs and Excise and the 25,000 in Taxation. During that short period, Customs seized the opportunities that agency status had to offer. It notably benefitted from remuneration flexibility for front-line managers (MG for management group) and for attracting some specialist roles, such as auditors, in high demand across the private and public sector. The upgrading of the front-line personnel function allowed, among other things, the development of the *CCRA Dictionary of Competencies* (2015), which is still current in 2018. Regional Customs operations also obtained more influence over national decisions as the five regional heads (assistant commissioners), were appointed at the assistant deputy minister level and reported directly to the Commissioner at headquarters.

On the administrative integration front, CCRA presented several advantages for what were now 'clients', particularly large enterprises, which were no longer subjected to three audits at three different times (a customs audit, an income tax audit, and an excise audit). Incidentally, the Excise function remained with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) following the reassignment of Customs to the CBSA in 2003. Then, the main challenge was to make the voice of Customs heard, including issues of an operational organization employing many officers at border areas removed from large urban centres. Yasui (2009) argued that a totally integrated revenue organization faces numerous challenges. The integration process has been described as "mating [a] terrier with [a] retriever" due to different historical, cultural and functional bases (10).

Limitations of the New Public Management (NPM) for customs and border management

As Customs and tax administrations from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, among others, implemented NPM, Malcolm K. Sparrow (2000), both a Harvard professor and UK law enforcement practitioner, set the limitations of this approach. Sparrow argued that the NPM does not consider the distinctive characters of law enforcement organizations, such as Customs administrations, in terms of client services and

performance measurement. He maintains that based on the US Customs Service modernization experience, enforcement organizations must not only provide client services, but also enforce obligations. Thus, they support social policies which do not lend themselves well to performance management based on quantitative indicators.

Sparrow’s work contributed to shaping the development of border management practices in Canadian customs for years to come. Central to Sparrow’s work is the *raison d’être* of enforcement and social regulation organizations, namely: the mitigation and control of risks and inherent threats of cross-border flows of goods, people, and means of transportation for health, public safety, and the environment. Sparrow stresses the enormous benefit to society that might accrue from the development of risk management as a core professional skill for regulators. Per Sparrow, regulatory and enforcement practices must achieve three main goals: “controlling risks, solving problems, managing compliance”. As such, a regulatory organization must invest in advance information and collaborative partnerships, and develop performance measurement notably focusing on results but also on outcomes and impacts.

The establishment of the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) in 2003: “One face at the border”

Shortly after the creation of the US Department of Homeland Security in 2002 and the border management administration known as United States Customs and Border Protection (US CBP) in 2003, the CBSA—first part of the new Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness department (and now Public Safety Canada)—was established on December 12, 2003. Some 9,352 employees from the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA), 1,037 from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) intelligence, interdiction, and enforcement program (port of entry program), and 108 officials from the Canadian Food Inspection

Agency (CFIA) import inspection at Ports of Entry program were transferred instantly to the CBSA.

The formation of the CBSA allowed the Government of Canada to install an integrated response to all manner of emergencies and threats to Canadian security and public safety, whether they were health-related, natural disasters, or terrorists. The addition of the enforcement and intelligence components of immigration enabled the CBSA to conduct business such as screening visitors and immigrants for war crimes, crimes against humanity, terrorism or security issues, organized crime and money laundering, and document fraud. Moreover, the CBSA was now able to proceed with investigations, detentions, audiences, and removals in the context of irregular migration enforcement. As a result, new border management roles were created, including international liaison officers (ILO) working abroad (ahead of the border), targeting officers, and criminal investigators. Tables 3 and 4 show the evolution from a centralized department to a semi-autonomous integrated border management agency in terms of its management and the development of policies.

Customs and border management: A recognized profession in Canada

The transition from a semi-autonomous Customs and tax agency to an integrated border enforcement agency was drastic. In an interview carried out in 2018 in the context of the 15th anniversary of the CBSA, Alain Jolicoeur, first CBSA president from 2003 to 2008, relates that the Thursday preceding the announcement of the creation of the CBSA, he was still deputy minister at the former Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (now Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada). Four days later, he was busy setting up a new integrated border management organization from the ground up: “[a]t 15:00 hours that day we had around 7,000 employees at CBSA and operational (...). It was a drastic change of orientation and

Table 3. Managing Customs in the 1980s vs. in the 21st Century Source: prepared by the author, adapted from Duchesneau (2019).

| | Managing Customs in the 1980s Legal Based Rationale “Customs for Customs” | Managing Customs in the 21st Century Management rationale based on New Public Management (NMP) |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Legitimacy | Based on the stability of formal structures and regularity of procedures | Based on adaptation to change and action effectiveness |
| Service | Citizen | Client |
| Accountability | Accountability of processes | Accountability based on results |
| Thinking mode | Linear <i>Legal logic</i> | Iterative <i>Effectiveness and action logic</i> |
| Organizational culture | Hierarchical | Delegation |
| Performance Management | On the respect of rules | On results and outcomes |
| Administrative structures | Centralized, Department | Semi-autonomous, Agency status |

Table 4. Evolution of the Customs Institution and Supporting Border Management Policies Source: prepared by the author, adapted from Duchesneau (2019).

| | Customs and Excise Canada (C&E) 1867–1999 | Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) 1999–2003 | Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) 2003–Present |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Department/ Ministry | Customs and excise administration part of the National Revenue Department | <i>Semi-autonomous</i> Customs and tax agency part of the National Revenue Department | Integrated border management agency part of the Public Safety Portfolio Integrate border management functions from three different departments: Customs and trade from CCRA, immigration intelligence and enforcement from CIC, Food, Plant and Animal Inspection from CFIA |
| Policy | Statement of Operating Principles (Customs Inspector 1985) | <i>Customs 2000: A Blueprint for the Future and Action Plan</i> (1998) | <i>Beyond the Border Action Plan: A Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness</i> (Government of Canada 2011) |
| | “The Department’s approach to the business as distinguished from the legal mandate” | <i>Investing in the Future: The Customs Action Plan 2000–2004</i> | “Addressing threats early; trade facilitation; economic growth and jobs; Cross-border law enforcement; and critical infrastructure and cyber-security” |
| | The International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures (1974) | “An approach based on risk assessment and advance information” | <i>WCO SAFE Framework of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade</i> (2005, 2018) |
| | <i>The International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS Convention)</i> (1983) | | <i>Customs in the 21st Century, Enhancing Growth and Development through Trade Facilitation and Border Security</i> (2008) |

philosophy for the Government of Canada, which has always put the emphasis on Customs and trade operations at the border. Suddenly, security became the priority, which required the reinvention of border operations” (Canada Border Services Agency 2018).

The main challenge was to establish an integrated border management agency out of a Customs and trade branch, part of a semi-autonomous Revenue Agency, an immigration enforcement branch, and a food and animal inspection division—and, at the same time, manage a 24/7 operational organization. This was often referred to in CBSA management circles as “replacing the wires while the lights are still on”. Among other initial challenges was the regrouping of employees, mandates, and cultures of three departments, described by Jolicoeur “as a wedding and three divorces” (Canada Border Services Agency 2018). They rapidly created a new professional group specific to border management (F/B for frontière/border) and a new title and role for front-line officers: Border Services Officer (BSO). This was the first time that Canadian government authorities recognized the specificity of the border management role in the federal government repertoire of professions. In 2010, a new uniform and a new heraldic badge representing the three legacy organizations were adopted.

Arming of front-line officers: Institutional transformation or cultural revolution?

The terms of the Harper Government (2006 to 2015) and the integration of CBSA into the Public Safety department gave birth to another institutional transformation, albeit a “cultural revolution”: the arming of front-line border services officers, except for those front-line officers working at airports. The 10-year Arming Initiative (2006–2016) had the primary objective: “to enhance border security and improve officers’ ability to pursue enforcement activities and handle and mitigate high risk situations by equipping designated frontline personnel with a duty firearm and associated training” (Canada Border Services Agency 2017, ii). The Northgate Group Report, *A View from the Front Lines—Officer Safety and the Necessity of Sidearms* (2006), commissioned by the Customs and Excise Union Douanes et Accise (CEUDA) was one of the main triggers of this cultural revolution. The report highlights the evolution of the Border Services Officers’ responsibilities which have since July 2000 included arresting violent and dangerous individuals and intercepting impaired drivers and criminal fugitives. This study proposed 31 recommendations to enhance officer safety and improve border security. It called, *inter alia*, for the following: “arm all border service officers involved

or potentially involved in interdiction or enforcement interaction with the public; create an armed border patrol; end work alone situations".

As underlined by Steven Rigby (Canada Border Services Agency 2018), CBSA's president from 2008 to 2010, "[t]he arming initiative was not frivolous. It was a significant and essential shift in the way the border is managed. It signaled how the CBSA would function in the future as Canada aligned its measures with those of Homeland Security". The Union's president Jean-Pierre Fortin (2017) concurred with him regarding the cultural change: "the role of the border officer has shifted dramatically over the years, now there is a heavy focus on national security, counter-terrorism and law enforcement, including intercepting impaired drivers, whereas the primary task was previously duty and tax collection" (Harris 2017). In addition, the Arming Initiative was implemented at the same time as another of the Northgate Group's recommendations: The Doubling-Up Initiative in *Small and Remote Ports of Entry* aiming to ensure that at least two officers were on duty at each port of entry in Canada. This measure created more than 400 new BSO positions across Canada. The Initiative "was implemented as intended, [and] targets to train and arm the frontline workforce were achieved within the timeline and under the original budget". After the Arming Initiative concluded, over 6,492 officers were trained and armed, exceeding the initial target of 4,800 officers. At this juncture, there are insufficient data to determine if the requirement to carry a side arm has impacted the recruitment of representatives of certain communities or if this will have an effect in the long run on staffing specialized positions in certain border management areas which require a practical and operational experience.

Part 4. A Unique Induction Training Curriculum for Integrated Border Management Front Line Professionals

Canada Customs/CBSA demonstrated strong capacity for adaptation and innovation during these major institutional and cultural transformations. It swiftly and effectively adapted its Customs and border operating model, its work descriptions, and up-skilled and trained its officers to an expanding mandate and ever-changing border management environment. At the beginnings of their careers, BSOs now benefit from induction training and professional development to acquire these unique qualifications and skillsets. Since 1978, CBSA has a national residential training center (The College) in Rigaud, Québec, where the professional knowledge, skills, and values for integrated border management are developed. Prior to the creation of The College, training programs were fragmented and often provided only on a coaching basis. A short period of formal training varied in application from region to region. As the first College

Director Peter Harkness pointed out: "[p]rofessionalism was very much the overall objective of the training philosophy and we felt to be professional, one needed a good deal of classroom training—from the history of the Department right through the hands-on skills that are required to undertake the job of a Customs inspector or an auditor" (cited in Canada Customs and Excise 1980).

In order to facilitate the development of skills in an operational environment, Canada Customs created within The College: a mock land port of entry (POE) with primary inspection lines (PIL), the port of Rigaud; an airport area to process travelers; an outdoor space dedicated to the search of vehicles where cars of all ranges and sizes are available for secondary examinations; and a mock courtroom to practice court testimony. Nowadays, it also provides a platform to experiment with the use of the operational and intelligence systems first-hand and, with the Arming Initiative, state-of-the-art shooting ranges and simulation rooms. The CBSA National Officer Induction Training Program has evolved with each institutional transformation, contributing to building a sense of belonging in the organization and maintaining a solid organizational culture and an "esprit de corps". The Program uses a blended learning approach and is built on three learning blocks: an introduction to the profession through distance learning, skills development through scenario-based simulations to assess performance at the learning center in Rigaud, and specialized training at the workplace where trainees are assessed using existing performance tools. In 1988, the Customs and Excise College launched the Customs Inspector Recruit Training Program (CIRTP), 18 weeks at the outset, then 12 weeks, to replace the two six-week Traffic and Commercial courses. The CIRTP has many new foundational features including competency and performance-based rationales, focusing on the development of operational skills through real-life scenarios and case studies. Trainee officers are assessed on their demonstrated capability, *inter alia*, to conduct interviews to determine admissibility of goods for examination, use technology to make informed decisions, carry out examination of vehicles, testify in court, etc. The CIRTP is also a pass-fail program where employment is contingent on successful completion of the program. Evaluations are done by superintendents and chiefs brought in from the field. From its inception, the CIRTP has been a flagship program in Canada and around the world. The Canadian model stands as one of the first customs competency and performance-based learning programs and is recognized as a good practice in the WCO Framework of Principles and Practices on Customs Professionalism (2015).

With the formation of the CBSA, CIRTP became the Port of Entry Recruit Training Program (POERT) in 2007, adding immigration and food as well as plant and animal inspection to the curriculum. Finally, it became the Officer Induction Training Program (OITP)

in 2012 with the addition of arming training as part of a 22-week program, including an online four-week orientation to the profession (Table 5). The recruitment and training of 400 new officers in the context of the Doubling-Up Initiative and the addition of side-arm training, combined with the replacement of a massive retirement of personnel hired at the end of the 70s, had a major impact on the training budget and thus on the delivery of other training and development programs of the Agency, notably commercial and management training. The CBSA Audit of Commercial Air Cargo (2014) highlighted the operational vulnerability of front-line officers not trained in a transportation mode that is growing and presents a high risk of smuggling of prohibited goods. The lack of commercial training combined with the loss of the bulk of the commercial experts, a trend exacerbated by the 2012 Deficit

Reduction Action Program (DRAP), created gaps in the Agency’s ability to address threats and vulnerabilities in the commercial stream.

Part 5. A New Frontline Role: The International Liaison Officer (LO)

The International Liaison Officer (LO) Cadre, a new integrated border management role, is a prime example of the ‘*pushing the border out*’ approach, built on advance information, risk management, and cooperation at the national and international level. The International Liaison Officer Cadre stems from the CBSA International Customs attachés network and the Migration Integrity Officers (MIO) Network of Citizenship Immigration Canada (CIC). It includes approximately

Table 5. Evolution of Canada Customs, Recruitment and Induction Training Program for Frontline Officers Source: prepared by the author, adapted from Duchesneau (2019, 13–14).

| | 1980s | 1990s | 2000s |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FRONT LINE OFFICER TITLE | Customs Inspector (CI) (PM / Program Management) | Customs Inspector (CI) CIC Migration Integrity Officer (FS/Foreign Service) | Border Services Officer (BSO) (Professional group FB Frontière/Border) International Liaison Officer (FB/Frontier Border) |
| TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTION | Customs and Excise College | Revenue Canada Learning Center | Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) College |
| RECRUITMENT | Local | Regional | National |
| NATIONAL INDUCTION TRAINING PROGRAM | Two courses: 6 weeks, Traffic 6 weeks, Commercial (1979) Customs Correspondence Course | <i>Competency and perfor- mance based Customs Inspector Recruit Training Program–CIRTP</i> (1988) 18 weeks at the onset 12 weeks 3 phases: Contextual Learning, Skills Training, Advanced | <i>Port of Entry Recruit Training–POERT</i> (2007) 12-weeks Core 9 weeks in-residence Online 1 week, In-Service Secondary 5 days each, mode specific, coaching <i>Induction Officer Training Program–OITP</i> (2012) <i>22 weeks: 18 weeks in residence and 4 weeks online</i> |
| USE OF FORCE / ARMING TRAINING PROGRAM | Advanced Communication Workshop including Dealing with Difficult People and Cultural Awareness (1986) 3-day workshop delivered to Customs Inspectors and Superintendents at local level | Provision of self-defense equipment to Customs Inspectors and Immigration Officers working at the border (1990) | Fully integrated in OTIP |
| DETECTOR DOGS TRAINING PROGRAM | Drugs, firearms, currency detection | Currency, explosives | |
| | Customs Detector Dogs (German shepherds) | Beginning of the use of detector dogs for agriculture matters i.e. (beagles) | |

forty international liaison officers, international network managers, and international region directors posted in Canadian embassies and high commissions. Working in critical global centres (such as Washington, Brussels, and Shanghai) and approximately 30 international trade and travel hubs, the LOs are called upon to carry out a myriad of pre-border activities covering irregular migration, trade facilitation, national security, and Customs fraud. Supporting the ‘*pushing the border out*’ approach, LOs act as collectors of usable information at the point of embarkation abroad to assist the *CBSA National Targeting Center* (NTC) with interceptions and the development of risk indicators and targets. True border management diplomats, LOs play a pivotal role in coordinated border management (CBM) as they work collaboratively with foreign border management (Customs, Immigration, border guards), law enforcement agencies, and other Canadian government departments based in the host country. As part of their facilitation and security role, LOs educate international stakeholders about CBSA trusted travel and trade facilitation programs and provide training to partners such as airline staff and local Immigration, Customs, and police on fraudulent documents detection. Key actors in the fight against irregular migration and customs fraud, LOs assist with the coordination of removal operations of inadmissible persons and support Customs and criminal investigations. Finally, as stakeholders in

the management of international emergency crises, LOs work in close cooperation with OGAs and international partners during emergency crises such as natural disasters and migratory crises, within the context of the Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The Network notably intervened during the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the 2006 humanitarian crisis in Lebanon.

During the Syrian refugee operation (2015–2016), the CBSA opened two temporary ports of entry (POEs), one in Amman, Jordan and another in Beirut, Lebanon, under the leadership of international network managers (INM) deployed in situ. They implemented a whole-of-government multilayer security screening process, tailored to the specific needs of the Syrian refugees. The LOs verified the identities of more than 26,000 refugees—and the validity of their documents using biometric information—by February 29, 2016. In addition, they provided their expertise in the detection of fraudulent documents and built on their knowledge of the airport environment to establish strong relationships with host countries’ airport employees and to facilitate the embarkation process in Beirut, Amman, Cairo, and Ankara. Finally, they have worked closely with Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Service Canada, and the Public Health Agency of Canada to develop arrival processes for refugees at the Toronto and Montréal international airports.

Table 6. Evolution of Canada Customs International Presence Source: prepared by the author, adapted from Duchesneau (2019, 27–28).

| | 1980s Customs and Excise, National Revenue | 1990s Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA)/Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) | 2000s Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Posts | Brussels and Tokyo | Brussels | Brussels, Washington, and Shanghai, and more than 40 travel and trade hubs around the world |
| Titles | Customs Attachés (professional group PM for program administration) | Customs and Revenue Counselor or Attaché | Counsellor Border Services/ Regional directors in Brussels, Washington, and Shanghai (Professional group EX for executive) |
| | Anti-dumping investigators (professional group CO for international trade/commerce) | Migration Integrity Officer (MIO) (1989) (professional group FS for Foreign Service) | International liaison cadre: International Liaison Officer, International Network Manager (Professional group FB for Frontière / Border) |
| Functions | Representation before the Customs Cooperation Council (1973) in Brussels in the development of harmonized and simplified Customs procedures for trade facilitation | CCRA: Representation before the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on tax issues | Integrated border management: representation before the WCO and hosted country, information collection, fight against irregular migration and customs fraud, support to investigations, fraudulent documents detection training, stakeholder’s education on trade and facilitation programs, emergency crises management |
| | Enforcing trade remedies that help protect Canadian industry from the injurious effects of dumped and subsidized imported goods | CIC: Fight against irregular migration | |

Conclusion

As Widdowson argues in "The Changing Role of Customs: Evolution or Revolution?" (2010), the mandate, the border, the institution, the profession and working methods have evolved significantly due to evolutionary factors such as globalization, international trade liberalization, New Public Management, and revolutionary factors including the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the arming of front line BSOs in Canada. Canada Customs and Excise transformed in less than 10 years into an integrated border management agency, the CBSA, responsible for the facilitation, control, and enforcement of the flow of people and goods, and the second-largest law enforcement agency in Canada.

Multifarious by the extent and variety of its responsibilities, CBSA contributes to Canada's fiscal, economic, public safety and national security objectives. Given its strategic position at the Canada-US border, in travel and trade hubs around the world, and in airports, sea-ports, train stations, the postal service, and express couriers, CBSA is uniquely placed to secure and regulate the flows of people, information (data), fiscal transactions, and goods, and to enforce more than 90 acts, regulations, and international agreements on behalf of other government agencies. No other public administration has such an exceptional position and the ability to play on so many levels. Singular in its versatility, the CBSA is also noteworthy in its field of operations that has extended abroad—ahead of the border and inland in Canada. Gatekeeper in the 1980's, CBSA now operates offshore using a risk-based, intelligence-informed approach and advance information to identify, mitigate, and respond to threats and manage risks before they reach the physical Canadian border. Borders are being 'pushed out'. Customs and other border formalities are carried out away from the border, electronically, before and after the actual border crossing at ports of entry.

The Customs Inspector (CI) role became Border Services Officer (BSO) in 2003 with the creation of the CBSA. It is now a recognized profession within the Canadian public service with its own occupational group—Frontier/Border (FB)—including roles such as intelligence analyst, targeting officers, senior trade compliance officers, inland enforcement officers, removal officers, and international liaison officers. Given the vast array of tasks they accomplish, border management professionals must have a unique skillsets supported by specialized learning, training, and development programs. They need to be relationship and network builders to cultivate productive strategic and operational relationships; critical thinkers and skilled analysts to make informed decisions; effective communicators both cross-culturally and with a range of

people and organizations; able to adapt to shifting and complex business needs; and above all, team players, including the ability to collaborate virtually. Based on trends observed at the international level, the mandates given to the now Canada Border Services Agency are bound to be extended over the next few years, notably in terms of public health, environmental protection, and the management of migratory and international emergencies and crises. The outlook of the border management profession is most promising. The number of front-line officers has more than doubled in 30 years, from 3,500 in 1980 to more than 7,000 in 2015. New roles and border management practices have been created, along with new challenges to face and overcome.

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POLICY REPORT

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Innovation and Vulnerability at the Italian–Swiss Border: the Cervinia–Zermatt Cable Car

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*This policy report examines the Matterhorn Alpine Crossing (MAC), an innovative cable car system that connects Italy and Switzerland through the Alps. Launched in 2023, this project showcases the potential for modern engineering to enhance regional connectivity and economic growth, while also posing significant challenges in terms of environmental conservation and operational efficiency. The report draws on a range of interdisciplinary literature, focusing on environmental management and sustainable infrastructure development. This analysis reveals that the infrastructure encountered critical challenges stemming from its environmental impact and the need for improved management practices. The findings advocate for a comprehensive approach that prioritizes environmental sustainability and robust stakeholder engagement to ensure the project's long-term viability. Proposed recommendations emphasize the importance of adaptive management strategies that respond to ongoing environmental and operational challenges. The report suggests that with thoughtful planning and committed execution, MAC could become a benchmark for integrating technological innovation with environmental stewardship in sensitive regions.**

Executive Summary

The Matterhorn Alpine Crossing (MAC), inaugurated on July 2, 2023, stands as an important achievement in Alpine transport and tourism, bridging the Italian municipality of Cervinia and the Swiss resort of Zermatt. This high-altitude cable car not only connects two nations but also represents a leap towards integrating technology with environmental conservation. Conceptualized in the 1930s and realized decades later, this project was envisioned to boost tourism and

facilitate easier cross-border movement. However, the journey from conception to operation has been fraught with challenges. Early stages of the cable car's operation revealed significant issues: unexpected maintenance closures and utilization rates that fell short of projections, underscoring deeper problems in infrastructure resilience and market acceptance. These operational challenges are mirrored by concerns over environmental impact. The delicate Alpine ecosystem

*Disclaimer

The views and contents of this document reflect only the author's opinion and do not represent the point of view of the National Customs Administration of Italy (ADM—Agenzia delle Dogane e dei Monopoli).

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possesses unique vulnerabilities that demand careful management. The literature reviewed emphasizes the precarious balance required to implement such ambitious projects without compromising environmental integrity. It highlights the need for sustainable practices that align closely with the goals of preserving natural landscapes while fostering economic development.

The report identifies a crucial gap in the existing management approaches, particularly in stakeholder engagement and environmental monitoring. To address these issues, some recommendations are suggested:

- Develop a dynamic governance model that includes continuous stakeholder dialogue to ensure that the project adapts to both environmental and community needs.
- Enhance operational protocols to prevent disruptions and maintain high service standards.
- Strengthen environmental oversight and integrate sustainability at every phase of operation to safeguard the Alpine habitat.

By implementing these strategies, MAC can serve as a starting point for future projects, demonstrating if and how innovative infrastructure can coexist with critical conservation efforts.

1. Introduction

On July 2, 2023, the inauguration of the Cervinia-Zermatt cable car took place, marking a significant milestone in Alpine transport and tourism. This new

cable car connects the Italian resort of Cervinia with the Swiss resort of Zermatt; ascending to 4,000 meters with a border crossing point at 3,480 meters, it is the highest current continuous cable car crossing in the Alps and the highest border crossing in Europe, connecting Switzerland and Italy in around ninety minutes (Matterhorn Alpine Crossing 2024). The cable car system features state-of-the-art technology and is designed to offer panoramic views of the Matterhorn and surrounding peaks (see Figures 1 and 2). It was originally supposed to operate year-round, providing a crucial link between the two countries and boosting the region's tourism, particularly in the summer and shoulder seasons when skiing is less prevalent.

The project was envisioned by the two countries as early as the 1930s, with the first section being constructed starting in 2018 between Trockener Steg and the Klein Matterhorn. The work was then completed five years later by the Swiss company Zermatt Bergbahnen with the creation of a three-cord cable car featuring 10 cabins, capable of transporting up to 1,300 passengers per hour across the Theodul Glacier, with a route of 1.6 kilometers covering an elevation difference of 363 meters. During the inauguration, officials from both Italy and Switzerland emphasized the project's importance for cross-border cooperation, tourism, and regional development. However, the project already raised concerns in its early stages about environmental impacts and several local associations reported some difficulty on the part of Zermatt Bergbahnen in sharing data, information, and sustainability reports for the project before it became operational (Famurewa 2019).

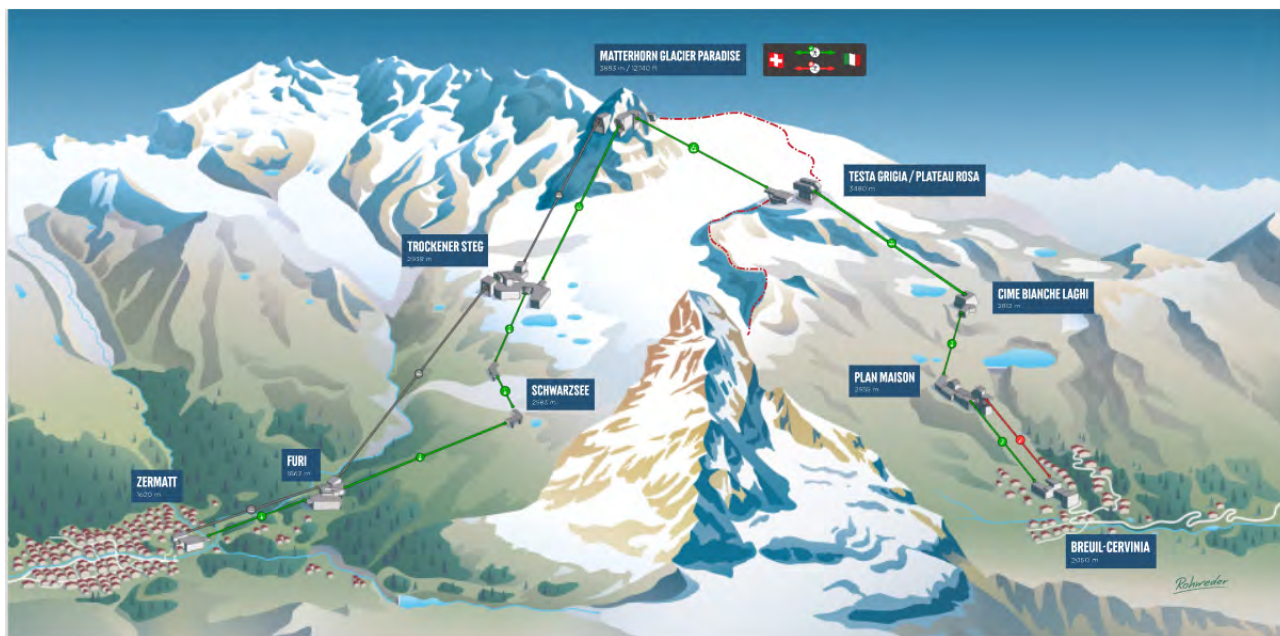


Figure 1. Matterhorn Alpine Crossing and the Stations of its Journey. Source: <https://matterhornalpinecrossing.com/en#anchor-panoramictmap>

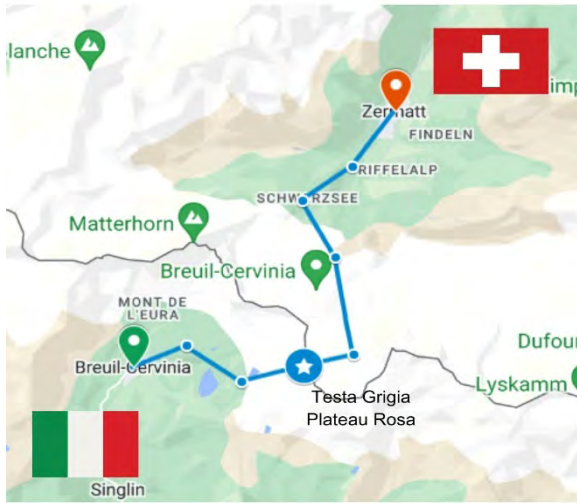


Figure 2. The Cross-border Journey of Matterhorn Cable Car. Three stations are in Italian territory (Cervinia, Pian Maison, Cime Bianche), five are in Swiss territory (Zermatt, Furi, Schwarsee, Trockner Steg, Matterhorn Glacier Paradise), and one (Testa Grigia, Plateau Rosa) is just at the border crossing. Source: author's elaboration on Google Maps.

The vulnerabilities of the Alpine transport system are well known, both in freight and passenger transport (see Figure 3). For several years, the Alpine Conference has been a body that brings together various institutions from the countries along the Alpine chain, aiming to monitor the state of the art and propose effective solutions. In particular, the Innsbruck Declaration issued during the fifteenth Alpine Conference (Alpine Convention 2019) set the goal of achieving "climate-neutral" and "climate-resilient" Alps by 2050, to be pursued through a series of monitoring actions and intermediate targets.

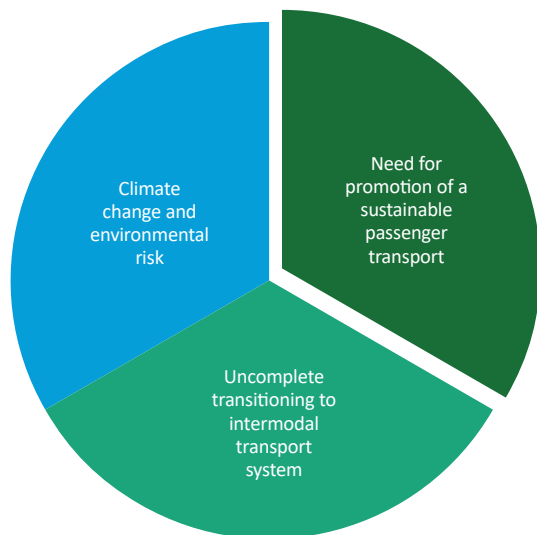


Figure 3. Fragilities of the Alpine System of Transportation. Source: author's elaboration on Alpine Convention (2019; 2023; Transport Working Group of the Alpine Convention 2022).

In this context, the role of the cable car as a symbol of modernity and connectivity is even clearer, but it is also as a reminder of the vulnerabilities faced by mountain environments due to climate change and increased human activity. It is worth noting that as a consequence of global warming, the State border, defined via the watershed, has shifted right near the Plateau Rosa station by approximately by 100 to 150 meters southward due to the retreat of the Theodul Glacier, from 1940 to today (Swisstopo 2024).

On the other hand, several innovative technologies are integrated into the project: notably, a baggage handling system that transports travelers' luggage and, similarly—though on a smaller scale compared to the most modern airport systems—allows for risk-based screening and efficient sorting at the border and during customs checks. This is a "sensitive" issue for modern customs administration strategies, especially in airports but not limited to them (Wong and Brooks 2015; Bigo 2022), particularly in Europe, on the eve of the new Customs Code reform (Arendsen 2024). Within a few months of the cable car's opening, however, several issues emerged (SonntagsZeitung 2024): the baggage handling system did not function as expected due to a lack of effective coordination between Italian and Swiss authorities, and significant sporting events that the cable car was supposed to support did not come to fruition. The Matterhorn Cervino Speed Opening ski race, heavily criticized by environmentalists (Francioli 2023) and scheduled for November, was canceled due to weather conditions. Moreover, bids for the 2030 and 2034 Winter Olympics were both rejected, likely due to a lack of public support and the inefficient and dispersed logistical setup (Wong Sak Hoi 2023).

In December 2023, Zermatt Bergbahnen announced an unexpected three-month closure for maintenance (Keystone-ATS 2023), later reduced to two. After the first winter season, there was already talk of a "flop" (SonntagsZeitung 2024; Rota 2024), as the numbers were not encouraging. During the winter season, around 8,000 skiers per day reached the Klein Matterhorn from Zermatt on the Swiss side, but only 800 of them crossed into Italy using MAC (SonntagsZeitung 2024). What exactly is not working for what was supposed to be the flagship of the new generation of Alpine crossings? Some have pointed to the cost of the ticket: approximately 360 Swiss francs per person for a round-trip day excursion. This is a high price, but likely in line with other Alpine attractions, such as the Jungfrauoch in Switzerland (on the border between the cantons of Bern and Valais), and the affluent clientele, primarily from Asia and the United States, that the project has targeted from the outset. There are likely social and environmental issues that have impacted the project's success and deserve to be investigated in detail. This policy report aims to address these, presenting possible options and recommendations for managing this infrastructure.

Section 2 introduces some theoretical approaches deemed useful for defining the issues at hand (borders as complex and multidimensional objects of study, territorial singularities, digitalization of customs control, and redefinition of risk analysis). **Section 3** describes contexts where these approaches have been applied, evaluating their applicability to the case in question. **Section 4** presents some conclusions, and **Section 5** suggests recommendations based on three areas of analysis:

1. Improving the performance of the infrastructure.
2. Achieving effective and seamless border controls.
3. Ensuring environmental sustainability.

2. A Different Approach Regarding Borders

An innovative approach to the study of border areas can be traced back to the 1920s, to scholar Paul de La Pradelle, who identifies the "*frontière*" not merely as a line but as a genuine zone where collaborative dynamics of interaction take place between states. However, this concept should be seen more as a starting point than a conclusion in subsequent literature (Perrier 2020b), given the many and varied issues related to the topic of borders. Borders, due to their mobility, complexity, and variability over time and space, require a multidisciplinary approach that can encompass various perspectives (Brunet-Jailly 2005; Rumford 2012). They also necessitate approaches tailored to the specific territorial realities they encompass. A unique case can be found in the Alpine region.

2.1 Management of border areas in the Alps

An organic approach to this new perspective to border management has already been extensively studied in the Alpine framework (Amilhat Szary 2013; Fourny 2013) noting the fluid and evolving nature of border regions in the Alps and the need for a dynamic equilibrium, where a range of nuanced governance options is implied. Among the themes addressed by this line of study, two seem to have played an important role in the MAC case: the lack of feedback and consensus on the project, and the apparent absence of sustainability in long-term infrastructure planning. Regarding the first point, it is worth noting that concerns, particularly from the Swiss population, were not limited to environmentalist groups skeptical of this specific project. There was significant opposition to the Winter Olympics bid (Hess 2017), and, in more recent times, to the ski championship scheduled on the glacier in November 2023 (Franciolli 2023). On the Italian side, a well-known writer, Paolo Cognetti, an expert on and passionate advocate of the Alps, publicly opposed the event in several interviews, emphasizing the need to protect glaciers as public goods (Gritti 2023). As for

the double rejection of the Olympic bids, it does not appear that the construction of new infrastructures was a positive factor. On the contrary, in a recent assessment model for the Winter Olympic Games (Müller et al. 2021), which assigns scores to host cities from the past 16 editions, the construction of new infrastructure is to blame: this may have negatively influenced the Olympic Committee's decision.

The long closure period during the peak winter season raises questions about the full sustainability of the Matterhorn project on the already fragile Alpine environment. Alps are heavily impacted by global warming and deprived of their original ecosystem. Many monitoring authorities provide valuable data and strategic plans, but, as highlighted in the literature, cooperation has obstacles and limitations (Wassenberg 2020), being characterized by a formal overlap of institutional presences rather than a substantial consolidation of competencies (Botteghi 2020). This often reduces the effectiveness of interventions, particularly in areas that require timely and sometimes extra-institutional action plans and capabilities.

2.2 A special case: logistic border singularities

The construction of a cross-border cable car, which spans the territories of two countries and features an interchange station for border crossing, brings to mind another important area of study: border singularities (Perrier 2020a). Originating from something rare at the location of borders, singularities can be the solution to diverse issues. We can observe interesting specificities in transportation infrastructure such as airports, tunnels, and bridges. Despite the physical location of the infrastructure, the border singularity typically requires multilateral and custom-made arrangements, where strategies and controls are shared among all relevant stakeholders. This is a fundamental prerequisite, though not the only one, and it is not sufficient to eliminate all the ambiguities associated with the status of singularity. A significant example is the Euro Airport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg (Reitel 2020), located on French territory less than four kilometers from the French-Swiss border. It is one of the few airports in the world operated jointly by two countries, France and Switzerland, based on a 1949 convention. On the airport premises, there are two separate sections and two Customs areas, Swiss and French, but all the decisional models and strategies are based on a joint governance. The airport features a last-generation baggage handling system with high performance cross-belt sorters (Alstef 2016; International Airport Review 2023), embodying a new process for additional oversight of hold baggage. This ensures smooth controls and an extremely low percentage of mishandled baggage, making the Euro Airport a front-runner within the latest European standards for baggage handling and safety checks (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Automatic Cross-belt Sorter (Baggage Handling System) for Basel-Mulhouse Airport. Sources: Alstef Group (2016); EuroAirport (2024).

How baggage handling and checks affected the Matterhorn cable car will be discussed in the following section, as well as whether and to what extent an airport model, with successes and challenges, can be applied to a cross-border cable car.

2.3 Border management and Customs controls

Another relevant topic addressed by the cross-border cable car case is the passenger and baggage check system at the moment of border crossing. The literature has sparked an interesting debate, far from having exhausted the issue: how can an effective and modern control authority ensure uninterrupted flows of goods and people, where the traditional trade-off between efficiency and security in a globalized world is overcome? Arendsen (2024) aims to highlight how, considering the upcoming Union Customs Code reform, the Customs Authorities of the member states must continue the work, partially included in the previous reform, of adapting risk analysis systems. This adaptation contributes to the ongoing development and management of a centralized and shared data hub, moving towards the much-anticipated goal of a truly unified European customs system. Bigo's (2022) perspective focuses on the digitalization of controls and the shift in perspective required from the involved stakeholders. A few years earlier, Wong and Brooks (2015) had described this trend toward the dematerialization of security controls in the aviation sector. A useful parallel can be drawn

with another contribution (Dijstelbloem 2021) that outlines the characteristics of new digitized border infrastructures, identifying disruptive elements of innovation in the technology they incorporate. Their impact on the control of flows of people and goods therefore requires a renewed study of the relationship between technology and political choices.

3. Border Singularities Approach Applied to the Alpine Framework

3.1 Not only the Matterhorn: The case of the Aiguille du Midi

Another important cross-border cable car in the Alpine framework is the Aiguille du Midi, a prominent peak in the Mont Blanc massif, at an altitude of 3,842 meters, built in 1955 and still active as an important cross-border infrastructure (Mont Blanc Natural Resort 2023). The Aiguille du Midi is connected to Chamonix, France, via a two-stage cable car system; in addition, the Panoramic Mont-Blanc gondola links the Aiguille du Midi to Pointe Helbronner on the Italian side of the border, enabling visitors to traverse between France and Italy over the Mont Blanc massif (see Figure 5).

The Aiguille, with the transnational management of its tourist site, represents a case of successful infrastructure in an area, Mont Blanc, where cross-border cooperation proceeds with both achievements and contradictions (Botteghi 2020). It is interesting to note that Pointe Helbronner is one of the three areas at the root of the unsolved border dispute between France and Italy over the two slopes of the Mont Blanc (Gautheret 2020). Nevertheless, this did not prevent a sort of effective management of this cross-border infrastructure, whose value is shared by local stakeholders as a common resource. The Aiguille du Midi, however, also faces significant challenges, particularly in terms of environmental impact and sustainability. The increasing



Figure 5. Route of the Aiguille du Midi Cable Car. Source: Mont Blanc Natural Resort (2023).

number of visitors, driven by the site's popularity, places a strain on the delicate alpine environment. Managing the balance between promoting tourism and preserving the natural landscape is a constant challenge for the authorities involved. Additionally, the cross-border nature of the site complicates governance, as the coordination between different national regulations and environmental policies is not always optimal. The need to protect the Mont Blanc massif's unique ecosystem while continuing to attract tourists presents a complex dilemma, highlighting the extent to which cross-border infrastructure requires coordinated efforts from the relevant authorities to navigate these challenges effectively. The presence, amidst significant divergences, of established ecological sensitivity and the proactive involvement of the Mont Blanc Observatory in disseminating climate change data may have positively influenced this scenario so far.

3.2 The Matterhorn cable car and the Basel–Mulhouse Airport

As mentioned in sub-section 2.1, a parallel can be drawn between MAC and the shared governance model of the Basel–Mulhouse Airport. However, to what extent is the reality of an international airport applicable to an alpine cable car? There are naturally significant differences due to the specificities of the two modes of transport, but there are also interesting analogies:

1. The border singularity status: both structures face successes and tensions due to this condition within local communities. For example, the Basel–Mulhouse Airport has faced issues related to noise pollution in the past (Reitel 2020), just as the Alpine Crossing now must manage its own challenges with local stakeholders and environmental fragility.
2. The matter of controls: the airport sector certainly has a unique nature and organization that evolves over time. However, as highlighted long ago (Salter 2008), airports are contemporary spaces that simultaneously exhibit the opportunities and vulnerabilities of globalization. In this sense, the Alpine Crossing is quite similar, as it is an innovative yet fragile engineering project, exposed to climate change and hindered by limited user feedback and engagement.

What seems truly different between the two realities is that the Basel–Mulhouse Airport has built a credible governance model over time through a genuinely multilateral and shared approach, where both French and Swiss authorities are always involved in all relevant strategic decisions. This aspect is not evident in the alpine cable car. The project was conceived and implemented almost entirely through Swiss initiative, with the operator Zermatt Bergbahnen focusing more on informational activities rather than true engagement with the local community. It does not appear that Italy and Switzerland have ever worked together on governance

or monitoring tables regarding this new infrastructure, nor has the monitoring body specific to the transport sector, the Alpine Convention, adapted its multi-year intervention programs to account for the existence of this new infrastructure. Similarly, the interaction between Customs authorities for the design of new passenger and baggage control methods occurred through conventional institutional channels that did not include the redesigning of risk analysis strategies or the adoption of new security control technologies, likely to result in a loss of efficiency from not leveraging technological innovations from the airport sector in this new context.

4. Conclusions

Is it fair to label MAC a failure just a few months after its reopening? Probably not, and it may be too early to draw conclusions from the current user statistics. This new infrastructure needs time to settle into its role within the region and establish its market position within the tourism sector. What stands out in this situation, aside from the public dissent, is the lack of active dialogue between the project's promoters and other institutional stakeholders in the region. This dialogue should go beyond press releases to include genuine, ongoing engagement and monitoring of a dynamic and evolving situation—much like the territory itself, which requires flexible and inclusive governance models at every level.

As for redesigning customs control processes, it is understandable that establishing a dialogue between institutions on process innovations might not happen overnight, especially in a time of significant change for Customs administrations across Europe. However, this example illustrates an expansion, not necessarily of physical borders, but of border thinking (Meena 2014). New borders are emerging everywhere, even in remote and hard-to-reach places, such as a frontier at 3,500 meters above sea level, managed by a high-altitude cable car system. Sometimes these efforts succeed; other times, they falter. This partial setback should not be seen as a reason to close the discussion, but rather as an opportunity to open it up critically and constructively. We should aim to identify actions that can improve the management of these complex border spaces, with a particular focus on benefiting the local populations.

5. Implications and Recommendations

Despite its challenges, MAC represents a significant engineering achievement, but its future success depends on addressing critical issues in infrastructure performance, border controls, and environmental sustainability, according to the model in Figure 6.

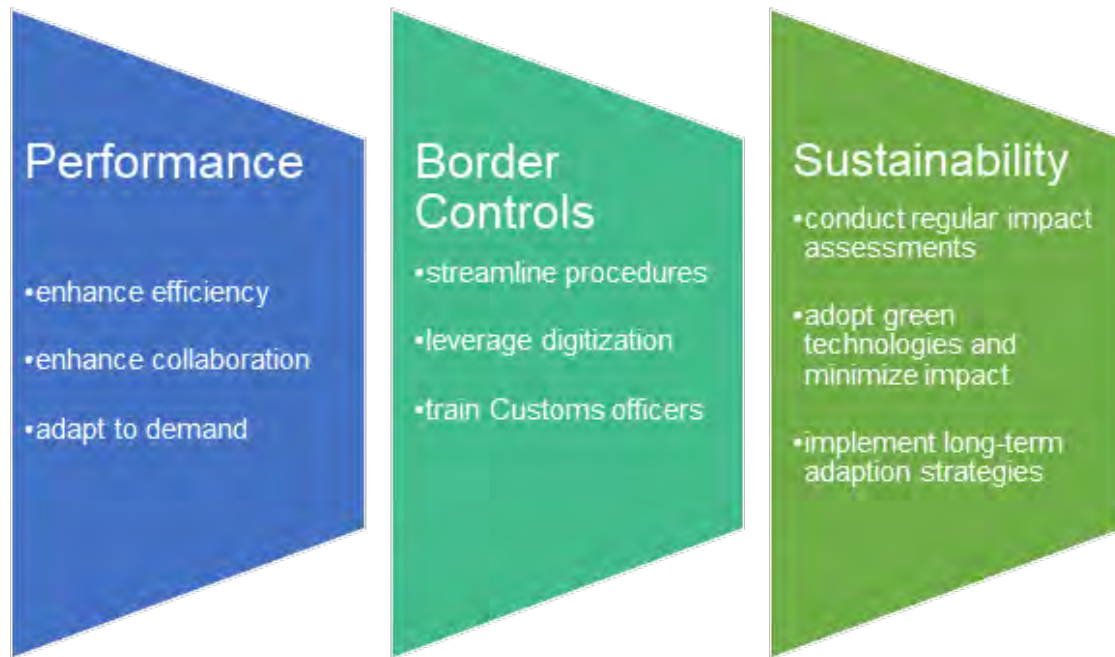


Figure 6. Policy Recommendations for Implementing Better Strategy in MAC. Source: the author.

To ensure the longevity and effectiveness of this cross-border cable car system, the following recommendations are proposed.

5.1 Improving overall performance

The initial performance of MAC has not met expectations, largely due to a lack of clear communication, coordination, and alignment with stakeholder interests. For this reason, it could be useful to implement the following initiatives:

Enhancing operational efficiency. MAC must address the operational inefficiencies that have emerged since its launch. The extended closure for maintenance just months after opening has raised concerns about the robustness of the infrastructure. To improve performance, it is crucial to implement a rigorous, ongoing maintenance schedule that minimizes downtime during peak tourist seasons. Additionally, investing in advanced monitoring systems can help predict and prevent mechanical failures before they result in costly shutdowns. By adopting a proactive maintenance strategy, Zermatt Bergbahnen can improve reliability, reduce operational costs, and enhance the overall visitor experience.

Enhancing collaboration. A joint Swiss–Italian working group to oversee the operation and promotion of the Alpine Crossing should include representatives from both countries' tourism boards, local governments, and the operator, Zermatt Bergbahnen, to ensure that the infrastructure meets the needs of all parties.

Adapting to market demand and pricing strategy. The underwhelming initial usage rates suggest that MAC has not yet found its niche in the tourism market. To improve its performance, a targeted marketing strategy should be developed to attract diverse visitor segments, particularly those who may be interested in cross-border experiences. This could include tailored packages that integrate the cable car journey with other local attractions, such as ski resorts or cultural sites. Additionally, the pricing strategy should be re-evaluated to ensure it is competitive with other high-altitude attractions, while still providing value to a broader demographic.

5.2 Achieving effective and seamless border controls

One of the critical challenges facing MAC is the implementation of efficient and seamless border controls. The dual nature of the crossing, connecting two countries with different customs and border policies, presents unique challenges.

Streamlining Customs procedures. Current procedures may need to be re-evaluated to ensure they do not disrupt the flow of passengers. One recommendation is to implement a pre-clearance system for customs and immigration checks, allowing passengers to complete these processes before arriving at the border station. This approach could significantly reduce wait times and enhance the overall user experience.

Leveraging digitalization. In line with broader trends in border management, MAC should explore opportunities for digitalization to enhance control measures.

For example, the integration of real-time data sharing between Swiss and Italian border authorities could enable more responsive and flexible border controls. Additionally, the adoption of a centralized data hub, as suggested in recent Customs reforms, could facilitate more efficient risk analysis and decision-making. These digital tools can help maintain the balance between security and efficiency, ensuring that MAC remains a safe and attractive option for travelers. The two Customs Authorities should assess the opportunities to adjust their existing Customs agreements to this new framework, needing effective and minimally intrusive controls.

Training staff. Border officers should receive specialized training to handle the unique challenges posed by this cross-border infrastructure, focusing on quick processing of passengers, fraudulent documents, and ensuring the safety and security of the crossing.

5.3 Ensuring environmental sustainability

MAC operates in a fragile alpine environment, where the impact of infrastructure on the local ecosystem is a significant concern. The sustainability of this project is critical not only for the environment but also for maintaining the area's attractiveness to tourists. It could be useful to envisage the following actions:

Conducting regular environmental impact assessments. The Swiss and Italian governments, in collaboration with environmental NGOs, should conduct regular assessments of the crossing's impact on the local environment. These assessments should focus on factors such as wildlife disturbance, pollution, and the impact on glaciers.

Adopting green technologies. The infrastructure should incorporate the latest green technologies to minimize its environmental footprint. This includes using renewable energy sources for the operation of cable cars, implementing waste management systems, and reducing carbon emissions through efficient transportation practices.

Implementing long-term climate adaptation strategies. The alpine region is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including glacial retreat, permafrost thaw, and increased risk of natural hazards such as avalanches. To ensure the sustainability of MAC, it is essential to develop long-term climate adaptation strategies. This could involve reinforcing infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events, as well as investing in research to better understand the impacts of climate change on the local environment. Additionally, collaboration with international climate organizations can help ensure that MAC is at the forefront of best practices in climate resilience, an initiative not only useful in itself but also valuable for understanding the complex movements of people at borders, as well as

the medium- to long-term prospects of an economic initiative that can represent a significant opportunity for value creation worldwide, attracting clientele from all over the globe.

Sustainability is perhaps the most significant challenge among the recommendations presented here. The critical question is whether it can be realistically achieved within the context of MAC and the current framework of the Alpine Convention. The future of the cross-border cable car depends on this—its long-term viability hinges on our ability to implement sustainable practices. Beyond that, MAC has the potential to set a precedent as a model of sustainable governance for innovative infrastructure. This project could serve not only as a case study but as a foundation for future environmental strategies in border regions, guiding other projects toward success in a rapidly changing world.

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Customs: Global Border Authorities as Pillars in Mitigating Climate Change and Transitioning to Global Green Energy

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Climate change and environmental threats require the attention of all stakeholders. Customs Authorities, as the primary border authorities of global trade, can be frontline leaders in the development of a “circular economy” and global green-energy transition. The World Customs Organization plays a pivotal role in the universal development of customs frameworks and has prioritized the transition to circular and green economies. The challenge is to balance these priorities with the promotion of global trade and economic growth. This requires reform and innovation to adjust to new and disruptive technologies, specifically, increased involvement in policy formulation, greater investment in human resources expertise, the promotion of tax relief Customs policy in Renewable Energy Sources (RES) and environmentally friendly goods, and more substantive collaboration with stakeholders from the private sector. This policy report explores these challenges, using case studies in the European context and beyond in combination with policy proposals and recommendations. Mitigating climate change is crucial, and, as this paper shows, requires alternative, global, and even “beyond-borders” approaches, so that recurring “statements” and “decrees” can also be mitigated.

Executive Summary

At the current moment, which is critical in terms of climate change and serious environmental threats, the activation of all stakeholders involved is vital. The development of the circular economy and the global green energy transition can find a crucial defender in Customs authorities, the global trade border authorities par excellence. In this context, Customs administrations have a prominent role to play, exercising their core competencies such as the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, the facilitation of legitimate trade, and the oversight, both across borders and on their territory, of global trade.

Customs authorities all over the world are expected to play a key role in the “green transition” due to their similar worldwide objectives, their particular “international nature”, and the quite well harmonized customs legal framework. The World Customs Organization has a pivotal role in the universal development of customs frameworks and efficiency and has prioritized as a key issue the contribution of Customs in the transition to a circular economy. However, Customs administrations are facing the challenge of managing the execution of their complicated missions, protecting the environment—and in parallel promoting global trade and

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economic growth—by embracing innovations, adjusting to new disruptive technologies, through reform and transformation, all in a changing world.

Increasing Customs' contribution to meeting sustainability targets depends on Customs substantial involvement in related policy formulation, investment in producing "human resources" expertise, the effective embrace of new technologies, the promotion of tax relief Customs policy in Renewable Energy Sources and environmentally friendly goods, more substantive collaboration with other stakeholders from private sector, and on the development of more effective Coordinated Border Management. Case studies, such as the European context and other worldwide examples of Customs' contributions to mitigating climate change and to the global green energy transition, are presented, in combination with policy proposals and recommendations for the reinforcement of Customs' crucial role.

However, aside from the transformation of the role of Customs, which is expected to effectively face the many new challenging opportunities, the whole concept of mitigating climate change must be approached and considered in alternative, global, even "beyond-borders" ways as well, so that ineffectual "statements" and "decrees" may also be mitigated.

1. Introduction

In the geological era of the "Anthropocene", unfavorably affected by human-led global warming, multi-level pollution, and energy inefficiency, where the mitigation of climate change is an alarming global necessity, setting up effective defense strategies and policies seems more than essential. In the framework of coordinated global action to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (2015), the outcomes of the Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, the transcendence of "*planetary boundaries*", and the need for an effective implementation of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements, the formulation of public policies targeted at developing a "*circular economy*" and "*environmental sustainability*" lies at the heart of the strategic "*arsenal*" that humanity must activate. In this context, it is imperative that all the involved authorities and stakeholders take full action. Among them, Customs administrations, and therefore relevant customs regulatory frameworks, as complementary to the global environmental legal framework, are in an especially good position to bolster the fight against climate change. Customs are the border control authorities par excellence and act as the supply chain's "check-points", and ought to be mandated to respond to the fight against environmental risks (Raath 2020).

There is no need to provide evidence that the environmental threat is a major universal topic that must be faced in a common global, coordinated way. Moreover, the doctrine that environmental protection must pass through a green energy transition does not need any further development, since the energy sector contributes the majority of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the majority of energy consumption is covered by fossil fuels (Leal-Arcas et al. 2022, 298). In this context, the global green transition—the transition from a linear to circular economy and the promotion of Renewable Energy Sources such as wind, solar, geothermal, and certainly hydrogen (Verdonck & Kammoun 2020)—can be effectively supported by Customs authorities at the global level through the implementation of harmonized processes, standards, and norms (Mikuriya 2022).

This paper offers a summarized and holistic approach to how Customs administrations and customs legal frameworks can contribute significantly to the successful reinforcement of environmental sustainability and the global green transition. The nexus "*environmental protection and energy transition*" can only be approximated in a combined manner if we intend to approach the issue in terms of causality and under the policy dipole "*problem-solutions*". In the research the basic topics of the Customs' regulatory framework (facilitation and simplified procedures, customs control) and their pivotal role in the global supply chain are lightened, as well as the forthcoming challenges for Customs authorities. The paper concentrates also on future Customs modernized competencies, the importance of the implementation of disruptive technologies in "*customs matters*", and generally the importance of Coordinated Border Management. The issue is to bring to the surface the great challenge for transformation and adjustment to the new global "*ecological exigencies*" and the achievement of a "*high score*" of performance for Customs, in order to fulfill their prominent commitments: protecting the environment and promoting the global energy transition.

2. Customs As Pillars Of The Global Environmental Sustainability And Green Transition

Worldwide, for Customs Administrations, environmental protection and sustainability constitutes a priority issue and a basic competency. In general, Customs combine and balance a dual and almost contradictory role, as on the one hand they facilitate the legitimate trade of all cross-border movements of goods, and on the other hand they are charged with surveillance, control, and enforcement through all phases of the Global Supply Chain of cross-border trade (Heimann et al. 2020).

2.1. Customs competencies

The implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs), the surveillance of compliance of the economic operators with the provided customs obligations, formalities, and prohibitions-restrictions, the collection of duties and domestic taxes, the control of illegal trade, customs fraud and smuggling, the implementation of trade policy, the facilitation of legal trade and the support of the “*environmentally sustainable trade*”, the protection of the environment, the assurance of public health and security, and the application of Trade Defensive Measures, such as tariff measures, agreements on Anti-Dumping Duties, quotas, subsidies, and Countervailing Measures, fall into worldwide Customs competencies.

2.2. Customs as border agency

Customs administrations, as first line border agencies, stand as pillars at land borders and around ports and airports, exercising their significant role at the border via efficient implementation of MEAs (Clark 2020) and by monitoring trade of environmentally sensitive or harmful goods and fighting smuggling and trans-boundary environmental crime. Customs administrations are placed on the top of the hierarchical pyramid of public cross-border authorities. But why Customs? What is the crucial element that makes them the primary border agencies and pillars in terms of environmental sustainability and global green transition? Far away from the intention to declare comparisons between Customs and the other border agencies such as Police, Coast Guards agencies, environmental and migration authorities, etc., it is essential to recognize that Customs Administrations present unique particularities. Customs Administrations have been characterized as “*international nature’s*” authorities, implementing globally similar processes due to their similar objectives and their engagement of international conventions and standards, having reached an advanced level of global harmonization (Montagnat-Rentier & Bremer 2022). In their substantial core lies the “*supranational element*” which makes them the appropriate agency to defend a global legal good like the environment. Furthermore, customs legal and regulatory frameworks themselves are a precious asset and can add separate value to the facilitation of the global energy transition.

The next question arising is if Customs can respond to the big challenges in a perpetually transforming world. The answer could be positive and rests in the redefinition of their role and the creation of strong partnerships and profound collaborations with other involved authorities and the private sector in order to fulfill their strong commitments, controlling trans-boundary movements of dangerous goods (Ferraro & Nguyen 2021) and meeting environmental goals.

2.3. Global approach of Customs contribution: Global actors in Customs policy making

To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the below major factors, global organizations, and initiatives play a fundamental role.

The World Trade Organization (WTO): The most important international trade Customs agreements are the WTO’s Agreement on Customs Valuation and the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). As parts of the ambitious initiatives of WTO in favor of the circular economy, it is also worth mentioning the Environmental Goods Agreement (EGA), regarding the elimination of tariffs on a number of important environment-related products where the role of Customs administrations is expected to be without a doubt critical (Eriksson 2022, 16), and also the Initiative on Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (Falgueras del Alamo 2024, 81).

The World Customs Organization (WCO): The WCO, over time and worldwide among its members, has developed agreements and standards for harmonized and simplified procedures, such as the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS), the revised Kyoto Convention (simplification and harmonization of customs procedures), the Framework of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade (Norms SAFE), and the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO). Moreover, supporting the transition to a climate-neutral economy constitutes a very important issue for the WCO. In the global green transition, the contribution of the WCO is critical, through a significant number of publications and papers in the WCO magazine, related study reports, the first Green Customs Global Conference in June 2022, and the Symposia on greening the HS codes in 2022/2023. Furthermore, regarding Customs enforcement, the WCO Customs Enforcement Network and WCO enforcement operations warrant mentioning, such as PREASIDIO, THUNDERBALL, DEMETER, and more. Additionally, standards for successful coordinated border management—such as the effective implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements and Regional Trade Agreements, the mutual recognition of Authorized Economic Operators, the sharing of equipment and data, and joint risk analysis and border control—have been developed by the WCO, mainly via the Revised Kyoto Convention.

The Green Customs Initiative (GCI) refers to a partnership of international entities and organizations, such as the World Customs Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC), and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, for the enhancement of the capacity of Customs Administrations and other border control agencies under the scope of

environmental protection through synergies, workshops, etc.

2.4. Customs as supervisors of the Global Supply Chain

Customs and the global supply chain are two interactional ecosystems. The supply-chain network connects several parties including suppliers, retailers, distributors, and manufacturers (Al-Haddad et al. 2021). Customs authorities ensure trade facilitation and supervise the Global Supply Chain (GSC) through all its stages (liberalization, transport, licensing, electronic data transfer, payment, insurance, information) while the fulfillment of Customs formalities by economic operators (submission of declarations, customs clearance through electronic procedures) is necessary during all phases of the GSC. Taking into consideration that the supply chain's performance can be negatively affected by long clearance processes, such as in import, export, and transit procedures, the critical role of Customs and especially its function as a “*business strategic partner*” becomes clear. Nevertheless, in accordance with the grid of social, economic, political, and environmental evolutions of our era, a new approach to the role of Customs is under discussion regarding the adoption of innovations, such as digitalization and information technology (Heijmann et al. 2020, 131) in GSC management. “*Green supply chain*” management passes through efficient border management and fast Customs clearance, competitiveness, digitalization, and security (Ferrano & Nguyen 2021, 296).

2.5. The contribution of the traditional Customs regulatory framework

The appropriate use of the specialized Customs legal framework could become a catalyst for boosting environmental sustainability and the global energy transition. Worldwide, the Customs **classification** of goods is based on a common coding system for imposing customs duties and implementing trade and commercial policy measures, namely the Harmonized System (HS), which was developed by the WCO and is critical for the development of a circular economy. In the field of HS and its relationship with environmental sustainability, a lot of work has been already done by the WCO in preparing the new edition of the HS in 2027 (Tariff and Trade Affairs Directorate & WCO Secretariat 2020). The WCO has emphasized the lack of HS codes, the difficulties in classification of new environmentally friendly goods, and the necessity to align HS nomenclature especially by developing new HS codes (World Customs Organization 2022), considering the need for a “new greening HS” (Grooby 2022, 27). An aspect of the difficulties regarding the task of classification is the different philosophy and purposes between HS codes and MEAs (World Customs Organization 2023, 36), as for example between HS codes and the Basel Convention

(Secretariat of the Basel Convention 2020), which is faced mainly with correlation tables. In any case, aside from the topic of classification, the establishment of low import duty rates for environmentally preferable goods or duty exemption, total or partial, and tax relief for goods or raw materials necessary for RES, could provide real progress in terms of sustainability.

Regarding the domain of **Origin**, which is the economic nationality of commercial goods—meaning the country where the products have been produced or manufactured, and particularly the *preferential* origin—the contribution of the Customs regulatory framework could be based on provisions included in preferential multilateral or bilateral trade agreements, for low or no duties in the case of imported raw material to be used for the production of Renewable Energy Sources (for example the infrastructure for a hydrogen pipeline). Additionally, it could be based on the implementation of simplified procedures, as, for example, the “*self-service printing of certificates of origin*” via the Electronic Origin Data Exchange System (EODES), as part of the initiative developed by China Customs, known as “Smart Customs, Smart Borders, and Smart Connectivity”, or the 3S initiative (Jiang 2021).

Regarding the topic of **Taxation**, Customs policy and legislation's contributions could be significant in the field of the energy transition and RES, taking into consideration the necessity for brave removal of certain duties and tax relief.

Concerning **Customs procedures**, it would be of great importance for an economic operator to choose the appropriate customs procedure (for example customs warehousing, inward or outward processing, or specific use procedures, such as temporary admission and end-use) and take advantage of duty suspensions and other privileges provided by specific customs regulations. While the necessity for cost-effective policy measures, reliefs, and financial facilitations replies quite well to costly requirements for investment in clean energy, the clever use of such economic regimes is beneficial. For example, the end-use procedure could be a wise choice for a Renewable Energy Sources economic operator who imports raw material or infrastructure items from a third country under reduced or full exemption import duties due to its specific destination (production of green hydrogen).

The complexity of customs formalities and therefore the necessity for simplifications and harmonization of processes occupy the first line of the Customs policy worldwide agenda throughout the development of **Simplified Customs Processes**. In this context, concerning the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) status globally in particular, the WCO has developed and published a 2020 AEO Compendium which has universally become a harmonized single point of reference.

Regarding the domain **Control and Risk management**, according to the revised Kyoto Convention and the SAFE Framework of Standards of the WCO, the Risk Management System (RMS) constitutes globally a magnificent best practice of Customs control competence. Following the modern approach, the “Integrated Supply Chain Management” concept tends to move away from traditional Customs control procedures and toward a modern customs reality which is based on Authorized Economic Operators (trusted traders) and authorized supply chains (trusted trade lanes).

3. The World in Transformation: The Challenging Metamorphosis of Customs Administrations

In a variously transforming world, the issue of environmental sustainability and energy transition should be launched far away from traditional policy approaches and territorial strategies and models (Dalby 2021). In this framework, new types of international cooperation are also born, such as Climate Clubs, which are groups of member countries and even non-state actors with a common strategy on a specific climate issue, engaged by agreed rules and guidelines on a voluntary basis (Monkelbaan 2021). Moreover, the on-going evolution of the circular economy, changing global trade patterns, and increasing technological innovations also complicate the traditional role of Customs. A great challenge for Customs authorities, despite their expertise, is primarily to gain a deep knowledge of the circular economy's policies, mainly by involving themselves in policy-making discussions at the government level but also through dialogue with the private sector.

Regarding Customs' competence in the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), according to the outcomes of a 2020 survey of WCO about the level of engagement and capacity of Customs Administrations, a lack of operational tools, guidelines, and partnerships were noted, while a differentiation was observed depending on the kind of MEA, as for example, the majority of Customs agencies are more familiar with the CITES Convention than with others (Raath 2020).

Approaching the role of Customs as border data collectors, the adjustment of Customs administrations to disruptive technologies (AI, block chain technology, data analytics) constitutes a great “*bet*” but simultaneously an optimal opportunity and useful tool for cross-border visibility, fraud detection, Risk Management System (RMS) implementation, revenue collection, and efficiency in customs controls (World Customs Organization 2023, 52). Furthermore, the use of geo-data by Customs authorities will be an important aspect in this framework, which will strengthen their role in border management and increase their capability to facilitate and enhance cross-border sustainable

economic activities (Cantens 2019). From the point of view of the other stakeholders, such as the economic operators, the digitalization of logistic systems has an impact not only in reducing enterprises' costs but in better leveraging of Customs risk management and control systems (Stephens 2020).

Finally, Customs, at their own level, go through the transitional phase of the circular economy via the self-adaptation of sustainable practices. Dubai Customs published their Sustainable Report in 2021 promoting best practices for energy management and recycling (World Customs Organization 2023, 23), and Uruguay Customs has implemented a similar policy on recycling.

3.1. Case Studies: The “greening” of Customs policies and procedures

The case of Europe: The energy transition pioneers—EU and European Customs

Apart from the worldwide concept of Customs' contribution to coherent “green policy” development in the framework of the WCO and WTO, it is crucial to underline primarily that in the framework of the European Union and the common customs territory, the harmonization of customs policy, legislative, and regulatory frameworks is almost absolute and entire, mainly due to Union's Customs Code Reg. 952/2013 and the relevant legal and regulatory arsenal of Regulations, Directives and Decisions. The EU, itself a member of WCO and WTO as well as its member-states, is a pioneer regarding the achievement of environmental goals and energy transition, having developed an admirable policy and strategic-legal framework (Kettlewell & Jones 2021). It is worth mentioning the Green Deal, the FIT for 55 (Goldberg & Bille 2022), the Clean Energy Package, the Ecodesign Directive 2009/125/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009, establishing a framework for the setting of eco-design requirements for energy-related products and its complementary “Energy Labelling Directive” (Directive 2010/30/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 on the indication by labelling and standard product information of the consumption of energy and other resources by energy-related products), which establish a framework for reducing energy consumption. Another important step toward this policy and a challenging new Customs competency is the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and especially the Carbon Border Tax for confronting the phenomenon of carbon leakage (Meyer & Tucker 2022; Schippers & de Wit 2022).

Special reference must also be made to the *Digital Product Passport* which is a mechanism—based on blockchain technology—for collecting and providing data information throughout a product's lifecycle, such as origin, composition, recycled components, etc., ensuring its traceability, transparency, “circularity”, and “sustainability” (Protokol 2025), which is expected to

become a new competency of Customs' cross-border control activities. Part of the same context (Circular Economy Action Plan—CEAP) is the EU Batteries Regulation. Another characteristic example of Customs border control competencies is the management of declarations of conformity and related documentation (Hydrochlorofluorocarbons—HFCs) according to Regulation EU 517/2014 (or the F-gas Regulation) which targets the achievement of large reductions in F-gas use and emissions.

In the context of European Customs, the on-going Customs reform and the new planned EU Customs Authority, the EU Customs Data Hub, and the Trust and Check Framework for a new type of Trust and Check Trader-economic operator, are expected to accelerate the ability of Customs agencies to meet the expectations of the new environmental and energy challenges (Arendsen 2024). The shining example of EU Customs also includes successful Coordinated Border Management (CBM) case studies such as the Customs Eastern and South Eastern Land Border Expert Team (CELBET), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), the EU Customs Port Alliance, and the **European Union Customs Alliance for Borders Expert Team (EUCAB)**.

CELBET (2016–2025) was an initiative of 11 EU Member States (MS) established to strengthen cooperation and operational coordination, improve the control of external borders, and prevent the entry of environmentally dangerous goods. FRONTEX, the European Board and Coast Guard Agency, is an EU agency developing exemplary activities of border management by using expertise and pursuing the fight against cross-border crime, including environmental maritime crime. EUCAB is an expert team established to foster operational customs cooperation among EU MS and to assist the ongoing EU Customs reform at the operational level. In addition, we must also mention the *PEN CP*, a five-year project funded by the EU under Horizon 2020 for creating an innovating networking system for efficient border management (Hintsa 2019) aiming also at efficient cooperation in the field of environmental protection.

Other worldwide Customs case studies

Uruguay Customs support the energy evolution of the country by implementing control processes on imports of raw materials or machines in order to rapidly release the goods while providing importers with special build-ings at the ports for the safe storage of such goods (Uruguay Customs 2020). Moreover, in the **United States**, the USA Customs and Borders Protection (CBP) released the Green Trade Program in June 2022, focused on the facilitation of legitimate trade and the reduction of environmental damage. In **Indonesia**, under the governmental policy of the National Taskforce for Non-Hazardous Wastes, the Customs Administration has a specific competency enforcing the related legislation and regulatory nexus of other national agencies as the

Ministry of Environmental Forestry, the Ministry of Trade, etc. (World Customs Organization 2023). **Singapore Customs** have launched the Network Trade Platform (NTP), a one-stop trade and logistics information management ecosystem connecting all players across the value chain in Singapore as well as abroad (Singapore Customs 2022). The **Jamaica Customs Agency** has developed a significant border cooperation system (Electronic Single Window, centralized risk assessment, and coordinated inspections) with 12 other partnering (border) regulatory agencies through Information and Communications Technology (Williams 2019).

4. Policy Options: Recommendations

4.1. Customs administrations as policy makers

Given that “a global problem cannot be solved with domestic solutions ... [because] climate change is a global problem and requires a global solution” (Quick 2009, 357), global trade's supervision authorities, Customs, should be directly involved in policy negotiations regarding environmental sustainability and the energy transition, providing their expertise to other agencies. If the role of Customs is to be upgraded to that of participants in policy creation at the governmental level, it is important to focus on global policy-making, considering the reciprocal relation between the environment and trade (Monkelbaan 2021), so as to reach policy coherence in the nexus of trade and the environment (Gstohl & Schnock 2024), a subject that lies at the heart of Customs' mission. In order to face the necessity of the involvement of Customs in the circular economy and policy development for the energy transition, the creation of separate organizational units or sectors within Customs' organizational structures will probably be required to deal with the development of policies and the reform of Customs' legal framework (World Customs Organization 2023, 23).

Regarding the pivotal role of the private sector and economic operators in contributing to the energy transition, Customs, except from public policy's makers and governance players, could also contribute through their advisory role, becoming an interface between public and private cooperation. However, Customs must develop new policies concerning how the transition could affect their role, without losing competencies and by proposing adjustments and new alternative policy options.

4.2. Increase of Customs efficiency: Investment in capacity building

Customs have expertise and holistic knowledge regarding the movement and flows of trans-boundary goods. Furthermore, boosting Customs' efficiency in implementation and enforcement of MEAs (Pisupati 2016) is key, and depends on the legal and technical capacity

of human capital. However, in general, Customs policies must be oriented to the investment of developing Customs officials' education-skills (Mikuriya 2006) via training programs organized at all possible levels, for example worldwide at the level of the WCO, which has developed a constant and integrated capacity-building network for Customs officers, and at the national level, in order to increase *expertise*. Public financing or sponsorships from the private sector could be key factors in Customs Administrations' capacity building.

4.3. Engagement and cooperation between Customs authorities and the private sector

Customs, the private sector, and national and international organizations, with the WCO as the major player, recognize the value of sustainable enhanced engagements and strategic alliances. In the framework of the WCO, the Private Sector Consultative Group (PSCG) constitutes a great example of successful collaboration and partnership between Customs and the private sector. This collaborative pattern is in force also at the national level, where most Customs Administrations collaborate with private-sector stakeholders such as brokers, importers, exporters, airport and seaport authorities, and industry associations in many ways, either by discussing—at the policy level—important Customs matters and legislative amendments, by sharing data and information, by participating in common working groups, or by calling on experts.

4.4. Coordinated Border Management

Revitalizing the cooperation between Customs and other border agencies, such as port (World Customs Organization & IAPH 2023) and environmental authorities, is pivotal for implementing law enforcement measures. For example, the FAL Convention (Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic), is very important while the Maritime Single Window is crucial for the electronic information exchange and the boost of stakeholders' cooperation. A critical step in terms of Coordinated Border Management (CMB) is also the creation of Joint Integrated Border Control Centers (IBCCs), such as the one established in Peru and Chile, including participation of all relevant public services, Customs, public security, migration, environmental, and agricultural agencies in full coordination at a juxtaposed border post, which carry out joint controls reducing the crossing time for all stakeholders (Cordova Crusada 2018).

Particularly, regarding cooperation and partnerships between Customs and environmental agencies, the type and the depth of cooperation could vary, from information and data sharing and joint operations in fighting environmental crime up to collaboration in the development of border environmental policies

(World Customs Organization 2023). Belgian Customs have developed a collaborative relationship with the Environment Authority of Belgium and the Belgium Environmental Directorate, with operational communication on a daily basis and with the exchange of crucial information, such as data regarding recycling business operators, which align Belgian RMS system and relevant Customs inspections. Canada has chosen a different approach of CBM (Portelance 2015) by creating the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) which integrated the entire grid of border-related functions (Customs, migration, safety and security, environmental protection) into a single organization, with the establishment of a centralized governance structure in the framework of data analytics strategy (Slowey 2017), which should improve the cooperative efficiency and interoperability of all involved agencies.

In the framework of universal transformation process, another new alternative approach to citizens' environmental contribution is so-called "*energy citizenship*" (Pel et al. 2022). *Energy citizenship* is a new concept, a label and empirical phenomenon, which, particularly for border area zones, could develop a model for active participation of all border area entities and also Indigenous Nations, transforming the traditional notion of CBM.

As launched by the Customs global policy driver, the WCO, the future purpose is to create "**Smart Borders**", **Secure, Measurable, Automated, Risk** management based and **Technology driven** (Mikuriya 2019). Considering the global transformation and digitalization in border processes, we will probably in the future discuss an "*invisible, adaptable and radically connected border agency*" (Cacham & de Voet 2020). In any case, as a policy option, the effectiveness of the CBM is a building block of the new strategic plan corresponding to the challenges that Customs face (Mikuriya 2006).

4.5. Investment in disruptive technologies and data sharing

Looking for policy solutions and in the concept of "*Digital Customs*", it is important to underline that developing and embracing new, advanced technologies will boost Customs efficiency in terms of transparency, security, and sustainability, and can enable Customs authorities to face unprecedented challenges and opportunities.

Data sharing between Customs and other stakeholders is a key factor (Montagnat-Rentier & Breemeersh 2022, 26) in the transformation of Customs agencies. The WCO Data Model was developed to provide a universal language for cross-border data in order to enable the implementation of Single Window systems, Data Analytics, and CBM (World Customs Organization n.d.).

4.6. Duty exemptions and tax relief

Without ignoring that taxation is a matter of national policy in general, it constitutes an important policy option to promote and adopt policies related to the global tendency towards reduction or elimination of tariffs on climate-friendly technologies and environmental goods and services. In other words, in terms of governmental energy policy, a tax-free regime is a must, for example, for green hydrogen used in electricity, transport, heating, and industry. The same concept must be kept in the case of selected environmental goods.

4.7. Reform, self-improvement, and deeper harmonization of Customs legislative and regulatory frameworks

Although a binding harmonization, as mentioned above, of the hybrid of EU customs legislative and regulatory frameworks is not possible at a global level, a reform based on the WCO standards and recommendations is imperative. The pass-through from international rules to national, and further at the regional and local level, is not easy but it is the only way to assure the transition to the circular economy and high technology requirements of the coming years. Progress toward more substantial harmonization depends on the willingness of each Customs Administration. In the frame of self-improvement, WCO (Mikuriya 2017) has launched performance measurement tools and methods based on data analysis, such as WCO Time Release Study (a methodology for measuring border agency clearance times) and mirror analysis (WCO tool to compare imports and exports among countries using the HS) which should be considered for adoption by all Customs administrations.

5. Instead Of A Conclusion

Customs administrations are expected to play a key role in reversing the ongoing climate catastrophe, to lead the planet safely to a sustainable model of survival and growth. Consequently, "*Customs authorities are certainly a key factor to facilitate the sustainability and the global energy transition in a way that will enable long term progress*" (World Customs Organization 2022). Through the transformation of their multiplied role, mainly under the guidance of the WCO, Customs will manage to execute their missions, traditional and modernized. Nevertheless, the challenge of transformation does not only concern the mission and legislation of Customs. Policy decisions regarding climate change actions constitute a matter of transformation of the whole concept of the earth system which should be conceptualized under a global perspective, where the notion of "*Globalization*" must also contextualize the notion of "*Borders*" (Dalby 2021). We may have to rethink everything—border lines, jurisdictions,

competences—to move from the *international* approach of borders-frontiers to a *transnational* and *cross-border living areas* approach, where collaborative ecological governance could be considered under other dimensions.

Furthermore, developing non-binding global policies on the basis of voluntary compliance which will be implemented at the national, regional, or local level within different countries always risks their remaining a "dead letter". It is a paradox to call for a solution to a transnational problem through national jurisdictions. In other words, can we reach global governance in climate mitigation and global green transition, or is it a utopia? Multilateral Environmental Agreements and international law are limited in terms of implementation, as there is no clear binding means for their international enforcement. In fact, the imperative for transformation concerns any traditional pattern or approach, even of international public law. Maybe it is time to look for alternative solutions beyond jurisdictions, territories, even borders, because the environmental and climate threat has no territory or borders. The mitigation of climate change will also signal the mitigation of so many "pledges" and "decrees". Customs authorities can, it seems, and I maintain, manage challenges to their own burden of responsibility. However, will states, governments, private interests, and the world in general finally seize this last chance? The response could be an interesting issue for another future study.

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POETRY

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POETRY

War-themed Poems

Diana Burazer

About the Poems

Where did these poems come from? I never sought to write about war or the suffering it imposes on people. But the war in my homeland of Croatia, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, where I lived for about 20 years and where I have friends and relatives of my husband, and the constant media reports from war zones around the world could not leave me indifferent. I moved to Zagreb (Croatia) during that war, in 1992, due to the conflict in the city where I had been living, Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina). I also witnessed the suffering of friends and the persecution of people just for being a different nationality. All of this marked my poems.



I never take sides in my poems but focus on the ordinary person, whichever side they are on. The poem “Migrants” is about a man in a refugee column, fleeing war towards a different but better life. A youth who carries a flag in an undefined war and whose death will, in the end, be in vain, is the subject of the poem “Flags”. In “Mostar”, I write about my friend, a poet who remains in war-torn Mostar but cannot leave because of his attachment to it. I also touch on the sensitive topic of terrorism and poetically address its causes, in “Terrorists”. Because within us lies the decision of what we will become; we all hold light and darkness between our palms. I was particularly interested in armies, as a group of human individuals, reduced (often by force) to a common denominator of belonging to a shared idea. I write about the relations between victors and vanquished, in the poem “Where Does the Army Go After Defeat”.

At a literary event one evening, after reading these poems, a man (known as quite exclusive and one-sided in his political views) asked me why I did not choose one side more clearly in my poems. My answer was: *I think I chose a side very clearly! My choice is always: ordinary people! Those who are unjustly threatened and exiled because of policies that they often do not understand, or if they do understand, do not value as highly as their home, family, and friends!*

About the Poet

Diana Burazer was born in Zagreb, Croatia, 1953, and graduated in Theoretical Mathematics at the Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. From 1977 to 1992 she lived in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and since then she has lived and worked in Zagreb. She has published in many Croatian and BiH journals, represented in anthologies and panoramas of Croatian poetry, winner of many awards. Her poems have been translated and published in about 15 foreign languages. She writes poetry, poems in prose, and short stories. She is the editor of the publishing house “Fidipid”. She has published seven books of poetry and four books (selection of poetry) in Macedonian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian and Albanian. She is a member of the Croatian Writers’ Association (DHK), the Croatian PEN, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Writers’ Association, and the DHK Herceg Bosna.

MIGRANTS

You need to walk
just walk forward,
says the bravest of us,
walk
walk.

Tiny bodies in oversized coats,
trembling disorientation in their bosoms.

Walk
just forward
walk,
says the most persistent of us.

When we give up
strengthen us with the phrases that no one but us
will deliver the truth into the empty sphere of the world.

Walk
walk,
says the loudest of us.

We are moving away from the cities of our lightheartedness
from familiar crying and laughing.
We are putting our reason in a state of rest,
being free we breathe into the emptiness.

Walk
Walk,
says the leader,
just forward
walk.

As we wonder if this obedience too is just a form of slavery
we reach the end of possible movement.
Almost happy for the sudden turnaround
we stand opposite other unknown walkers.

Being worn out we have our hearts tested,
we lean our bodies against the wire -
an unwound ball of pain

no matter which side we approach it.

(New poem; translation: Miroslav Kirin; original title in Croatian language "Migranti")

THE TERRORISTS

Between our palms
light and darkness.

We give them but a narrow passage
to our internal storeroom,
we set their duration and meaning.

Dangerous times are knocking
at the weak door.

The polite sign "open/closed"
is not meant for all
of history's passers-by.
Nameless scars and logbooks
of all of those who entered and exited
offer feeble hope that we'll recognize the intruders,
wretches of the night,
strapped with the invisible signs of hatred.

And it could be so simple:
we open the door with the key
if they have been locked at all,

the palms of our hands
with the heart
the evil predecessors
have unconditionally disowned.

*(Poem from the book Heavenly Apples; translation: Tomislav Kuzmanović;
original title in Croatian language "Teroristi")*

WHERE DOES THE ARMY GO AFTER THE DEFEAT

Where does that the mighty army go after the defeat?
The squares are occupied by flags of different colors
hoarse victors
parade along the wide streets
embraced and temporarily immortal.
A mass presentation of impoverished dialogue
and simplified happiness.

Where does the army go after the defeat?

To the springs
of healing
miraculous water,
where even god cures himself from delivering frivolous justice,
to the places where
forgiveness and oblivion
are given out
all at once.

Somewhere, outside of it all
in silence,
a warm soup and a white bed,
are already set,
waiting,

the comfort
that keeps the truth
at bay.

*(Poem from the book Heavenly Apples; translation: Tomislav Kuzmanović;
original title in Croatian language "Kamo ide vojska nakon poraza")*

FLAGS

Sorrowful is the courage of a flag bearer in a war.
Instead of a weapon
he carries a flag
he was told is worth even dying for.
He is usually too young to understand,
but the boyish trust and passion
are enough
for the very act of carrying.

He dreamt, however, of riding a horse,
driving a tank,
charging with a gun.
From the crowd on the battlefield and war cries on both sides,
he is no longer sure of anything.
And doesn't really have time to think.
He charges gripping painfully
a wooden,
barren
tool.
With occasional loud shouts,
of recently learned slogans,
he feeds his weakened courage.

On a big field once green
His death is
just about futile.
Flag he carried will be somewhere else tomorrow
treaded on or burned.
Medals are always received by others.
Boys flag bearers
like those who bring water to the thirsty
no one even remembers.

(Poem from the book Orange; translation: Sunčica Kragulj; original title in Croatian language "Zastave")

MOSTAR

(to N. Borozan*)

I will come even there and there
I promised,
pointing with my head
to the two opposite sides of the world,
trying to give an impression that I understand everything and
that my loyalty is unconditional.

I will walk along the Neretva(**)
if I can't do otherwise.
I will be hugging the river banks
with my left and right hand
I say,
with a carefully measured smile
so that everything we have just talked about
would lose its sad seriousness.

It is simpler and easier for you to love this city -
says my friend
who would probably die of sadness if he had to leave it.

He doesn't say much about it in his letters,
he has moved into his own verses,
and thus, detached,
bravely deals with its ugly facades,
with black beams where roofs used to be,
with the graves in the park,
with the parks grown wildly within the walls.

Every time before I come back,
he puts a gilt of memory
and hope
for me.

In a café, in the afternoon,
both trapped in a cloud of his pipe smoke,
beyond reality and all sin,
with the same fervor
as before
he talks about his new love

* *Friend, poet from City Mostar (Bosnia and Hercegovina)*

** *River in Mostar*

(Poem from the book Orange; translation: Miroslav Kirin; original title in Croatian language "Mostar")

SMS, MOSTAR (I)

Cities will be like
the people who live in them -
I typed the answer
with a trembling hand
fearing for the City.

*(Poem from the book Orange; translation: Miroslav Kirin;
original title in Croatian language "SMS, Mostar I")*

SMS, MOSTAR (II)

My love lived there -
I say with awe,
because everything changes:
neither is love the same anymore,
nor is the City.

*(Poem from the book Orange; translation: Miroslav Kirin;
original title in Croatian language "SMS, Mostar II")*



FILM REVIEWS

Film reviews explore cinema related to the world of borders, whether political, material, cultural, or conceptual borders. The section is edited by Hakan Ünay. Like all content published by *BIG_Review*, film reviews are available for free in open-access Creative Commons licensing, unless otherwise specified.



FILM REVIEW

Borders in Globalization Review
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YINTAH and Recognition of Indigenous Sovereignty

Jacob Smallboy

YINTAH

Documentary film (2024)

Directed and Produced by Jennifer Wickham, Brenda Michell, and Michael Toledano

Runtime: 1 hour, 50 minutes

More information at:

<https://www.yintahfilm.com/>

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt31841789/>

YINTAH (2024) is an Indigenous-made documentary that follows the decades-long battle of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation against the Coastal GasLink pipeline project, which seeks to expand through their traditional territory. *YINTAH* centres on Howilthkat Freda Hudson and Sleydo' Molly Wickham, whose activism is informed by the 1997 Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa Supreme Court of Canada decision, which affirmed that the Wet'suwet'en people never ceded title to their land. Despite this legal victory, Canadian governments and corporations have continued to attempt to claim control over the territory.

By providing an account of the Wet'suwet'en land defense, the film documents this conflict. The documentary took over 10 years to create and captures standoffs between Wet'suwet'en land defenders and RCMP forces along with the private security officials hired by Coastal GasLink and other companies. Over the course of the film, viewers bear witness to officers storming the blockades defending Wet'suwet'en territory, arresting land defenders and filmmakers alike. Between shots of the blockade, Wet'suwet'en families are shown engaging in and working to revitalize their traditional practices. They hunt on their traplines, walk the forests, and draw drinking water straight from the lake. These smaller, intimate moments framed within the greater conflict demonstrate that *YINTAH*, at its core, is about Indigenous sovereignty.



Borders are an important aspect of sovereignty, especially unrecognized borders. Wet'suwet'en borders are not recognized by state maps, but for the Wet'suwet'en people, these borders are demarcated by their hereditary governance system, which has been present since time immemorial. As the film explores, these borders

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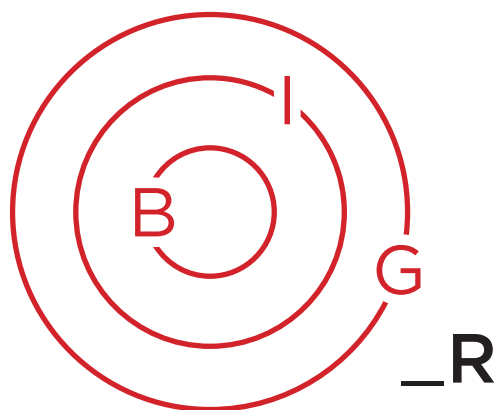
are clearly drawn around Wet'suwet'en land and are steeped in lineage, stewardship, and traditional responsibility. These historical Indigenous borders remain unrecognized by Canada's legal and political systems, even after the 1997 decision recognizing Wet'suwet'en territory as symbolic and not sovereign. This tension is the focus of the film: the state publicly recognizes Indigenous land rights yet simultaneously denies their enforcement. *YINTAH*'s conflict comes from this contradiction. Land defenders occupy their territory and block pipeline construction, but are criminalized as trespassers on their own land for enforcing their laws within their territories.

YINTAH captures the spatial dimension of Wet'suwet'en resistance through the physical creation of border enforcement, road checkpoints, pipeline construction sites, and Wet'suwet'en encampments. A great deal of the film's runtime is devoted to these camps, especially to the Unist'ot'en Camp, which was the largest camp and was built directly in the path of the pipeline in 2010, establishing a checkpoint that is shown to be enforced throughout the film. These physical border checkpoints are constantly shifting through the film, which covers the repeated dismantling of the camps by the RCMP, with armed officers often exercising force in their removal of Wet'suwet'en land defenders from their lands. These scenes contrast with another form of Wet'suwet'en resistance: resisting by simply being on their territory. *YINTAH* shows us how Wet'suwet'en families build their homes, raise their children, walk their traplines, and hunt for their sustenance. These actions reinforce their claim to the land, despite encroaching industrialization and the Canadian government's refusal to recognize their sovereignty. By presenting these smaller stories about cultural revitalization for

the Wet'suwet'en people, *YINTAH* ultimately shows us that Indigenous sovereignty is a vital goal that the Wet'suwet'en people are actively working towards.

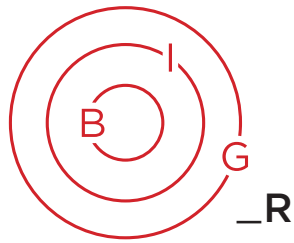
Sovereignty is not a political concept but a lived reality with the land, law, and community that exists outside of colonial frameworks. Wet'suwet'en sovereignty is ancestral, coming from the land itself and being passed down through a hereditary system where there are no rule makers but instead caretakers and knowledge holders. Through the everyday stories filmed in between the conflict, *YINTAH* shows the viewers how Wet'suwet'en families live, hunt, fish, and raise their children on their traditional territory. In documenting these moments, *YINTAH* shows that living on the land itself is an act of sovereignty and resistance. For Wet'suwet'en land defenders, protecting their traditional land from industrialization is not only a political stance but an expression of legal and spiritual responsibility. *YINTAH* demonstrates this again by documenting cabins being built, ceremonies being held, and food being gathered. These are acts of resistance but also assertions of presence, law, and belonging. *YINTAH* demonstrates that sovereignty is not a verbal agreement or a legislative document, but rather the sum of interconnected everyday actions.

YINTAH is a beautiful film that explores how the Wet'suwet'en nation occupies their lands, maintains their laws, and builds futures rooted in Indigenous sovereignty. In doing so, *YINTAH* provides a glimpse into a future where Indigenous systems are not suppressed or forgotten and are instead living and evolving structures of governance and care. The type of future that *YINTAH* documents is one in which Indigenous sovereignty, care, and community are embedded into everyday life.



BOOK REVIEWS

Books reviews offer concise summaries of academic works related to the world of borders, whether political, material, cultural, or conceptual borders. The section is edited by Chief Editor Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly. Like all content published by *BIG_Review*, book reviews are available for free in open-access Creative Commons licensing, unless otherwise specified.



BOOK REVIEW

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Book Review: Gender Dynamics in Transboundary Water Governance: Feminist Perspectives on Water Conflict and Cooperation

Kalpana Jha

Gender Dynamics in Transboundary Water Governance: Feminist Perspectives on Water Conflict and Cooperation

Edited By Jenniver Sehring, Rozemarijn ter Horst, Margreet Zwarteveen

Routledge, 2022

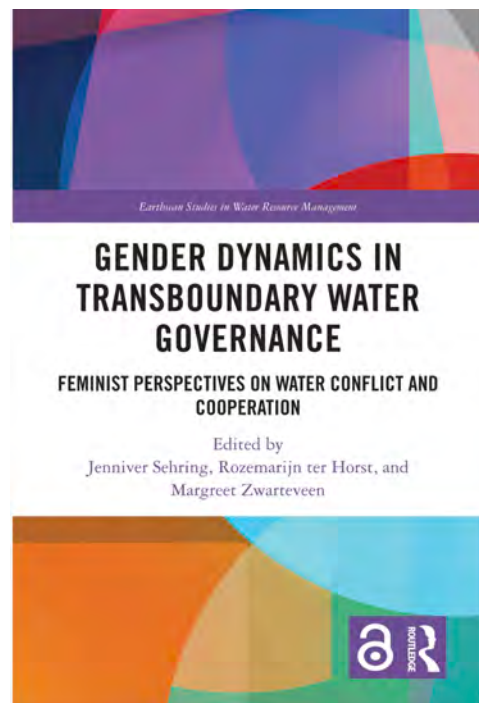
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The feminist perspective goes beyond treating gender as a single variable; it serves as a powerful analytical lens for understanding the complex social and political dynamics that shape relationships within and across societies. A key challenge for feminist scholars, however, is advancing feminism as a distinct and coherent worldview that fundamentally challenges the patriarchal logic of securitization, control, and territorial borders that dominate mainstream political thought. Feminism in this sense is not just a form of critique but an alternative framework for reimagining power and power relations across borders. This framework is especially crucial in the context of transboundary water governance, where national interests, international diplomacy, and state-centric power structures often dominate. By challenging these masculinist and technocratic frameworks, a feminist approach reveals how water governance is deeply intertwined with issues of equity, inclusion, and justice.

Gender Dynamics in Transboundary Water Governance: Feminist Perspectives on Water Conflict and Cooperation, edited by Jenniver Sehring, Rozemarijn ter Horst,



and Margreet Zwarteveen, makes a groundbreaking contribution by centering gender analysis in a field where it has long been sidelined. The book offers an essential alternative lens for understanding how power operates in the management and negotiation of shared water resources across borders. With an interdisciplinary team of scholars and practitioners, the volume interrogates how gendered power relations are embedded in and reproduced through the governance of transboundary waters, an area often portrayed as

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technocratic and politically neutral. Significantly, 18 of the 20 contributors to the volume are women.

With case studies from a range of geographies—South Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe—the book exposes how water-sharing processes are shaped not only by international law and state interests but also by social norms, power asymmetries, and everyday gendered experiences. Drawing on feminist political ecology and critical hydropolitics, the contributors dismantle the persistent assumption that transboundary water issues can be addressed through gender-blind policy and institutional reforms. The authors bring to the fore arguments beyond the idea of inclusion. For example, in her chapter, Medha Bisht advocates for a shift in perspective through what she terms “feminizing water” (74), an idea that goes beyond the recognition and participation of women. This concept involves reimagining water governance policies as more responsive to women’s needs and experiences. Such a shift requires a change in how we perceive and engage with water issues, emphasizing relationality and inclusivity. By advocating for a relational and networked approach, this book recognizes the complexities of power and the importance of gendered experiences in water diplomacy.

The book is comprised of an editor’s introduction and 11 chapters divided into three main parts. Part I consists of five chapters that establish the theoretical and conceptual foundations for rethinking knowledge production in water diplomacy through a feminist lens. This section critically engages with dominant paradigms in water governance and introduces feminist critiques that challenge masculinist and technocratic approaches. Part II is a shorter section with two chapters dedicated to examining the implementation of gender mainstreaming in transboundary water governance. It critically assesses existing policies and frameworks, highlighting both their potentials and limitations. Part III contains five chapters that delve into women’s lived experiences in the field of water governance and diplomacy, drawing on case studies and empirical insights. This section foregrounds the everyday realities and challenges faced by women working in water-related decision-making spaces, highlighting how gendered institutional processes shape participation, authority, and recognition, while also revealing strategies of resistance and agency employed by women in navigating these spaces.

One of the volume’s key strengths lies in its critical engagement with dominant institutional frameworks such as Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and River Basin Organizations (RBOs). These frameworks, the authors argue, often fail to move

beyond symbolic inclusion of women, neglecting the structural inequities that shape participation and benefit-sharing. The book offers a compelling analysis of how formal diplomatic arenas tend to marginalize non-state actors—especially women, Indigenous groups, and local communities—who are often most affected by water conflicts and decision-making about cooperation. Gender has not been meaningfully integrated into the institutional framework of water discourse but addressed superficially through the inclusion of a few women in consultations without challenging underlying power imbalances, resulting in what Ellen Hagerman, Hellen Natsu, and Christine Ochieng refer to in their chapter as “token approach to gender mainstreaming” (95).

Through interviews with female practitioners in the field of water diplomacy, the book presents a compelling narrative of how professional legitimacy for women often hinges on a disavowal of their womanhood. To be taken seriously, women are expected to conform to a narrow, patriarchal mold marked by technical expertise, emotional restraint, and assertiveness. As one expert is quoted: “when women talk about transboundary water, it’s not like they’re talking as the voice of women’s rights. In this position, women participants have to be thought of as men, with a very serious, assertive, and technical attitude” (189). This erasure intensifies when water is tied to productive uses such as irrigation, energy access, or livelihood security. In these contexts, water becomes a matter of state sovereignty, power, and geopolitics, and women are pushed further to the margins. Their everyday, embodied experiences with water—collecting it, using it, managing its scarcity—are dismissed as apolitical or irrelevant to international relations.

By bringing these dynamics into conversation, the volume effectively asserts a foundational feminist insight: *the personal is political*. Women’s daily encounters with water are not outside politics; they are shaped by and have stakes in decisions made at the highest levels of governance. Their exclusion from transboundary water diplomacy reflects not a neutral oversight, but a political choice that silences lived knowledge and sustains patriarchal power.

Overall, this book is indispensable for scholars and practitioners across disciplines—international relations, gender studies, political ecology, and environmental governance—who are seeking to engage with more inclusive, critical, and grounded approaches to water diplomacy. In its insistence that water governance is always and inherently gendered, this volume sets a new standard for what serious engagement with equity and power in transboundary water governance should look like.



BOOK REVIEW

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Book Review: Unbuild Walls: Why Immigrant Justice Needs Abolition

Jules Soupault

Unbuild Walls: Why Immigrant Justice Needs Abolition

By Silky Shah

Haymarket Books, 2024

Hardback, 256 pages

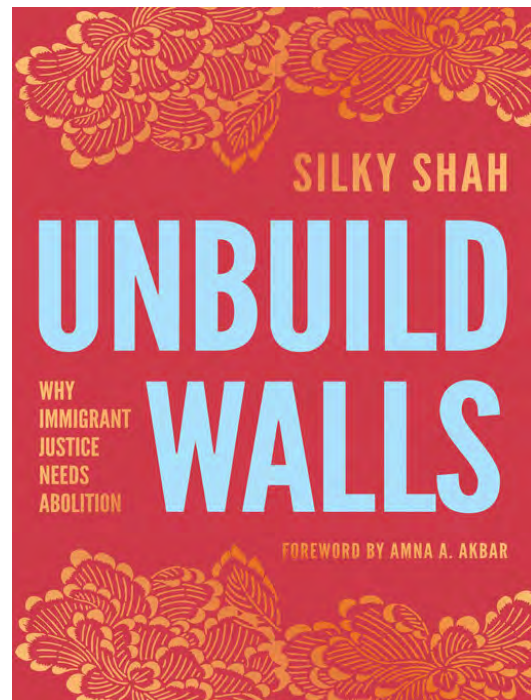
ISBN: 9798888901229

<https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/2279-unbuild-walls>

Unbuild Walls: Why Immigration Justice Needs Abolition presents a vital account of abolitionist struggles in the United States, drawing on decades of organizing experience with Detention Watch Network (DNW). Silky Shah's book maps the laws and policies that have facilitated the detention and deportation of people on the move while also reflecting on the strategies activists have used to resist and build "communities, not cages", as per one of DNW's campaign titles (2021).

As Trump returned to power and ICE made their raids into a spectacle for viewing in 4K resolution, abolitionists, community organizers, activists, and critical border scholars continue to push back against liberal discourses that problematize only the "excessive" deployment of border enforcement (Mayblin et al. 2024; Neusner & Kizuka 2021; De Noronha & Bradley 2022). After four more years of bipartisan consensus in support of policing, surveillance, incarceration, deportation, and genocide, many feel like the space for radical/abolitionist imagination opened by the Black Lives Matter movement has shrunk abruptly. Yet, as this book shows, this space not only still exists but has the potential to continue to grow.

By chronicling her journey as an organizer, the evolutions of DNW, and the campaigns the organization has been a part of, Shah shows the transformative potential of abolition and the need to connect the linked



struggles against police, prisons, borders, militarism, and racial capitalism. "Unbuild walls" is not just a call to tear down cages and border walls; it's also a reflection on the unintentional divisions that separate these movements. The book's central argument is that abolition provides the tools to analyze and organize in ways that reinforce rather than undermine each other. This argument unfolds throughout eight chapters in which Shah draws on her extensive knowledge of policy agendas and activist campaigns over the past 60 years.

The first part of the book dives into the co-constitutive development of mass incarceration and immigration enforcement in the United States. Chapter 1 traces the

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backlash to the post-civil rights era and the normalization of mass incarceration effected by the neoliberal turn. It shows how this backlash laid the groundwork for the Bush administration's raids and the creation of the DHS and ICE. In Chapter 2, Shah critically examines the Obama era as an illustration of how reformist solutions help expand and consolidate the carceral and deportation state. Chapter 3 continues this discussion by reflecting on the Trump administration's infamous practices of family separation and expulsion without the processing of asylum claims. Far from an aberration, the author argues that these practices were made possible by previous policies, and that despite mass mobilization, the Biden administration kept them in place.

In the second part of the book, Shah focuses on the history of organizing and discusses the limits and prospects of the different strategies employed. Chapter 4 credits a new generation of activists for helping the immigrant-rights movement move away from accepting “trade-offs”—policy deals to regularize some in exchange for the deportation of others—and embracing abolition instead. Chapter 5 critiques the overemphasis on private prisons in immigration activism and argues for a broader analysis of the carceral system. While recognizing the strategic benefits of this angle, which enables local organizing and offers a serious opportunity for disrupting the economy of detention, Shah criticizes how it obscures the state's role in building and running prisons. In Chapter 6, she tells the story of the local organizing victories that led to the closure of 20 detention centers in California and the Midwest. These wins were achieved through diverse forms of action, protests, litigation, and coalition work. Each success, Shah notes, generates momentum for the next, illustrating the cumulative power of building grassroots resistance.

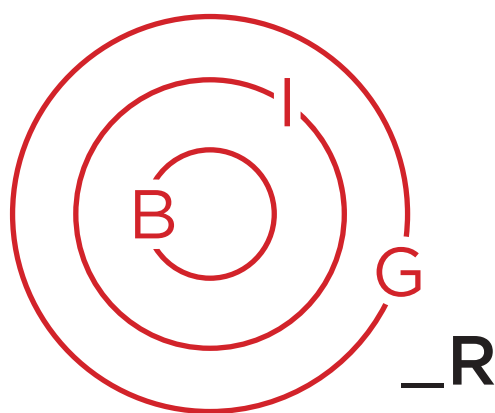
The final section of *Unbuild Walls* offers some reflections on the road ahead for convinced abolitionists. Chapter 7 explores the relationship between legal strategies and abolitionist goals. While Shah is clear that transformative change cannot be won through the courts alone, she emphasizes the value of legal tools when deployed in tandem with organizing, exemplified by successful campaigns to end ICE-police collaborations, terminate detention contracts, and defund ICE. In Chapter 8, Shah concludes on the need to propose an agenda that goes beyond abolishing ICE. Inspired by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Shah reminds us that abolition is not simply about tearing systems down but about building life-affirming alternatives in their place. The preceding decades of organizing have shown that community-based support, mutual aid, and continuous efforts to learn and adapt “have already begun making abolition every day” (2024, 213).

The book offers rich and nuanced descriptions of the tensions that arise when abolition analysis is not centred and Shah certainly deserves recognition for posing questions that may not have clear answers yet must still be discussed. At the same time, engaging more directly with land-based and internationalist movements—such as Indigenous struggles, including Palestinian liberation—might have helped situate this conversation on abolition within a global and imperial context (Fúnez-Flores 2024; Corntassel 2024; Natanel & Pappé 2024; El-Shewy et al. 2024)

All in all, this book reminds us that abolition is happening now, wherever people organize, resist, and imagine relations centred on care and solidarity. It has already generated interest and conversations among activists and organizers in the U.S., but scholars will also learn a great deal from this work, which provides tools to identify and organize abolitionist strategies beyond policy solutions.

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EDITORIAL MATTER

About the Journal

Focus and Scope

Borders in Globalization Review (BIG_Review) provides a forum for academic and creative explorations of borders in the 21st century. Our interest is advancing high-quality and original works in policy, social sciences, the humanities, and fine arts that explore various aspects of borders in an increasingly globalized world. *BIG_Review* publishes scholarship (academic articles, essays, research notes, book reviews, and film reviews) as well as artwork (photography, painting, poetry, short stories, and more). The journal is committed to peer review, public access, policy relevance, and cultural significance.

Our starting point is that borders offer metaphoric-conceptual tools for the study of differentiation and integration. This perspective mandates a wide range of artistic, theoretical, and empirical explorations of borders. The journal is especially interested in advancing the study of the borders of globalization. New research is documenting a shift in the logic of borders from spatial and territorial to functional and aterritorial. This means that borders are increasingly detached from territory, operating as mobile and relational nodes in increasingly complex regulatory frameworks. For example, border screening often happens far from the border, and goods and people are increasingly bordered 'on the go' with microtechnology and biometrics. Simultaneously, global processes challenge the territorial foundations of borders, including subnational and transnational pressures, the virtual flows of global finance and big data, the spread of infectious disease, and the effects of climate change.

The borders of globalization are being established in a variety of spaces—not just in borderlands. Like a shifting puzzle, their infrastructures and institutions interlock in kaleidoscopic geographies and modalities across world, though not always visibly. *BIG_Review* offers a platform to visibilize, problematize, and discuss how these borders are changing and how they affect all

other borders, physically, of the mind, of social groups, and across cyberspace.

The journal also advances original artwork related to borders. Borders capture the popular imagination and inspire creative works. Artwork reflects and influences the cultures that shape borders and can be subversive. *BIG_Review* connects artists to audiences around the world through wide distribution networks and open-access electronic editions. Our art pages showcase individual works as well as portfolios, including photos, paintings, poems, short stories, fiction reviews, and more. All art is published at no cost to the artists.

Peer Review

Each academic article and essay considered for publication in *BIG_Review* undergoes at least two double-blind peer reviews from our international Editorial Board (board members are listed at the front of this issue and on our journal home page). In the event of a split recommendation, a third (and sometimes a fourth) review may be obtained. Publication decisions are based on these reviews.

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Borders in Globalization Books (BIG_Books) shares an editorial board with *BIG_Review*. The focus and scope of the books are the same as the journal, except the books publish only academic content, not artistic or fictional. Learn more at [BIG_Books](#).

History

In 2018, [Borders in Globalization](#), a Research Lab of the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, established *Borders in Globalization Review* (BIGR/*BIG_Review*) and the Borders in Globalization Book Series (BIGB/*BIG_Books*). Both publish online, open access, double-blind peer-reviewed manuscripts about the borders of globalization.

Funding and Support

BIG_Review is funded and supported by the [Borders in Globalization](#) research program (BIG). BIG received funding from the [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada \(SSHRC\)](#) Partnership Grant (Grant no: 895-2012-1022), and from the [Erasmus+](#) programme of the European Union (the European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein).

In order to continue publishing high-quality and open-access work in the absence of secure, long-term funding, *BIG_Review* aims to become self-sustainable through publication fees for academic submissions and advertising revenue.

The [Centre for Global Studies](#) at the University of Victoria provides office space and support. The journal is hosted online by [University of Victoria Libraries](#).

Publicity and Advertising

BIG_Review reserves space for paid promotional content in the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts, including advertisements for new books and other publications, special events, calls for papers, courses and programs, and more. Full and partial page insets will be made available on the inside of the front and back covers, as well as the first and last pages of the journal.

Inside front cover: full page = \$1,000 (Cdn);
half page = \$500; quarter page = \$250

Front pages: full page = \$500 (Cdn);
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Ad proposals should be submitted as PDFs directly to our Chief Editor. All inquiries welcome. *BIG_Review* reserves the right to reject ad proposals on any grounds.

Publication Frequency

BIG_Review publishes twice annually: spring/summer and fall/winter.



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It is the responsibility of the authors, not the journal, to determine whether disclosure of their material requires the prior consent of other parties and, if so, to obtain it.

Editorial Notes

BIG_Review is produced on Adobe InDesign. All content templates by Michael J. Carpenter (except front cover template, by Karen Yen). Layout and design by Arifin Graham of Alaris Design

For Contributors

Submission Guidelines

BIG_Review publishes **scholarship** (academic articles, essays, research notes, book reviews, and film reviews), **policy work** (briefs and reports), and **artwork** (photography, painting, poetry, short stories, and more).

Scholarly submissions should present original research relevant to borders in the 21st century. Submissions should engage with the interdisciplinary research literature on borders, including, for example, borderlands, borderscapes, and bordering processes. We are especially interested in studies that go beyond the 'land image' by exploring borders as non-contiguous, aterritorial, globalized, mobile, electronic, biometric, functional, etc. We are equally interested in border studies from Indigenous perspectives, along with questions of sustainability, climate change, global health, colonialism, and subnational and transnational identities. Research questions might include: What are contemporary challenges to borders, internally and externally? How are borders adapting? What challenges do borders pose for communities and for people in transit or seeking asylum? How are cultures shaped by borders, and vice-versa? How are technologies shaping borders? We encourage innovative theoretical work and explorations of borders widely construed, as well as empirical and quantitative research. We welcome scholarly submissions from all disciplines and backgrounds.

BIG_Review also promotes **artistic submissions** pertaining to borders (borders understood broadly: political, social, cultural, metaphoric, personal). Borders capture the popular imagination and inspire creative works. Artwork can reflect and influence the cultures that shape borders. We promote small portfolios and individual works, including original poems, photos, paintings, short stories, creative essays, film and literature reviews, artistic commentaries, and other forms of art. Artists retain copyright of their work and benefit from increased exposure at no cost to them.

BIG_Review's policy section dedicates space to the translation of academic research and scholarship into focused, plain-language reports available to everyone. Writing policy briefings and essays is a special skill-set that requires researchers to step outside of their academic training and to imagine what their work might look like to someone without their background. Researchers need to present their work in ways that inspire and enable non-experts to incorporate the findings into their policy frameworks. This means submissions should use clear and relatable language, catchy titles and headings, appeal to current events and issues, avoid jargon and theory, cite relatively few sources, and avoid footnotes. Policy suggestions should flow naturally from the research's key findings.

For technical submission requirements, see below.

Peer Review Process

Each academic manuscript considered for publication in *BIG_Review* is submitted to at least two members of the Editorial Board (or other qualified scholars) for double-blind review. In the event of a "split" recommendation, a third (and sometimes a fourth) review may be obtained. Publication decisions are based on these reviews.

The editors notify authors as early as possible as to whether their paper has been accepted for publication. Selected manuscripts are assigned a member of the editorial team, who will work with the author to address any outstanding issues concerning style or substantive content prior to publication. Papers that do not abide by the publication's style guide may not be accepted. Once revisions have been completed, copyediting and production are provided by *BIG_Review*.

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Academic Submission Requirements

Articles are long-form papers (7,000 to 11,000 words) that advance public knowledge about borders in the 21st century, presenting original research, data, analysis, or theory, and engaging with contemporary scholarly literature on borders. Authors should have a background in social sciences, humanities, law, or policy.

Essays are shorter-form papers (1,000 to 4,000 words) that advance public knowledge about borders in the 21st century, including literature reviews, persuasive writing, and opinion pieces, as well as short research papers.

Research notes engage concisely (750 to 1,200 words) with single concepts, terms, or debates pertaining to border studies.

Book reviews (between 800 and 1,100 words) summarize and analyse books (academic and fiction) relevant to contemporary border studies.

Film reviews (between 800 and 1,100 words) summarize and analyse film and television relevant to contemporary border studies.

Submissions must be written in English, though we also consider French and Spanish submissions.

All academic articles and essays must include an **abstract** (75 to 200 words) that summarizes the paper, including the main argument or findings, the disciplinary background or approach, and research literatures or theories relied upon.

BIG_Review **citation style** is very similar to [Chicago "author-date" manual of style](#). This means all citations are contained inside parentheses within the text, listing author(s) last name, and the year of publication (and pagination when appropriate, especially following quotations). Complete bibliographic details of all references are contained in Works Cited at the end of the manuscript, listed alphabetically by author last name, with year of publication preceding work title. All references to academic journal articles must include [DOI weblinks](#) or other [stable URLs](#) at the end of the entry. This increases the exposure of your work.

Quotations should not end with a period or a comma inside the quotation marks, unless the punctuation is original to source; otherwise, periods and commas come after and outside the quotation marks. In the case of article titles in the Works Cited, these should be in quotation marks and followed by no punctuation marks, neither commas nor periods, as in the following examples.

Examples of *BIG_Review* citation and reference style (*notice the placement of all punctuation*):

According to some scholars, borders raise normative imperatives as well as territorial considerations: "what borders do", for example, "should always be related to the overriding ethical concern that they serve and not undermine human dignity" (Agnew 2008, 176).

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Endnotes are not used for citations and should be used sparingly. Endnotes may be used for substantive observations or supplementary material, but not for citing (though endnote content may include in-text citations). Endnotes should appear together at the end of the manuscript. We use endnotes, **not footnotes**.

For **numerals**, single-digit numbers are spelled out ("zero" through "nine") but higher-digit numerals (starting with "10") are written with numbers. For example, "the total membership rose from just seven to a staggering 6,500". Note that a comma is inserted in four-digit numbers and higher (not for years). Large numbers in units of hundred, thousand, million, etc., may combine numerals with spelling, for example: "There were 18 million applications and just six hundred awards."

Units and **percentages** are spelled out, as in "kilometer" (not "km") and "percent" (not "%"), unless the text is particularly heavy on units and percentages, in which case these should be abbreviated.

All **figures** and **tables** are placed within the text at the appropriate points, rather than at the end (or markers are used within the text to indicate placement).

Sentences are separated by one space, not two. Paragraphs are separated by an additional line.

Academic submission files must be **Microsoft Word** (.doc or .docx), and include two documents: a) an anonymized version (for prospective reviewers); and b) a separate copy of the title page alone with the submission title and author information, including highest degree obtained, job title, department, institution, and contact options (i.e., email and social media).

The submission has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another publisher (or an explanation has been provided to the editor). Submissions are not guaranteed approval. *BIG_Review* reserves the right to reject submissions on any ground. Make a submission: [submit page](#).

Artistic Submission Requirements

Our electronic platform permits a wide range of media, from print to visual, video, animation, and interactive.

Prose (short stories, creative essays, film and literature reviews, artistic/critical commentaries) should be

double-spaced and use a 12-point font. Length may vary. Accompanying photos and artwork are welcome.

Visual art (photography, painting, sculpture, etc.) must be high-resolution, BMP, JPEG, or PNG, including separate captions.

Poetry formats may vary (length, layout, font, font size, etc.). Accompanying photos and artwork are welcome.

All submissions must be previously unpublished and not simultaneously before other publishers for consideration, unless other arrangements are made with our editors. Submissions are not guaranteed approval. *BIG_Review* reserves the right to reject submissions on any ground. To make a submission, follow the steps at [Submit page](#).

Policy Submission Requirements

Policy submissions may take two forms: policy reports or policy briefs. **Policy reports** should be 4,000 words in length, include a short summary (three bullet points), executive summary, findings, and conclusion with implications and recommendations. **Policy briefs** should be 2,000 words, include a short summary (three bullet points), and must conform to the following template (reports may adopt this format as well):

Title [A policy briefing title should capture the reader's attention and clearly state the brief's purpose]

Author [full name, highest degree, position, institution, city, country, and contact info (email and/or website and/or social media account if applicable)]

Executive Summary [An executive summary details the central themes and purpose of the report and will also contain one or two explicitly stated policy suggestions in the conclusion. An executive summary fills a similar role as a research paper abstract, though it is longer, less technical, and written in plain language that is accessible to non-experts. Whenever possible, avoid the use of jargon or theory. Your sentences and overall approach should strive for brevity and clarity. You should write the executive summary last.]

Introduction [A good introduction will provide the reader with an outline of the problem or question being tackled by the research and will justify why the research is of interest/ importance to the audience you are trying to reach. It will also provide a brief overview of the research and its findings and will encourage the reader to continue reading.]

Approach and Results [Here, you will lay out a summary of the research's findings, and a short description of the project's methods and analysis (who conducted it, how was it conducted, what research methods were employed). The findings should start by painting a general picture, before providing specific detail. This section should not be too technical, as it will be read by a non-specialized audience. If applicable, this section should also highlight potential opportunities that emerge from the research.]



Conclusion [Interpret your findings for your audience. Make sure your conclusions flow from your findings and are supported by them. Be as definite as you can be. Aim for clear assertions rather than equivocations.]

Implications and recommendations [Implications are what could happen, based on the research; recommendations are what should happen. Both need to flow from the conclusions and be supported by the evidence. Implications tell the reader "If 'X', then..." Even if specific advice hasn't been requested, implications—when phrased correctly—can imply a course of action regardless. Recommendations ought to state clearly what should happen next. They should be related in a step-by-step fashion, and they must be relevant, credible, and feasible.]

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