Political boundaries and tourism: borders as tourist attractions

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Although formalities commonly associated with international boundaries are sometimes considered bothersome and often add a perceived distance to certain tourist destinations, borders do, in many cases, function as tourist attractions. This paper discusses the nature of political boundaries in the context of tourism and examines the tendency of various types of international frontiers and their associated environments to attract significant tourist numbers. Situations considered are relict boundaries, boundary parks and monuments, and natural wonders located at international borders. Subnational boundaries are also examined in a similar fashion. Since tourism is also important in areas adjacent to boundaries (borderlands), the last part of the paper focuses on some of the dimensions of cross-border shopping, bordertown gambling, welcome centers, and international enclaves—all border-related phenomena which are not in fact part of a precisely established political boundary but which owe their existence to their borderlands location.

Keywords: tourism, borders, attractions

The most commonly accepted definitions of a tourist include elements of distance travelled and time spent away from home. When operationalized in this way, tourist travel usually entails the crossing of some political boundary, whether it be municipal, township, county, provincial, state or international. Although subnational borders do not greatly affect tourist flows, travellers are often bothered by the 'hassle' of crossing an international boundary. Owing to the negative perceptions often associated with frontier formalities (even at friendly borders), many people may avoid certain interesting and desirable destinations just because they lie within the limits of another country. For some people the inconvenience of having to go through customs, having to deal with a foreign language, and having to spend foreign currency can add a perceived distance to nearby, over-the-border attractions. This perceived distance may deter many would-be tourists from actually visiting a neighbouring country. Other tourists, however, consider border crossing part of the excitement of a trip.

Recent research has confirmed the importance of tourism in borderlands areas. However, although some writers have, in passing, toyed with the notion of boundaries functioning to attract tourists, few, if any, have demonstrated how borders themselves and border-related environments can act as significant tourist attractions. Furthermore, except for a few notable exceptions, there is little information present in the literature to offer a conceptual basis for studying the relationships between political boundaries and tourism. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to address these gaps by examining some of the basic relationships between tourism and political boundaries, including a discussion on the role of international and intranational boundaries themselves and their associated environments as tourist attractions.

The nature of political boundaries

International boundaries are invisible, vertical planes that transect the airspace, the soil and the subsoil between adjoining states, and they mark the limit of territory in which a state can exercise its sovereign authority. Borders often limit contact between people and can function as lines of economic containment and military defence. In many cases they act as filters or barriers against influences considered negative or unwelcome by a national government. Reynolds and McNulty have sug-
people. separation, boundaries may also be viewed as lines formed, even though the actual distance is not great. The spacing of these access points can have significant impacts upon the subjective environments of frontier zone residents and will be displayed in their spatial behaviour. In essence, a perceived distance is formed, even though the actual distance is not great.

However, in addition to their role as lines of separation, boundaries may also be viewed as lines of contact: places where similar or dissimilar cultures and economies converge. Many parts of the world are full of examples where political lines have been drawn through regions populated by culturally similar groups of people. This situation often gives rise to problems of territoriality, and contact between similar groups often goes unaltered by the presence of a political divide. Some open borders even allow a great deal of contact between dissimilar groups of people.

Subnational boundaries (eg provincial, county, etc) serve different functions from international ones. Within a county such borders may determine which electoral candidates are on a ballot, the tax rate of goods purchased, the value of property people possess, which schools children will attend, the hours during which alcohol may be consumed in public establishments, and whether or not people are allowed to gamble legally.

Although actual boundaries are invisible, their position is usually marked on the ground with a variety of tangible objects, including fences, walls, stone or cement obelisks, metal posts, cleared vistas in forested areas, welcome (or warning) signs, flagpoles and painted lines across roads. The way a border is marked can reveal a great deal about the relationships between neighbouring countries. For example, electrical fences and high walls adorned with barbed wire would seem to indicate contention, while open fields with only occasional stone markers would likely demonstrate more peaceful relations. However, this is not always the case, especially in areas where the harsh environment sometimes impedes attempts at boundary demarcation.

**Boundaries and tourism**

As previously mentioned, borders are commonly regarded as barriers or constraints, even in the context of tourism. However, in many cases this goes beyond mere perception. Many examples exist where tourist flows between neighbouring countries are heavily restricted (eg many African and Middle Eastern boundaries) and even altogether prohibited (eg North and South Korea). In addition, Matznetter has suggested that the longer the waiting period at a border and the more formalities associated with crossing it, the more it tends to become an obstacle for tourists. Again, the perceived distance increases.

In many ways the existence and functions of political boundaries influence the nature of the tourism industry itself and the spatial development of many tourist destinations, especially in touristic regions adjacent to, or bisected by, international frontiers. Matznetter has categorized the positions of international boundaries in relation to places of touristic interest into three broad types: (1) situations where the line runs between two touristic areas but at a significant distance from each; (2) situations where touristic areas touch a border, but only on one side; and (3) conditions where tourist areas abut a boundary on both sides (Figure 1). In the first situation the border is merely a barrier or a point of transit on the way to a more distant destination, and its influence on tourist flows depends largely on its degree of permeability. The second situation may remain the same for many years as tourism continues to develop on one side of the border only. However, in the event that tourists are permitted to cross the border easily, and given that the other side provides places or objects of interest, tourists from the developed side may begin to visit the non-developed side, thereby promoting the growth of tourism on both sides of the border until the situation becomes increasingly more like that in Matznetter's third example. In this instance, the cohesion between the two tourist areas on each side depends to a large extent on the degree of openness between adjacent countries. In areas of open borders, such as in the Lake Constance region of Central Europe, tourism often circulates across international lines so freely that the area's political fragmentation is often forgotten. Along similar lines, some researchers have suggested that international, regional cooperation regarding such matters as tourism promotion on both sides of a border effectively reduces the segregative role of the boundary as common problems in adjacent peripheral areas may overshadow national considerations. In other areas, however,
such as along the Gulf of Aqaba in the Middle East, boundaries act as barriers, and although beach tourism is a major industry along each country's coast, it is usually not allowed to overlap political lines.

According to recent literature, as indicated previously, tourism is a highly significant and growing industry in many border areas in much of the world. Eriksson suggests that the level of attractiveness of border areas for tourists depends on a number of factors, including the natural, social and cultural environment near the border and the degree of freedom or difficulty in crossing it.

Figure 2 describes different types of border areas as they relate to tourism by comparing the degree of difficulty for tourists in crossing the border and the degree of similarity in the cultures or societies located on both sides. The black, dotted lines represent international boundaries in general, and the thickness at different points along the line indicates the degree of permeability (ease of crossing) associated with various boundaries. The grey zone above the line refers to examples of borderlands where the culture and society are similar to that on the opposite side, while the hatched area represents a different culture or society than what is found across the border. Section A represents areas where boundaries are both difficult (sometimes nearly impossible) to cross and where they divide dissimilar cultural or social groups. An example of this may be Israel and its Arab neighbours or Albania and Greece, prior to Albania's recent move toward capitalism. This type of frontier region may attract some of Plog's allocentric travellers who are willing to go through the tedious process of crossing a difficult border, or evading the restrictions altogether in order to experience marked differences in landscape, culture and society on the other side. Mongolia and China or Thailand and Myanmar (Burma) may be examples of border areas in sector C. Characteristic of these areas are similar cultural or social groups near the border and extensive formalities or restrictions associated with crossing it. Section B represents borders such as the one between Greece and Turkey, where crossing is relatively easy, but where the society and culture are different on each side. Area D represents easy-to-cross boundaries where similar cultures and societies meet (eg Austria–Germany and Canada–United States). Plog's psychocentric travellers, who would rather travel to a place with a familiar culture and which requires little by way of formalities, would be more inclined to cross this type of border for tourism purposes.

**Borders as tourist attractions**

The previous sections have addressed some of the more general relationships between tourism and borders. However, in addition to the role of borders as filters or barriers to tourism, one of the most obvious relationships between the two is that of political boundaries as tourist attractions.

Some travellers cross borders for the sole reason of being able to claim, for reasons of prestige, that they have been in a foreign country. Leimgruber writes that people's perception of boundaries are molded by experiencing a feeling of going beyond, of being able to cross into a different political, social and economic realm. Ryden suggests that borders imply a transition between realms of experiences, states of being. They are lines between life as lived in one place and life as lived in another. About boundaries he goes on to say that,

...in the space of a few feet we pass from one geographical entity to another which looks exactly the same but is unique, has a different name, is in many ways a completely separate world from the one we just left... This sense of passing from one world to another, of encompassing within a few steps two realms of experience, enchants and fascinates.

It is this interface of differences which many travellers find fascinating about political boundaries. The following sections discuss another relationship between boundaries and tourism: the role that many borders and borderland environments play as tourist attractions.

**International boundaries**

The role of international boundaries in tourism is commonly a transit one. Many people arrive at the border, pass through customs and immigration, and continue hastily on their way. It is not uncommon, however, to see tourists (where allowed) photographing welcome signs, border markers, poles displaying the flag of the foreign country, and customs buildings. In their own right these icons may be an attraction to many people as they mark the interface of differences in language and culture, economics, politics and social systems. Indeed, some crossing points are even provided with areas where motorists can pull off the road for a close-up view of the boundary. This is the case at the Dutch–French border on the Island of St Martin and at the Peace Arch in Blaine, Washington, USA and White Rock, British Columbia, Canada.

While most international boundaries themselves are generally not the final destination for travellers,
several man-made border attractions do indeed exist which draw significant numbers of tourists and which serve as one of the main destinations of a tourist trip. For example, the International Peace Garden on the border between Manitoba, Canada and North Dakota, USA, internationally recognized for its theme of peace and international cooperation, attracts approximately 200 000 visitors every year (North Dakota Parks and Tourism, personal communication, 1993). The boundary line in this botanical garden is marked at the entrance with a cement pillar and throughout the garden with a small stream and rows of flowers. Souvenir shops on both sides of the border within the park have been established which offer park visitors a wide selection of international border-related mementos. During the summer months the garden plays host to a variety of festivals and other events which attract significant numbers of tourists from many parts of North America. The International Music Camp is attended by more than 2700 liberal arts students every year, and Sunday afternoon concerts are standard. In addition, the Old-Time Fiddlers Contest and the International Balloon Rally are hosted at the Peace Garden in June and July respectively and draw large crowds of visitors. 19

An attractive monument, accessible only by hiking trails, marks the meeting place of Finland, Norway and Sweden. Within Finland's Mallan Nature Reserve, this 'tri-point' monument is considered the most popular tourist attraction. 20 A similar attraction is the Border Field State Park, a small recreation area in Southern California known for its scenic ocean views. The park draws recreationalists mainly from the San Diego area and is popular largely owing to the fact that it extends up to the United States-Mexico boundary fence and lies only a few hundred meters from Tijuana's popular 'Bullring-by-the-Sea'.

Some of the world's most popular tourist destinations are natural wonders that are located at international boundaries. Niagara Falls, for example, attracts more than 12 million visitors annually to the Canadian side of the border alone (Niagara Parks Commission, personal communication, 1994). Victoria Falls in Southern Africa and Iguazu Falls in South America are also famous natural attractions which host large masses of tourists each year. Although the attraction of these destinations is the natural wonder itself, the boundaries which run through each of these three falls may indeed add a degree of intrigue to such destinations. To view the falls from both countries, especially if the two points offer different vistas, may be a realistic ambition for many tourists.

Curiosity seekers are sometimes attracted to populated areas where international boundaries divide villages and even buildings. The Haskell Library and Opera House straddles the United States-Canada border and is situated in the communities of Rock Island, Quebec and Derby Line, Vermont. Though actual data are not available, it is estimated that several hundred curiosity seekers are attracted by the unusual situation of the structure every year (M Charland, personal interview, Haskell Library, June 1992). In addition, a number of other alluring curiosities exist along the US-Canadian boundary where taverns, grocery stores and even private homes are divided. 21, 22

Former boundaries that no longer function as such, but which are still marked by differences in the landscape, are known as relict boundaries. The Berlin Wall and indeed the entire East Germany-West Germany divide is one of the most well-known, recent examples of this type of border. Many environmental, economic and social consequences of that line are still discernible in the landscape, and some parts of the wall still exist as reminders of the past. Though the boundary is technically no longer there, the area still draws crowds of visitors and, in fact, chunks of the wall are still being sold to tourists as unique souvenirs of this portion of the relict Iron Curtain. Hadrian's Wall and The Great Wall of China are two of the most well-known ancient examples of relict boundaries which attract large numbers of international tourists.

Subnational boundaries

Even more permeable in nature, state and provincial boundaries are generally less attractive than international ones. Again, however, it is not uncommon to see tourists photographing 'Welcome to . . .' signs at border crossings to document their holidays. County, township and municipal boundaries are probably not as important unless they display an unusual sign or name such as Kalamazoo, Michigan; Hell, Norway; or Lanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch, Wales.

There are significantly fewer subnational border-related attractions than international ones. The most obvious exception in North America, however, is the Four Corners Monument where Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona meet. Many visitors stop by this unique feature every year, and each of the four represented states advertises the site as an important tourist attraction. 23-26 Furthermore, a number of entrepreneurs have realized the importance of the site and have set up souvenir stands near the monument.

Another famous example of tourist-drawing international boundaries in the United States is the border between Maryland and Delaware. Ending many years of dispute between William Penn's family and Lord Baltimore, the eastern end of the boundary between Maryland and Delaware (on Fenwick Island) was marked with a stone bearing the coat of arms of Lord Baltimore in 1751. Beginning in 1763, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon spent four
years locating and marking the Delaware–Maryland and Pennsylvania–Maryland boundaries (made famous as the divide between slave- and non-slave states during the American Civil War) with stones bearing the arms of the Penns and Lord Baltimore.27 Today both Delaware and Maryland promote the original markers of their common boundary as important historic attractions in their tourism literature.28,29

Border-related tourist attractions

So far this paper has examined a number of actual borders which function as tourist attractions. However, there are several other border-related phenomena which are not in fact part of an established political boundary but which owe their existence to their borderland location that seem to attract significant tourist attention. These include, among other things, cross-border shopping opportunities, bordertown gambling, welcome centers and international enclaves. Each of these will be addressed in the following sections.

Cross-border shopping

For years people have crossed political boundaries to shop. Shopping malls, grocery stores and gas stations often draw people from across administrative borders for a number of perceived benefits, including lower prices and taxes and a wider or different selection of goods. In addition to shopping (both pleasure based and economics based), many cross-border shoppers often include in their trip such activities as watching movies at a cinema, visiting museums and historic or natural attractions, eating in restaurants, using public transportation and, for those staying more than one day, spending the night in local accommodations. Hence, international cross-border shopping is not only an economic activity, it can also, in many cases, be viewed as a pleasure-based form of recreational travel for many people and a major tourism generator in border areas.30

Cross-border shopping is a common activity in many parts of the world. A number of publications identify the importance of this activity in Europe, between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, between Denmark and Germany, and between Switzerland and its neighbours.12,31,32 Within the North American context, it is perhaps most notable along the US–Canadian border. Canadians shopping in the United States have long been an element of both trade and tourism between the two countries, and the phenomenon has been fostered by the relative ease of crossing the border, the large number of crossing points, and the familiarity and similarity between the two countries.30

Although many Canadians purchase goods while on vacation and on business trips in the United States, government agencies have directed their attention to and defined cross-border shopping simply as those people who cross the border by car and return the same day.33,34 Since the late 1980s, there has been a very rapid increase in the number of one-day Canadian shopping trips to the United States. In 1987, Canadians made almost 31 million shopping trips south of the border. By 1991, this number had nearly doubled to over 59 million.

Research has shown that the main reason Canadians shop in the United States is the general perception that prices are lower there, as a result of lower taxes, more competition and lower profit margins.33–35 Other pull factors have been identified, such as a strong Canadian dollar, better service, special sales, free amenities, businesses accepting Canadian currency at par (which has in recent years been a saving of between 10% and 25%), and the availability of Sunday shopping.33 The introduction of the 7% federal Goods and Services Tax at the beginning of 1991 was considered the main ‘push’ factor for shopping in the USA that year, and the growth of cross-border shopping was widely blamed for a drastic increase in the loss of Canadian jobs, retail bankruptcies and billions of dollars in lost government revenue.

This over-the-border shopping craze continued to grow until mid-1992, when numbers of Canadian day trips began to taper off. This decline has been attributed, in large part, to the decreased value of the Canadian dollar.30 Despite its apparent decline, however, cross-border shopping in the United States is still a significant economic problem for retailers in Canada.

Bordertown gambling

There are a number of examples where gambling is legal in one state or country but illegal in neighbouring states and countries.36,37 This situation provides many opportunities for border communities within the gambling state to draw large numbers of people from nearby out-of-state areas by establishing casinos and game halls just inside their boundaries.

With the development of the interstate highway system and with the increase of long-distance automobile travel, people in neighbouring states and countries where gambling is not allowed are ready and willing to drive to the nearest bordertown for recreational purposes.38 In Nevada the recent results of this have been a rapid development of gaming and recreation communities, such as Mesquite, Wendover and Jackpot, along the state’s borders.39 In one study of the attraction of Nevada border towns for residents of neighbouring states, Jackson and Hudson discovered that 50% of cars parked at Mesquite casinos originated in Utah. Comparable results were found in Wendover. In Jackpot, two-thirds of the cars were found to be registered in Idaho. The economic impact of out-of-state spending in Nevada...
visits and increased expenditures. It is clear that other studies have shown that the use of tourist better utilize its resources.

establishment near interstate boundaries, a tourism organization can encourage travellers, before travelling any further, to see more of the state and to better utilize its resources.

Muha's study suggested that obtaining tourist information is the most popular reason for people stopping at most welcome centers. A number of other studies have shown that the use of tourist information centers does indeed have some impacts upon travellers entering a state or province. For example, Fesenmaier and Vogt and Tierney conclude that welcome centers influence travel decision making, and they tend to promote longer tourist visits and increased expenditures. It is clear that strategically placed tourist information centers at state and provincial boundaries draw substantial numbers of tourists, can enhance the tourist experience and can be effective in increasing the level of spending by out-of-state visitors.

**Exclaves/enclaves**

True exclaves are small parts of one country that are completely surrounded by the territory of another country. These can only be approached by passing through foreign territory. Similarly, the term 'pene-exclave' is used to describe small outliers which are physically connected to the homeland, but are easily accessible, ie by wheeled traffic, only by passing through the territory of another country. From the point of view of the country in which the outlier is situated, it is an enclave. From the perspective of the country to which it belongs, it is an exclave.

Although several exclaves are found in North America, most are located in Europe and Asia. Switzerland hosts two (Campione, Italy and Büsingen, Germany), France hosts one (Llivia, Spain), the Netherlands hosts 25 Belgian exclaves (Baarle-Hertog), and Belgium is home to 12 Dutch exclaves (Baarle-Nassau), one of which lies within Belgium proper, while 11 lie within the Belgian exclaves. In addition to several normal enclaves, a number of pene-exclaves exist in Europe along the German–Austrian and the Republic of Ireland–Northern Ire-

land borders. One Omani exclave lies within the United Arab Emirates, while India and Bangladesh each lay claim to many small tracts of territory within the other country along their common border. Furthermore, with the break-up of the Soviet Union, 11 new international exclaves have been formed. In North America, several pene-exclaves are located along the US–Canadian boundary, but only three are inhabited: Point Roberts, Washington; Northwest Angle, Minnesota; and the Akwesasne Indian Reserve, Quebec.

Although special problems exist with the development of tourism in international exclaves, such as the implications of their political and physical isolation and limitations placed upon them by both home and host states, as well as their small size, tourism is generally the most important industry in most European and North American exclaves (Figure 3). Many of these outliers have been well endowed with features most tourists find attractive. Baarle’s existence as a geopolitical anomaly is its most important attraction, followed closely by its historic buildings and shopping facilities. In addition to its attractive mountain setting, Llivia draws a significant tourist crowd to its tax-free shops and several health spas, while Campione’s appeal lies in its Casino Municipale, its art treasures and its architectural heritage. Cross-border shopping, as discussed previously, is Point Roberts’s most important claim to fame for Canadians from the nearby Vancouver area, while the Northwest Angle is known for its beautiful, pristine location which stimulates a prosperous fishing- and hunting-based tourist industry.

Although these unusual places are small in area and population (the population of most western enclaves is less than 1000), they have become rather important destinations for many international travellers. Most exclaves have traditionally been known for their open borders and lack of customs controls (at least in Europe). As a result, they often offer tax-free shopping and a large variety of foreign consumer products. Furthermore, the intrigue associated with travelling abroad can be realized for host country residents without having to pass through the typical formalities affiliated with transboundary travel.

**Discussion**

It remains to be seen how the role of political boundaries will change in relation to tourism as the tenets of the recently signed Maastricht Treaty, the North American Free Trade Agreement and other such international agreements are implemented. With the reduction of border formalities within the European Community, tourism is expected to increase between member states. On the other hand, certain drawbacks may be associated with reductions in border procedures. Such international agree-
ments, which reduce the barrier or filter effects of political frontiers, will necessarily make tourism more difficult to monitor on a national level, except where border formalities continue to be practiced on the fringes of the communities. This may not be viewed as negative, however, if the goal of the new international community is to plan for economic development at a broader, regional level. Perhaps, for some people, the no-border situation will make international tourism less attractive if part of the intrigue of travelling in the first place was to go 'abroad' or 'somewhere different'.

There exists an array of opportunities for additional research concerning the relationship between boundaries and tourism, especially in light of the major political changes occurring in much of the world today. There is a need for further inquiry into the effects that political boundaries have on the spatial and economic growth of tourism in tourist areas adjacent to or bisected by them. The effects of changing boundary functions (for example, those currently going on in Europe) on border-related tourist activities and attractions, such as cross-border shopping, gambling and international exclaves, deserve more concerted attention. More studies exploring the effects of border/territorial disputes on tourism would contribute significantly to the body of knowledge about international conflicts and tourism. Market research revealing characteristics of border tourists would also be useful to planners of tourism in borderland areas, for obvious reasons. And finally, case studies examining the degree to which various boundary situations add a perceived distance to attractions in neighbouring countries would be a valuable tool to assist countries or regions in the planning and marketing of international tourism.

Conclusions

In the context of tourism, boundaries are usually viewed as barriers to interaction, both perceptually and in reality. However, in many cases, they may be regarded as lines of contact and cooperation between similar or dissimilar cultural, economic and social systems. Boundaries in either one of these positions can heavily influence the development and flows of tourism, especially in areas adjacent to or bisected by them.

Although commonly associated with transit traffic, it is clear from a number of examples discussed that many international boundaries and even some intranational ones draw not only a number of curiosity seekers, but some are indeed major tourist attractions. This is apparent in that many tourism organizations promote well-known boundaries and boundary-related attractions in their tourism literature and by the fact that millions of people are drawn to a number of these attractions, such as the International Peace Garden and Niagara Falls, every year. Communities located near historically significant boundaries should be able to gain from their border location by appealing to curiosity seekers in the way that Lloydminster (Alberta/Saskatchewan) and Texarkana (Texas/Arkansas) have done. Much of their tourist promotion focuses on their unusual border location.

Tourism appears to be an increasingly important industry in many border areas, and it deserves more attention by academics and practitioners alike if it is to be effectively planned and promoted. Boundary monuments, parks, natural wonders, relict boundaries, cross-border shopping, gambling, welcome centers and international exclaves are just some of the attractions which are currently contributing to
the development of tourism in many border areas throughout the world.

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