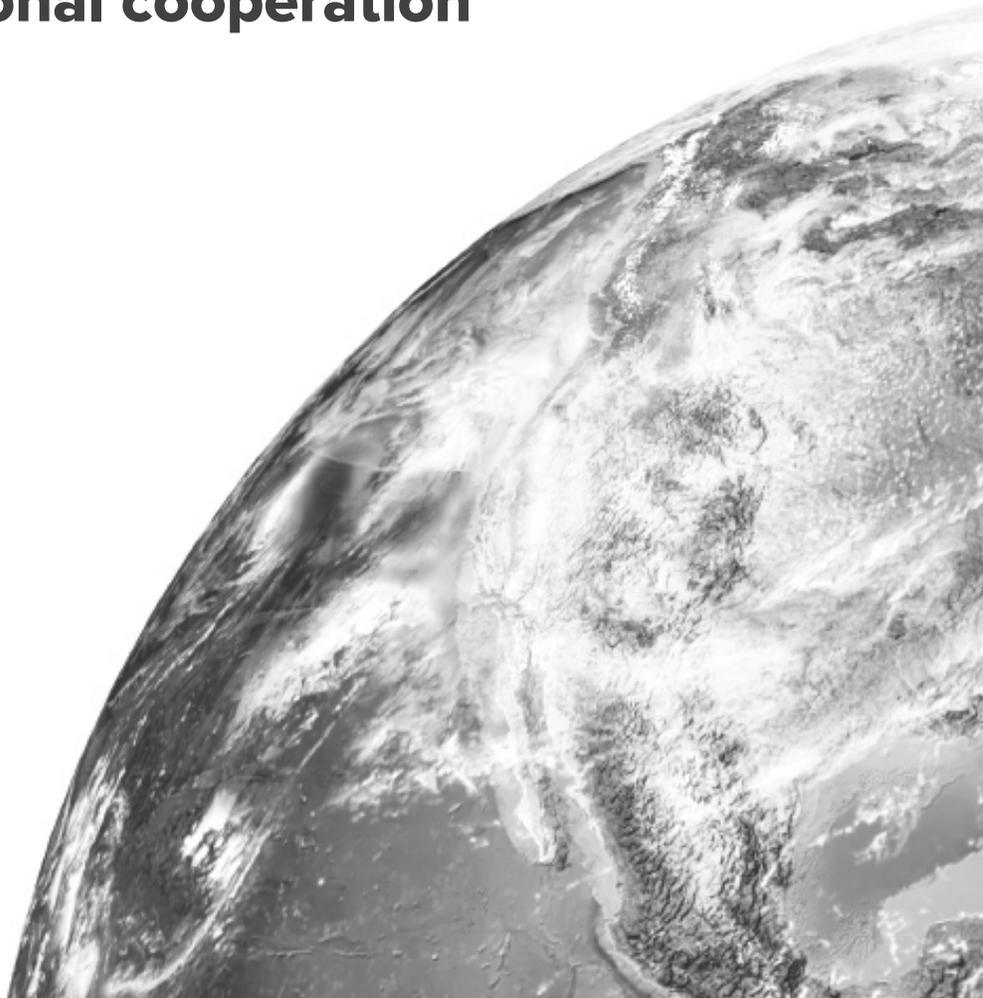


**BORDERS IN
GLOBALIZATION**

**BIG POLICY BRIEF
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In the Prairies and Great Plains, local and regional cooperation matter



In the Prairies and Great Plains, local and regional cooperation matter

Inland borders present a challenge for policy makers on both sides of the Canada-United States border. While ports of entry along borders in the eastern and western edges of the continent typically boast extensive facilities for pre-clearance and checks, inland borders such as those found between Alberta, Saskatchewan, Montana and Idaho are less developed. There is also a secondary challenge: inland regions like Alberta and the Prairies rely on West Coast ports for much of their shipping, and when those ports grow congested, the supply chains leading back into the Prairies suffer.

THE RESEARCH

Researchers with the Borders in Globalization program (BIG) have identified several areas of concern along the various borders of these Inland regions (both the North-South border between Canada and the United States, and the East-West interprovincial boundaries). These regions are only lightly populated, compared to the borderlands of the Pacific Northwest, the Detroit-Windsor corridor, or the borderlands of Quebec and the New England states.¹

The low regional population means that borderland regions often lack many of the amenities, infrastructure, and access to flexible staffing required to maintain large border facilities. The low populations in the Canadian borderlands also means that cross-border regional networks of communication and cooperation remain limited due to their small size and limited support, and sometimes have trouble assisting larger regional and national actors in meeting policy goals in their spheres of influence. For example, the systems used to export Canadian specialty products frequently suffer breakdowns in communication and cooperation, which makes management of these supply chains difficult.²

Effective supply chain management in the borderlands is critical, especially as consumer spending patterns shift in response to social concerns regarding animal welfare, sustainability, and the environment im-

pact production, distribution and sales.³

Inland borders are often frequently crossed by pipelines transporting Canadian fossil fuels to refineries in the United States and monitoring these systems – for both leaks/disruptions and [as] other potential security risks – is increasingly important. BIG research in the region has indicated that joint management of these systems by Canadian and American agencies or organizations remains an unrealistic expectation. Instead, American and Canadian agencies require the presence of regulatory cooperation and mutual recognition in the borderlands. Without these two basic ingredients, cross border flows of goods and services will remain a challenge. Given the interdependence of American and Canadian energy grids for example, recognition and cooperation are critical components in the future of Inland borderlands.⁴

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE IN ALBERTA FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INLAND POINTS OF ENTRY - AND FOR THE BORDERLANDS IN GENERAL - IS THAT OF DISTANCE.

There are other challenges in these regions. As Canadian and American economic sectors continue to experience unpredictability – both in terms of market flows and regulatory interaction – the challenge of effective supply-chain management across borders will become more pressing.⁵

There is also growing concern among stakeholders in the various supply-management systems within the borderlands, particularly cattlemen and hog producers, that national policy makers are overlooking them when formulating policy. This concern stems in part from the realization that while these networks have strong regional components, their ability to engage with international policy remains dependent on national organizations working at higher levels.⁶

The low population of the region also results in chronic labour shortages that in the past were partly

addressed through guest worker and temporary foreign labour programs.⁷ In the past few years however, changes in U.S. immigration policy have complicated cross-border business, adding a new dimension to the challenge of addressing labour needs in both the short and long terms. In the future, this issue will become increasingly important for policy makers to understand.

Finally, BIG research indicates that economic integration in the borderlands tends to be highly specialized, except for bulk commodities, where deeply entrenched supply networks dominate. There is also a tendency towards east-west integration, rather than north-south linkages, particularly given distances of major distribution centres (except Winnipeg) from the border in both countries.⁸

THE POLICY

The challenges of managing border crossings and cross-border cooperation throughout inland borderlands present policy makers with an opportunity for innovation, and to exercise leadership in the development of region-specific solutions.

The greatest challenge for the development of inland border ports of entry – and for the borderlands in general – is that of distance. These regions are far from both provincial and federal centers of power. Rather than rely on those distant centers to construct and oversee development in the borderlands, federal and provincial governments should seriously consider the advantages of decentralizing decision-making away from national or provincial capitals. Regional networks in the borderlands already exist, as do cross-border relationships among stakeholders. They should be empowered by their respective governments to do

the work they already know is needed.

The people who live in the Prairie-Great Plains borderlands are used to living and working independently of their respective, distant governments. They have adapted their regional culture to incorporate cross-border collaboration on everything from water stewardship to freight and livestock shipping and processing.

Rather than Ottawa or Washington investing time and energy reinventing these established networks, they should instead work through them by empowering them to take the lead on policy and implementation of policy in and between their communities.



More information and research can be found by visiting the Borders in Globalization [website](#).

Dr. Edwin Hodge is a Post-Doctoral Researcher with the Borders in Globalization research program at the University of Victoria.

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