



PRÉCIS

INFRASTRUCTURE AND BORDER COMMUNITIES

Canada and the United States share a border that is almost 9,000 kilometres long. Very little is known, however, about the ways in which some of the individual communities along this border manage cross-border issues. A recent study by Demetrios Papademetriou and Deborah Meyers, now both at the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., provides unique insight into this issue.¹ Through a series of case studies, the authors present detailed profiles of a number of key cross-border communities and examine how communities on both sides of the border often work together in close collaboration to address common problems and interests.

As Papademetriou and Meyers point out, their analysis is especially relevant as policy-makers in Ottawa and Washington are paying increased attention to borders and border management and security. The efforts are unfortunately less effective than they could be since, as the authors conclude, policy- and decision-making in the two capitals is taking place “without the benefit of input by local communities and interests or of their experiences in problem solving and living together.” One of the principal aims of the study is to bring these experiences – and the lessons-learned – to the attention of national policy-makers on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border.

Highlights for Infrastructure Canada

The study includes detailed portraits of a dozen border crossings and the communities with which they are associated.² These portraits offer important insight into the context for border infrastructure and BIF (and CSIF) initiatives. The portraits, in many cases explicitly comparative, include information on: demographics, local history and economics, environmental and socio-cultural traits, the degree of social and economic integration, attitudes towards governance, traffic flows, the nature of border crossings and border officials, as well as public-private partnerships and non-governmental initiatives that have been used to address shared problems.

¹ Deborah Waller Meyers and Demetrios G. Papademetriou, “Self-Governance Along the U.S.-Canada Border: A View From Three Regions”, in Papademetriou and Meyers, eds. Caught in the Middle: Border Communities in an Era of Globalization (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: 2002).

² The border crossings examined are along the Ontario-Michigan border (i.e. Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, the Ambassador Bridge and the Blue Water Bridge), the Ontario-New York border (i.e. the Peace Bridge, the Rainbow Bridge and the Whirlpool Bridge) and the B.C.-Washington border (i.e. the Peace Arch crossing, Pacific Highway crossing, Sumas/Abbotsford and Point Roberts). The communities covered include: Windsor, Detroit, Port Huron, Buffalo, Fort Erie, Niagara Falls Bellingham, Blaine, Lynden, Sumas, Surrey Point Roberts, Seattle and Vancouver.

Overall, the study reinforces that, while the preoccupation is often with border infrastructure, physical infrastructure in general is one of the leading connective mechanisms for cross-border communities and is a key determinant of the quality of life of their citizens.