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## Tourism and Conservation in Border Regions

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### ABSTRACT

Despite their traditional role as barriers to human interaction, international boundaries have become lines of contact in recent years and their role as separators has relatively decreased. Sovereign nations are beginning to see the importance of crossborder cooperative efforts and their value in promoting economic development and cultural and ecological sustainability. This is especially important in borderlands, where tourism is one of the primary areas of concern.

Of the many advantages to crossborder cooperation in tourism is the ability to promote cultural and ecological balance and integrity. It may also assist in standardizing use and conservation policies on both sides of the border, allowing for valuable amenity areas to be managed more holistically and sustainably. Despite its many advantages, however, there are some significant economic, political, and sociocultural obstacles that typically prevent full cooperative efforts.

Within this context, this chapter examines the role of tourism in border regions and the importance of crossborder collaboration, particularly in the realm of tourism and conservation. It also dis-

cusses many of the economic rationales for tourism-related conservation in border areas and suggests several methods for funding tourism, cultural heritage, and nature conservation.

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## Turismo y Conservación en Regiones Fronterizas

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### RESUMEN

A pesar de su función tradicional como barreras de la interacción humana, las fronteras internacionales se han convertido en líneas de contacto en estos últimos años y se ha reducido, en términos relativos, su función como barreras de separación. Las naciones soberanas comienzan a comprender la importancia de los esfuerzos cooperativos transfronterizos y su valor en la promoción del desarrollo económico y la sustentabilidad cultural y ecológica. Esto es de importancia especial en las zonas donde el turismo representa uno de los rubros de interés primario

Entre muchas de las ventajas de la cooperación transfronteriza en el turismo se encuentra la capacidad de promover el equilibrio e integridad de la cultura y del medio ambiente. También puede ayudar a estandarizar políticas de uso y de conservación en ambos lados de la frontera, permitiendo que el manejo de las zonas recreativas valiosas se realice de manera más integral y sustentable. A pesar de todas las ventajas, sin embargo, existen algunos obstáculos sustanciales de orden económico, político y sociocultural que típicamente impiden la realización completa de los esfuerzos de cooperación.

Dentro de este contexto, en este documento se examina el papel del turismo en las regiones fronterizas y la importancia de la colaboración transfronteriza, especialmente en el ámbito del turismo y de

la conservación. También se presentan muchas de los razonamientos económicos para la conservación relacionada con el turismo en las zonas fronterizas y sugiere varios métodos para financiar las actividades de turismo y conservación del patrimonio cultural y de la naturaleza.

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## INTRODUCTION

Borderlands are dynamic and constantly changing. They rarely coincide with the spatial, economic, and social norms of individual nations. In some cases, border zones are seen as sub-nations – figuratively distinguishable from the countries to which they belong. According to Pan-American scholars, the U.S.-Mexican border is no exception (Brown 1997; Herzog 1986, 1990, and 1991; Kearney and Knopp 1995; Martinez 1988). In fact, most observers agree that the U.S.-Mexican border and its adjacent territories function as a distinct region, pulling both sides into a contiguous and interdependent province that rarely resembles Mexico or the United States in economic, social, political, or ecological terms.

Despite this integrative pattern and the symbiotic relationships that often develop between border communities—which is especially apparent in twin cities like El Paso, Tex.-Ciudad Juárez, Chih.; San Diego, Calif.-Tijuana, B.C.; and Nogales, Ariz.-Nogales, Son.—political boundaries have traditionally functioned as significant barriers to cooperation, regional growth, and conservation management. Nonetheless, political and economic changes have occurred in recent years resulting in improved international relations, increased efforts at crossborder planning, and more integrated forms of communications and development. Various emerging forms of supranationalism (such as the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA], the European Union [EU], and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN]) and bilateral agreements are examples of these changes.

Tourism is the world's largest industry and one of the most noteworthy foci of crossborder cooperation today. Moreover, most places in the world have targeted tourism as a medium for economic development. In many borderlands, tourism is an important economic

activity and the most typical types of tourism are shopping, drinking, gambling, and prostitution, which develop as a result of divergent rules of law, distribution systems, and taxation on opposite sides of a border (Timothy 2001, 2002). In addition, because borders are situated in national peripheries, they are routinely located in pristine natural areas. As a result, nature-based tourism is common in border regions. Rain forests along the Costa Rica-Panama and Uganda-Democratic Republic of Congo borders, for example, are acclaimed areas for ecotourism and various other forms of nature travel (Timothy 2001), and there are several similar places along the U.S.-Mexican border. Many of the frontier zones of the former Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe, which are essentially zones of untouched vegetation and wildlife, have now been designated as nature preserves; similar proposals have been made for the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea (Young and Rabb 1992).

This chapter examines the several roles of borders as venues for tourism and cultural and natural resource protection, and includes an examination of funding opportunities. It then highlights the importance of crossborder cooperation in tourism development and conservation, examines various social and political constraints to bilateral collaboration, and applies these insights along the U.S.-Mexican border region.

### BORDERLAND RESOURCES AND CROSSBORDER COOPERATION

In their discussions about sustainability, scholars have emphasized a form of tourism development and planning that advocates the long-term integrity of natural and cultural resources so that they may be maintained for continuous future use (Butler 1999). Several goals of sustainable tourism development have been identified over the years, including the protection of ecological processes and biodiversity. The human element has received additional attention in recent years, however, as development specialists have promoted development principles such as community involvement, holistic planning, harmony, equity, efficiency, balance, cultural integrity, and integration (Bramwell and Lane 1993; Hall and Lew 1998; Milne 1998; Timothy 1999).

Within the context of border regions, these principles can best be supported through crossborder cooperation. For example, in many border areas where natural and cultural heritage abound, international parks have been established, several of which have become important tourist destinations. Most international parks have been designated international because two or more national parks or other protected areas meet at an international border, although some are designated as international because they may lie adjacent to a border but only on one side. Transborder cooperation is crucial to the sustainability of parks and other protected areas in border regions.

### *Cooperation for Conservation*

During the past 30 years or so, Western societies have become obsessed with conservation and its various forms and manifestations in both natural and cultural spheres. There are several reasons for this social phenomenon. First, industrialization and high-tech development have brought about a greater sense of urgency to conserve rurality, traditions, and natural environments. Second, environments are seen as having considerable scientific and conservation value because they can provide valuable information in many areas of research (Pearson and Sullivan 1995). The educative role of conservation has also importantly influenced the growth of conservation in recent years. Third, people value the aesthetic aspect of historic communities and natural landscapes, which may be esteemed because they are old or have an otherwise high “scarcity value” (Lynch 1972). Fourth, there is value to preserving ecological and cultural diversity. In its broadest sense, environment refers to both human and natural elements. Environmental diversity and sustainability are crucial considerations in conservation, particularly since built heritage and many forms of natural heritage are non-renewable resources. Once sites of historical value are gone, they cannot be reintroduced or regenerated, and even if replicas are created, they cannot replace the originals in scientific, aesthetic, or educational terms (Timothy and Boyd 2003). Fifth, nature and culture also have a functional value. It is common for old buildings, for example, to be renovated and used for purposes other than their

original operation. Some good examples of this are old factories that have been transformed into office buildings, jailhouses that have been transformed into restaurants, and railway stations that have been transformed into souvenir shops.

Another important reason for conservation's growth in popularity, and perhaps one of the most important reasons in the realm of tourism, is that conservation is good economics. In places where tourism is based on natural and cultural resources, the economic impact of conservation efforts can be profound. According to Timothy and Boyd (2003), as tourism has grown, destination leaders and residents have begun to realize the potential value it has for local economies in terms of job creation, increased tax revenues, additional regional income, and the stimulation of entrepreneurial activity. Often, then, economics becomes the basis for conserving environments and developing tourism.

Because most cultural and natural tourism resources are not bound by human-created political borders, most conservation problems cannot be solved without the joint involvement of administrators in adjacent countries. Crossborder cooperation in ecosystems management can help facilitate the standardization of conservation controls on both sides of a border. This has the potential to contribute to the protection of migratory species, water bodies, and scenic landscapes that cross international boundaries. It may also reduce the risk of fire and air pollution, and it allows fuller and easier enjoyment of recreational amenities and experiences (MacNeil 1990). Crossborder collaboration may also reduce the over-exploitation of resources on one side of a border—something that all too commonly results in severe conservancy problems in neighboring regions (Ingram, et al. 1994; Johnstone 1995). Crossborder cooperation might also enhance tolerance and understanding between personnel and entrepreneurs (Tenhiälä 1994). This tolerance and understanding is important where natural resources are concerned, as disputes commonly erupt over partisan uses of internationally shared resources.

### *Funding through Cooperation*

As previously noted, economics is a major force behind conservation efforts and it especially motivates decisions to develop tourism. Crossborder cooperation can be an important tool for funding tourism and conservation in frontier areas. However, regardless of whether true cooperation is achieved or not, funding is an otherwise crucial part of development. The following paragraphs describe various funding sources that can be tapped for tourism in frontier regions.

Despite its economic potential, conservation is not cheap. Most conservation bodies throughout the world have faced severe budget cuts in recent years as public monies have dried up, and management has had to devise new ways to fund conservation. In most cases, tourism has been targeted as a key economic activity and a method of funding various forms of conservation. The source of funding for the maintenance of natural and cultural areas has sparked considerable debate in both private and public circles, and various observers have identified a range of options for generating additional funding.

User fees, such as entrance and admission fees, are the first, and perhaps most widely accepted source of revenue. Cossons (1989) and Prentice (1989) have argued that to make up for lost public funding, it becomes imperative for users to pay for their experiences, and research shows that in most cases, tourist use of cultural and natural resources is price-inelastic, meaning that requiring payment for use does not generally result in lower levels of use. In most cases, visitors are willing to pay for the upkeep and conservation of the sources of their recreational experiences. Interpretation is similar to user fees, which can also be used as a revenue source. The most typical methods for this include audio tape rentals, purchasable maps and guidebooks, and inexpensive group tours.

A second revenue source—special events such as festivals, art shows, sporting competitions, and other exhibitions—can also offset conservation costs. Participants in special events can be charged rental, utility, and other service fees, or they may be required to pay a certain percentage of their earnings to the hosting agency or attraction. Although planned events have the potential to bring in

significant quantities of revenue, it is critical for managers to bear in mind that they must not let these occasions detract from the primary aims and objectives of the site.

Retailing, the third major revenue stream, may be used for conservation purposes. Research demonstrates that people have an unusually high propensity for spending money while they travel and engage in recreational activities. This tendency to spend can have important economic implications for tourist destinations, especially in small communities and rural areas. With the realization of its economic potential, many park and historic site managers have begun to expand their services into the retail sector (Butcher-Youngmans 1993). With careful planning, the development of tourism in areas of historic and natural importance can play an important role in providing not only funding for conservation and daily operations, but jobs and increased community income and standard of living, as well (Timothy and Boyd 2003).

Although they require more capital investment, lodging and catering for tourists can also be useful for funding conservation. If new buildings are required, it is important that site managers ensure they do not divert from the goals of conservation or trivialize the significance of the place in question. In many instances, existing homes and historic structures may be used as accommodations and food services areas. The extent to which this can be done will usually depend on extant land use plans and zoning regulations. In rural areas, some of the most successful and aesthetically sound lodging establishments are bed and breakfasts, cabins, farmhouses, campsites, and cottages.

Grants provide yet another source of funding. When no direct line of government funding exists, agencies, organizations, and communities can submit grant proposals to various public agencies and philanthropic associations. Sometimes, agencies with an interest in education and conservation are able to provide one-time gifts to private, public, and nonprofit areas, and there are several agencies that have distinct interests in funding borderland development projects. For example, several high-profile philanthropic organizations (including the Kellogg Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation) give regular grants for communities in border areas, including Mexico, to assist in community development. These grants are usu-

ally awarded on a competitive basis and solid justifications have to be made for why the individual site is most deserving of the money. Many of the largest philanthropic organizations have programs for both domestic and international work and tend to focus on development-oriented projects. In these cases, a one-time gift is usually offered.

Sponsorship, an increasingly popular revenue source for conservation areas, entails a form of in-kind exchange, whereby some sort of service is provided in exchange for another service, or money. An example might be a regional newspaper that offers advertising space to an historic fort in exchange for admission passes, which it uses as prizes or gifts. It may also be possible for organizations to sponsor special events, which allows a great deal of exposure for their products.

Donations are one of the most common sources of conservation funding for natural and cultural sites. Unlike sponsorships, these typically do not have in-kind exchanges attached to them. Instead, they are gifts that are not expected to be repaid in any way. Donations may come from individuals or organizations. To elicit small-scale and personal donations, managers often place donation boxes near entrances and exits to motivate people to donate spare change or more to the site's conservation fund. This practice is commonplace at many attractions, even where entrance fees are required. In some instances, a donation may be considered an adequate admission fee at locations where official user fees are not levied. Larger gifts from estates, philanthropic individuals, and corporations are also important.

In spite of the source of funding, managers and conservationists must understand the funding processes and how environments can support their own conservation and interpretation. Not every funding source may be appropriate for every situation, and managers need to be aware of the best ways for money to be used and for resources to be tapped.

## CONSTRAINTS ON CROSSBORDER COOPERATION

Despite increasing efforts toward cross-national partnerships throughout the world, true cooperation is difficult to achieve. While cultural and natural resources in border areas face the same types of problems other protected areas face (such as law enforcement, funding, research, staff issues, illegal hunting, and unsustainable agricultural practices nearby), their location creates a set of rather unique obstacles that most protected areas do not typically encounter (Timothy 2000).

Cultural and social values on opposite sides of a border have a tendency to create chasms between neighbors that are difficult to bridge. Of course, the size of this chasm depends on the degree of difference and the willingness of each side to work at cooperation. Collaborative efforts are much easier to facilitate when symmetrical interests, values, languages, and social practices exist between each side of a border (Blatter 1997). Saint-Germain (1995) found language and cultural traditions to be significant barriers to crossborder communications along the U.S.-Mexican border. Differences in administrative practices can raise insoluble barriers to international collaboration. When agencies in each nation, whose responsibilities include environmental protection and/or tourism development, have contrasting mandates and opposing views of natural resources, it is difficult to realize common goals in borderland areas. For example, in the United States and Canada, park and forest management agencies have traditionally been at odds with each other. In the United States, "the Park Service strives to preserve the natural environment while allowing recreational activities, and the Forest Service seeks to balance multiple uses of the land with recreation. In [Canada], the agencies are more polarized. While [Parks Canada] functions much like the U.S. Park Service, the Forest Ministry operates solely for the purpose of resource extraction" (Weingrod 1994).

Problems also arise when dissimilar levels of government responsible for various aspects of planning and conservation meet at international frontiers. In Mexico, for example, states, and not the federal government, usually administer parks and preserves. In most cases, U.S. borderlands are administered by states and federal agen-

cies that do not always agree. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Parks Service, Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs, Bureau of Reclamation, and Bureau of Land Management, as well as the states of Sonora, Chihuahua, and Coahuila all have an interest in what takes place along the border (Steffens 1994). Therefore, a situation is created where many “individuals, groups, and agencies involved in all kinds of activities have an interest in the [U.S.-Mexican] border region. Yet many of them seem to operate in almost total ignorance of the others. They duplicate each other’s efforts, and their interests overlap” (Kjos 1986).

Political practices in most places have mandated that all levels of international negotiations are the responsibilities and rights of national governments (Gaines 1995). This has typically precluded local governments from getting involved in crossborder negotiations. In most cases, local authorities have no rights to enter into agreements with their crossborder neighbors unless they have received prior authorization from the national government (Hansen 1983). This is an unfortunate situation, for in many cases, the implementation of conservation and tourism policies and programs usually works best on a local level, where the people and administrators are more familiar with their crossborder neighbors (Gaines 1995; Hansen 1983; Timothy 2000). This is certainly the case in most crossborder communities in the United States and Mexico. The twin cities of Douglas, Ariz., and Agua Prieta, Son.; Nogales, Ariz., and Nogales, Son.; and Yuma, Ariz., and San Luis Río Colorado, Son., for example, commonly work together in areas of environmental care, fire control, and tourism (Ingram, et al. 1994; Johnstone 1995).

Sovereignty is typically viewed as the absolute control of national space and territory. True forms of cooperation are hard to establish because it means the parties involved would have to give up some minute degree of autonomy in the name of collaboration, and thereby diminish absolute territorial sovereignty (MacKinnon 1993). This notion is usually most visible at international borders, where economies and political systems meet. Arduous border-crossing formalities are a manifestation of sovereign control and may keep people from visiting another country. They may also avert the free flow of goods and services between sides. These restrictions

hamper staff and visitor exchanges, which are particularly important in building understanding, conducting research, and in carrying out interpretive programs. Border-related issues usually take precedence over conservation needs in borderlands. Most national governments are more interested in preventing undocumented migration and in controlling the flow of goods than they are in protecting the environment and in establishing cooperative relations. As one U.S. park official noted:

For every agency that wants to encourage the greater flow of wildlife, another agency wants to build 14-foot walls to keep immigrants and drugs out. All of our conservation problems are affected by social problems: drugs, illegal immigration, the language barriers ... If we don't make progress with illegal immigration and drug traffic—which will continue to be difficult to resolve—we won't make progress on conservation issues (quoted in Steffens 1994).

Because of sovereignty constraints, it is difficult to achieve truly integrated cross-national cooperation; both polities understand that they will have to give up some level of control in the name of collaboration. In the context of the U.S.-Mexican border, Herzog (1986) notes:

By the beginning of the present decade the political implications of the growing symbiosis between San Diego and Tijuana began to emerge more clearly. Although citizens, bureaucrats, scholars, and elected officials on both sides of the border recognized the need for local coordination, the principle of national sovereignty continued to impede the formation of any truly binational form of boundary governance. Thus, decisions would persist within the framework of separate jurisdictions of San Diego and Tijuana.

The physical structure of the border also influences conservation efforts. Barbed wire fences, minefields, and guard towers are obvious barriers to human interaction, cooperation, and conservation in some parts of the world. However, even in less-stringent situations,

such as on the U.S.-Canadian border, a seven-meter wide cleared vista extends along the entire border, cutting through agricultural landscapes and protected areas such as the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, marking ecological integrity and true binational cooperation in conservation (Timothy 2000). The vista, which is cleared with herbicides and bulldozers, is an eyesore to many conservationists and it reflects non-cooperative conditions rather than crossborder cooperation. Along the U.S.-Mexican border – where the U.S. has erected high walls and fences and in some places where the U.S. has dug anti-vehicular trenches just inside the border near crossing points – the border infrastructure is also an impediment to conservation. Even in less urbanized areas, the smaller border fences divide nature preserves and historic sites, which affects species migrations. Illegal mass migration (by foot and vehicle) into the United States also endangers many of the plant and animal species that inhabit the borderlands.

Marginality is another influential variable to cooperation. In the 1960s, the Mexican government invested millions of dollars in the northern frontier zone for economic and infrastructure development, urban renewal, and cultural preservation. Mexico, however, is outside the norm in this respect. Central authorities normally view frontier zones as marginal and unimportant to their modernization and economic development efforts. Usually, they favor the more populated and industrious interior. This leads to a lack of funding and administrative support for border regions (Blake 1993; Korona 1995). During policy development, peripherality also typically results in the marginalization of border residents' concerns. Thus, as Ingram, et al. (1994) note, it is not surprising that national and state policies often differ from the needs and priorities of communities and places along the border.

Finally, contrasts on opposite sides of a border are especially visible when the developed world meets the developing world. When it comes to tourism and conservation, varying levels of development are difficult to balance, because in less-developed countries it is often hard to provoke widespread enthusiasm for conservation when governments and most of the population are primarily concerned with basic survival (Norton 1989). In these cases, binational cooperation is difficult because most less-developed countries are more

concerned with domestic problems such as poverty, health care, and unemployment than they are with crossborder issues (Timothy 2000). Additionally, imbalance exists when one country has knowledge about and the resources to devote to conservation and management, but its crossborder neighbor does not. In the words of Parent (1990):

Like Mexico itself, the Mexican park system is still developing. Mexico does not have the resources to staff and manage its parks as intensively as in the United States. Unlike the United States, Mexico cannot give such strong emphasis to environmental preservation. Instead, it must compromise more with economic development for the local people.

Differing levels of development may also result in varying degrees of environmental protection on opposite sides of a border. Where pollution is uncontrolled on one side of a border, conservation efforts and tourism development are necessarily influenced on the other side (Steffens 1994). In the U.S.-Mexican borderlands, for instance, "polluted surface runoff, unimpeded by the border, threatens the health of residents on both sides" (Ingram, et al. 1994), and Pacific Ocean pollutants from Tijuana, which the current carries northward, make many of the beaches south of San Diego unusable for recreational purposes (Timothy 2000).

## CONCLUSION

Crossborder cooperation is of paramount importance to sustainable development and to the development of equitable relationships on both sides of the border. Crossborder cooperation can promote community empowerment, it can promote the sustainable development of natural and cultural resources, and it can strengthen local economies. In addition to sound infrastructure development, human resource advances, and ecological conservation, binational collaboration may enhance funding. Many sources of funding exist for tourism development, and while most of these are not specific to border regions, they may be adequately applied to communities and areas located on or near the international boundary.

Border areas are often important tourist destinations, and in some cases, because of their typically peripheral location, they are prime laboratories for ecological and cultural conservation. While the border and its effects (such as peripheral location, marginality of residents, and opposing levels of development, among others) usually function as barriers to cross-national networks, methods need to be explored to overcome these obstacles. Because true crossborder cooperation is a rather new paradigm (with a few exceptions in Europe) it is still too early to understand the gravity and breadth of its repercussions. Nonetheless, nascent evidence suggests that crossborder cooperation provides many opportunities for community enhancements on both sides of the border.

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