Symposium: Community, Identity, and Public Administration

BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES IN FLUX AND THE RESURGENCE OF IDENTITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

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Please allow this introduction to start with a personal horticultural tale that will become relevant in quick fashion. My wife and I have complementary duties in our yard and the surrounding acres of woods. I handle the grass and the trees while she handles all but one of the flower gardens, both annual and perennial. I spend hours lining the flower gardens with fallen trees and field stone borders to neatly separate my mowing and trimming chores from her flowers and herbs. No sooner is this accomplished than my wife starts planting “mini” flowerbeds outside of my nice, neat borders! She makes new field stone borders that don’t follow the long straights or curved arcs that facilitate lawn maintenance. We argue, she wins, and I occasionally mow through some flowers with my tractor. If I trample on a border area enough, she backs off -- détente!

Much the same story can be told of many local jurisdictions and even nations -- the topic of this symposium. In the current environment of public administration the meanings of borders and boundaries are in flux at the local, regional, subnational, national, and international levels. The papers in this symposium amply demonstrate this instability. Communities, administrators, and politicians have responded with various methods for working across jurisdictions, including network structures, regional governance, citizen engagement, and the creation of borderless regions. Scholars in public administration, political science, and international studies question the impact of such actions on identity and sovereignty, frequently under the label of globalization, as in Edward Cohen’s *The Politics of Globalization in the United States* (2001) or labels such as horizontal governance (Peters, 1998), public/private partnerships (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998), hollow state (McGuire & Agranoff, 1998), or community collaboration (Mandell, 1999).

Numerous ideas in this symposium were incubated in preparation for the PAT-Net 16th annual conference in Anchorage in June 2003. This was fitting because Alaska is in many ways a frontier rather than a jurisdiction. The United States clearly asserts sovereignty over Alaska, but its distance from the continental U.S., its separation by thousands of miles of Canada, and the nature of the rugged individualists who populated Alaska, have forged an interesting quasi autonomy. For attendees from Europe, Australia, and elsewhere, visiting Alaska was not quite like visiting the United States. Sure the money was the same and the language was similar, but the culture, the diversity, the environment, the economy, and the geography were unique.

In particular, this symposium builds upon the conference track on borders and boundaries in public administration. The focus is on how public administration may address community and identity in this environment of flexible boundaries. Three of the papers focus on the local level, one paper on the subnational (state) level, one paper on
the regional (cross-national) level, and one paper on the international system. Together they make for a meaningful and well-rounded approach to this topic.

Jodie Kluver’s article examines the use of non-profit organizations to help develop viable citizen participation structures in local governance, particularly in the early stages of development when it may be useful to mask social change efforts in order to tone down general opposition to change. In her paper, non-profits were used to develop neighborhood-level participation to overcome an environment that was hostile to change (i.e., those with entrenched power were not desirous of additional input into the policy-making process). The Center for Greater Neighborhoods, however, facilitated additional participation by providing technical and leadership services and resources to neighborhood associations. Kluver posits that some success was possible because this role was indirect -- “‘removed’ from the powers within the city.” The primary relevance of this piece to the symposium theme is that having distinct public, private, and non-profit organizations may be useful by providing alternative approaches for fostering citizen participation and democracy.

Margaret Banyan’s article is also focused on community governance, but across the large metropolitan region of Portland, Oregon. The distinctive suggestion of this piece is that the public good can best be achieved by focusing on organizational citizenship rather than individuals or citizen participation. Cultivating “high organizational citizenship” is said to offset the corrosive effects of “complexity, ideological isolation and fragmentation.” Certainly Banyan is correct that the American view of democracy is about citizen engagement rather than group efforts and that much of the social capital literature seeks to retain this focus, rather than make the shift to organizations as the unit of analysis. The reader will need to decide if organizations can or should be personified in this manner, and if so, whether they should be the dominant focus for further community governance research.

This research is embedded within specific communities and each case involves competing definitions of what community is most relevant. With Kluver’s topic, for example, there is a tension between the value of neighborhoods and the importance of the city at large. Do citizens identify with the city or with their specific neighborhood, or perhaps just with their city block? While such issues exist in these first two articles, the next two articles explicitly focus on place and sense of place, more nearly broaching the symposium focus on identity. Any conversation of borders and boundaries would be made weaker if such an explicit discussion was missing and so these articles are critical to the symposium topic.

Eric Austin focuses on whether or not administrators ought to promote citizen identification with community and he argues that a focus on place (i.e., the physical environment) can support the emergence and growth of civil society. He sees place as a “catalyst to the social bond” and concludes that “more and better discourse” -- a frequent prescription for all that ails community -- may be necessary but is not sufficient to developing the social bonds that a strong civil society requires. Nanzer’s focus on place is more of a methodological breakthrough. His research on Great Lakes water diversion policies created and tested a scale for measuring “sense of place,” including place attachment, place identity, and place dependence as subscales. While this 12-point scale is not immediately transferable to places other than Michigan and the Great Lakes,
Nanzer’s article effectively uses a broad base of literature to develop a well-rounded picture of what “place” is all about.

The final two articles change the center of attention to international borders. Amy Lovecraft discusses transboundary aspects of the Great Lakes ecosystem while Kym Thorne and Alexander Kouzmin focus on the core issue of sovereignty. My own thinking about the impact of globalization on the sovereignty of the modern nation-state is mixed. In one publication I state that “The nation-state model for collective decision-making is under great stress . . . Few decisions made under the sovereign authority of one nation have limited impacts beyond the borders of that nation while numerous decisions made by subnational units of government (i.e., states, provinces, municipalities, tribes, and clans) and specific corporations have global implications” (2004a). In another article with less rhetoric and more empirical research to back up my thoughts, I conclude that state actors retain significant power and that what we are observing is really an expansion of democracy more than a loss of sovereignty (2004b).

My first perspective is in keeping with Lovecraft’s ideas that managing cross-border ecological problems calls for a relaxation of sovereignty and a commitment to joint decision-making. Control by local stakeholders and ecosystem-based units of administration are viewed as two challenges to national sovereignty. My later perspective is in keeping with the Thorne and Kouzmin article because they conclude that it takes a great deal of sovereignty to create jurisdictions that are legally outside of one’s sovereign control. Their fascinating discussion of invisible regions -- regions at once within the control of a sovereign nation and yet intentionally outside its sovereign legal system -- is well worth your attention regardless of the focus of your research. They conclude that sovereignty must be alive and well, at least for the oppressive major world powers, if nations have the power to decide when and where they will act with invisible precision. In their analysis, however, these sovereign actions do not reflect democratic tendencies.

Collectively the six selections in this symposium highlight issues related to boundaries and jurisdictions. They demonstrate that such distinctions are seldom, if ever, clean and linear in our increasingly complex world. It is tempting to define “ours as that which is not theirs,” but such a possessive view of politics, whether local or international, is waning in favor of the notion that most everything must be shared because the systems are interconnected. While international borders are not as omnipresent and important in the everyday life of Americans as they are to Europeans (Blatter & Clement, 2000), this symposium emphasizes that border and boundary issues are also critical in the North American context. It has been my pleasure to work with the authors on developing their ideas. I would also like to thank the blind reviewers for their excellent advice and Richard Box for his superb organizational support, without which ATP would surely be at a loss. I hope you truly enjoy reading this symposium.

REFERENCES


