Borders on the map and in people’s lives*
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**Introduction:**

This paper presents a study of cross-border activities and attitudes in a small research area straddling the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in counties Fermanagh, Monaghan and Cavan. The study is based on a questionnaire survey of 200 households in the rural area and 56 families in the nearest towns carried out in 2005.

Borderlands are special places within their own geographic areas with special relationship systems, and borderlands differ among themselves in their various models of interaction (Martinez, O. J. 1994). “Borderlands are sites and symbols of power” (Donnan, H, Wilson, M. T. 2000). “Borders appear to be necessary feature of social organisation” (Staudt, K, Spener, D. 1998), but are they barriers or bridges between territories, people’s lives, social and political activities, etc? Do borders protect our societies and economies or do they bring us trouble? In Europe the Iron Curtain has recently been destroyed resulting in greater trans-border movement, trade, cooperation etc. Conversely, in America moves are being made to fortify the frontier between the USA and its southern neighbours to restrict migration.

Are border people passive or active agents of these cross border interactions? What is their attitude about things related to cross-border issues? In the case of Northern Ireland the question of links between Catholics and Protestants is also very important within the country (O’Dowd, L, McCall, C. 2004). Is there any correlation between their attitude and their cross-border activities? This paper will present some relation of their interactions and attitude researching small border area in Ireland.

**Methods**

The method is based on a questionnaire survey.

*The sampling framework*

Two surveys were carried out. The first aimed to investigate households in the rural border’s area (figure 1), where 99 households fell into the sample randomly from the North and 101 ones from the South. In the other survey the households were chosen within local towns (Lisnaskea, Newtonbutler, Clones, Coothill; figure 1). 29 households were asked in the Northern towns and 26 households in the Southern towns. It was not intended to be representative of the study population, the ratio of Catholic and Protestant people within the sample who were asked was 48.2 : 48.6. However, the same ratio in the research population is 75% : 18%.

*Indexes*

Index of frequency of border-crossing was a simple estimate of the mean number of crossings per person per year given by the respondents.

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Index of purpose of border-crossing was the average score, on a 10-point scale, given by respondents for the importance of each type of ‘border crossing purpose’ we encountered, where 1 represented the lowest importance and 10, the highest. Indexes of attitude were calculated from the scores, on a 40-point scale, given by respondents to represent their level of agreement or disagreement with a number of statements of attitude which were posed in the questionnaire (where -20 was the lowest disagreement and 20 was the highest agreement).

The attraction index was derived as follows. The questionnaire posed a series of questions about where respondents engaged in consumer activities (for example buying foodstuffs or visiting the cinema). Respondents were able to name a maximum of two places used for each activity. A town or village got 1 point each time it was mentioned for any activity (i.e. if one person named the same town for every activity it would receive the maximum number of points available). The number of mentions received by each (possible) centre of attraction was summed. If the respondent named their home settlement it was not counted: only places travelled to were counted. Each centre’s score was divided by the maximum possible score and multiplied by 1000 to give a ‘per-thousand score’. This was termed the ‘attraction index’.

Pearson Correlations were calculated by SPSS with significance (2-tailed).

Results of the survey:

Identity
The questionnaire asked the political and national identity of people in the sample. There were 52% Irish or Northern Irish, and 40% British people in our sample in the North; and 94% Irish or Southern and Northern Irish, and 5% British people in the South (Figure 2). Only 30% of them named themselves as nationalist and 43% as unionist in the North, while this rate was 39% : 30% in the South (Figure 3).

If we look at the broad relationship between political identity and religion and nationality of people, we find a slightly higher proportion of Unionists among Protestants than
Nationalists among Catholics (figure 4), and a much higher proportion of Unionists among British than Unionists among Irish people (figure 5). Irish identity was more heterogenic than British, but to relate political identity to religion we can say that Catholics tend to be Nationalist and Protestants tend to be Unionists. In the North we did not find any Unionists among Catholics and there were not any Nationalists among Protestants. It means there is sharp division between Catholics and Protestants in the North, and it is strong relate between religion and political identity both sides of the border, but stronger in the North. It also appeared that around 40% of Catholics did not reply or said they were neither Unionist nor Nationalist in the North. Similarly a little bit more than 40% of Protestants living on the southern side of the border did not reply or said that they were neither Unionist nor Nationalist.

Figure 2 Nationalities of people in our sample

Figure 3 Political identities of respondents

Figure 4 Political identity and religion of people

Figure 5 Political identity and nationality of people
Cross-border activities

The questionnaire was designed to examine the following themes concerning border activities:

- level of contact maintained between relatives resident on opposing sides of the border
- frequency of border crossings
- purpose of border crossings
- distribution of the visitation and use of ‘municipal attraction centres’ (e.g. providing retail and services) with respect to direction travelled to the centre relative to the border

Frequency of border crossings and level of contact maintained between relatives resident on opposing sides of the border:

To cross the border is very frequent in this area, especially in the North, where people go every 3 days to the South (figure 6). On the Southern side of the border going to North is half as frequent (DONNAN, H. 1999: “Unless they live very near the border people from the Republic of Ireland usually see no reason to cross to Northern Ireland”). More than 50% of all respondents had relatives on the other side of the border, but to visit them was not correlated with the frequency of border crossings.

![Figure 6](image-url)

Figure 6 Frequency of border crossings in our sample

Purpose of border crossings

We will find the reason for this relatively high level of border crossing among people from the North, if we have a look at the purpose of this activity (figure 7). The cheaper price of petrol on the Southern side encourages people to cross the border from the North very frequently. In terms of ‘cross border visiting’ at least, people from the North appear to keep contact with their relatives more intensively than those from the South. Though significant, crossing the border from the North to work did not have a particularly high index score (2.5, see figure 7).
A strong correlation between their opinion of how important crossing the border for working was and the frequency of border crossing was found (0.700 – in towns, and 0.468 – in rural areas, but in the case of towns in the South it was 0.913) There was a perceptible, but not strong, correlation between how people think about the importance of crossing the border for buying petrol and the frequency of border crossing (0.381 – in towns, 0.498 – in rural townlands), despite the main aim of Northern peoples’ cross border activity being to get petrol from the Republic. No strong correlation between the perceived importance of re-opening border roads for the prosperity of this area and the frequency of border crossing was observed, though among people living in the local towns this correlation value was more appreciable (0.490, but in the case of people living in rural townlands it was only 0.136). We also found a correlation between how much respondents said they would be happy to move to the other side of the border to live and their cross border activities (the value was 0.499 in the case of people in towns, and only 0.237 among people living in rural townlands). Frequency of border crossing was also correlated with respondents’ agreement with this statement: ‘cross-border co-operation will lead to prosperity in the border region’, but only in the case of people living in towns (0.395) and especially those who live in the North (0.591). Correlation between cross-border activity and agreement with joining the single European currency – euro, appeared only in the North, for both people living in towns (0.367) and rural areas (0.300).

The overall impression given by these correlation values is that the main character of frequency of border crossing is practical and economical and less dependent on people’s attitudes.

Distribution of the visitation and use of ‘municipal attraction centres’ (e.g. providing retail and services) with respect to direction travelled to the centre relative to the border
The attraction index shows us which settlements work as ‘centres’ in the research area. Despite the different currency and the unfavourable political situation (which is less of a disadvantage now), there are some towns in the South (Clones, Monaghan) which are very popular with border people from North as well (Figure 8). Enniskillen got the highest score as a local centre, and this town had the strongest attraction role from the South. Clones plays the main role as a trade centre for the whole research area. De-militarisation of the border means that without any checkpoints cross-border movement is now much easier.
The way local people feel and see this area

It was asked in the questionnaire “how has living near the border changed since the paramilitary cease-fires ten years ago?” Both sides responded that mobility was perceived to be better on roads (50-50%), they feel more relaxed and comfortable (20% in the North, 30% in the South) and more than 10% of people on both sides of the border thought that their life had not changed much (15% in the North, 13% in the South).

In the North some respondents thought there were advantages of living in this border area. For example, getting petrol cheaper (40%) or ‘good for shopping’ (19%). However, 30% of people expressed the opinion that there was not any benefit of living in this borderland. In the South some respondents thought living in this area was good for shopping (38%), or brought advantages from being a multicultural area (19%), but 40% of people thought there was no benefit from living there.

On both sides a disadvantage in being isolated (17% in the North, 15% in the South) and using two currencies (10% at North, 9% at South) were mentioned. In the North they also thought the low level of infrastructure (12%) and terrorism and high crime levels (10%) were disadvantages of the area. It should be noted that on both sides a high proportion of people (60-50%), did not see any disadvantage in living in this border area. Benefits were more frequently mentioned than disadvantages although a rather high proportion expressed no feeling of either advantage or disadvantage.

Relationship between attitudes and National, Political and Religious identities

It is interesting to examine people’s attitudes with respect to their differing and overlapping, national and political identities, and religions. Only those who classified themselves as ‘Irish’
were, as a group, on average, happy to move to the other side to live. A high percentage of British citizens refused this idea. Both Unionists and Nationalists, and Protestants and Catholics tended to disagree with this statement (figure 9). From the point of view of all the various identities there was agreement that there should be more integrated schools for Protestants and Catholic children in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic (figure 10), and they also all agreed with the next statement: “In 20 years time Northern Ireland will still be part of the UK (figure 11) despite both Nationalists and Catholics disagreeing that Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK (figure 12).
Both Protestants and Unionists tended to agree (though the difference between the percentage of those who agreed and disagreed was small) that border Protestants feel let down by unionists in the rest of Northern Ireland (figure 13), but Catholics, and Nationalists rather disagreed that Northern Catholics feel let down by Southern Nationalists (figure 14). This is possibly because Protestants live in this border area as a minority, which situation might make them feel isolated from the rest of Northern Ireland.

In the main division is between British and Irish attitude concerning to this statement: “In the border region the main division is between Catholics and Protestants rather than between North and South, but Catholics and Nationalists or Protestants and Unionists disagree with it (Figure 15). The opinion of Irish people is rather on the side of agreement, but not with a strong bias to this point of view. If we examine the response to this statement considering only whether the respondents lived south or north of the border, people from the South generally did not agree whilst in the North, the value of this index was positive although low (figure 16). Looking further (to compare British and Irish people attitude with this statement), among British’ the opinion was that the main division is between Protestants and Catholics, i.e. greater distance between people with different cultures was apparently felt, whereas Irish’ opinions about the division in Ireland apparently had a more political origin.

Figure 13  Border Protestants feel let down by Unionists in the rest of Northern Ireland
Figure 14  Northern Catholics feel let down by Southern Nationalists
Figure 15  In the border region the main division is between Catholics and Protestants rather than between North and South

**Attitude in North and South** (figures 16 – 17)

**Differences between North and South in our sample:**
In the North, they do not agree with the statement that ‘Northern Ireland should join the single European currency – the euro’, while people do in South. They agree with the statement that ‘border Protestants feel let down by Unionists in the rest of Northern Ireland’ and that ‘in the border region the main division is between Catholics and Protestants rather than between North and South’ in the North, while people do not in the South. People more strongly agree that ‘Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK’ in the North, than those in the South.

**Similarity between North and South in our sample:**
People from both sides agree with the statement, ‘there should be more integrated schools for Catholics and Protestants children in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic’, with ‘re-opening the border has been very important for the prosperity of my area’, and with ‘cross-border co-operation will lead to prosperity in the border region’. People from both sides think ‘cross-border co-operation has increased only because of EU and peace money’ and ‘in 20 years time Northern Ireland will still be part of the UK’. They all support cross-border co-operation for each of the following activities: agriculture, education, health and security.
Summary

Our previous researches examined the main factors affecting cross-border activities in the border areas (MOLNÁR, J. 2005). Five main factors were found:

1. physical obstacles
   a. geographical barriers (mountains, rivers, see, etc.)
   b. barriers were built by humans (check points, road closures, etc)
2. historical relationships
3. economic situation
4. political situation (wars, strong hostility, etc)
5. settlements structure (rural or urban area)

In this paper attitudes of border people based on a questionnaire survey were researched. Correlation between border people’s attitude and their cross-border activities was investigated. In the case of people living in the North, they cross the border more frequently when their attitude about the importance of crossing the border for work and for buying petrol is stronger. Those who cross the border more frequently, quite often said that they would be happy to move to live in the other side of the border. Those who often visit places on the other side of the border, probably find that area more familiar. But to summarise our results concerning different attitude variables and frequency of border crossings, the main factors influencing movement relate to economic and practical considerations rather than matters of political beliefs or personal attitudes.

There are intensive cross-border activities in both directions but, significantly, border crossing by those living on the northern side is twice as high as south to north movement. Border towns play a centre role in the region from both sides. The main aims of people going
to the neighbouring country are correlated with business or financial advantage (e.g. getting some products cheaper). Maintaining relationships is important too, but border crossing specifically to visit relatives and friends constitutes a small proportion of the whole cross-border movement.

All respondents tend to think that ‘in 20 years time Northern Ireland will still be part of the UK’ despite both Nationalists and Catholics disagreeing that Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK. It seems that Protestants, Unionists, Catholics’, Nationalists’ and British’ feel distance rather between people with different cultures, but Irish people opinions about the divisions were of a more straightforwardly political nature. However, we should note that in Ireland ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’ might have been seen by some respondents of the survey as synonymous with ‘Unionist’ and ‘Nationalist’ rather than strictly relating to religious practices and ideologies and this may obscure our view of how attitudes to the border relate to nationality, political and religious affiliation. Furthermore, it was not our aim to examine the levels of tolerance and harmony among people with different religions, customs, nationalities and cultures within the border region but it would be an appropriate direction in which to continue this research area.

**Bibliography**


