

Perspectives on the Borderless World - Issues for Canada

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In August, 1999, a multi-disciplinary group of boundary scholars assembled in Vancouver to discuss a wide range of issues arising under the general heading of the 'borderless world'.¹ The gathering met under the aegis of the International Boundaries Research Unit (IBRU) of the University of Durham, England.² IBRU conferences have a loyal international following, but the Vancouver Conference injected a stronger North American flavour to the proceedings than is usually the case with its annual conferences. Accordingly, much attention was focused on the Americas. Groups of papers also examined contemporary boundary issues in Europe, as well as a range of theoretical issues and approaches, intractable disputes, the possible uses of diplomacy, and challenges thrown up by technology. A session devoted to graduate students allowed younger scholars to present their work to an international audience drawn from a wide variety of disciplines.

The papers were presented in an academic setting, and, as is usual, addressed over-arching themes identified by the organisers. It seemed to the present writers (who are editing the proceedings for publication) that many of the themes and issues explored had some relevance for contemporary Canadian policy-making as regards borders and boundaries. This paper attempts to synthesise some of the ideas discussed at the Conference and to focus them on aspects of the Canadian 'borderless world' agenda.

One of the recurrent themes in these conference papers is that of the projected end, or survival, or re-definition, of the nation-state. Some months after the conference, this was the theme of an address to both Houses of the Parliament of

1 *Permeable Borders and Boundaries in a Globalising World: New Opportunities or Old Problems?*, Conference organised by the International Boundaries Research Unit (IBRU), University Of Durham, UK with the Department of National Defence, (Maritime Forces Pacific), Okanagan University College, Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia and University College of the Cariboo, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, August 25 – 27, 1999.

2 IBRU is an inter-disciplinary research and training organization located on the campus of the University of Durham, England. It produces numerous regular publications on issues relating to boundaries, undertakes research and consulting services, organizes annual training programmes on various aspects of boundary-making, and also organizes an annual conference on a theme of contemporary importance. The 1999 Conference was the first held by IBRU in Canada; the present writers co-chaired the Organising Committee.