

Seattle's Cascadia Connections

Matthew Sparke, University of Washington

Conceptualized originally as a bioregion spanning the 49th parallel, Cascadia has been reimagined in the age of NAFTA as a bi-national business region. The "eco" of the original eco-regional maps has in this way been taken over by the "eco" of economic interconnection maps: the natural green of the Cascade mountains and forests being used to naturalize the integration and paper-thin greenery (think dollar signs) of cross-border capitalist growth. The business boosters thereby chart a "Main Street Cascadia" linking Vancouver, Seattle and Portland. They promote British Columbia, Washington and Oregon together as a 'gateway region' for Pacific Rim capital and cash-carrying tourists. And they imagine new developmental synergies within the wider Pacific Northwest Economic Region. Compete globally, they say, by collaborating locally.

All this economic imagining has historical-geographical antecedents. Back in 1924 the Seattle Chamber of Commerce published a booklet by Erwin Weber entitled: *In the zone of filtered sunshine. Why the Pacific Northwest is destined to dominate the commercial world.* The cover featured a graphic map that circled the same binational region being promoted today. Like today's promoters, Weber also appealed to natural history to argue for the region's natural future as a commercial

center. However, the way in which he did so was through a white supremacist version of environmental determinism that would probably horrify today's boosters. Citing Ellsworth Huntington, Weber argued thus that the region would take off commercially because its cloudy climate would attract the "most energetic" and "most virile human types" from the world's "highest and most enduring civilizations" in northern Europe. Today, by contrast, this geopolitical and overtly racist outlook, has been replaced by a geoeconomic and multicultural management vision. Cascadia can compete successfully, goes the argument, because its diverse immigrant communities create connections for trans-Pacific commerce.

Despite their competitive drive and connections, Cascadia's economic imagineers have little to show for all their imaginative geography. The border has not been bulldozed. Economic interdependencies across it are less significant than others that tie BC to Canada, and Washington and Oregon to the US. And meanwhile some of same environmental concerns that inspired the original bioregional maps – the problems facing the region's forests, rivers, salmon and orca – urgently call for cross-border solutions that business interests block.

Where the boosters have failed or feared to tread, however, geographers from Canada and the U.S. have more recently traced new trails: reappropriating the term Cascadia to name a series of regional conferences. This year, at the fifth annual Cascadia Critical Geography Conference at the University of Victoria, a transnational group of us agreed to share reflections on some of the cross-border geographies that this critical work brings into view. We can only point to a few of the issues erased by the boosters' boasts

about the region, but we hope our remappings are nonetheless useful guides for other geographers who want to make sense of Cascadia's connections and contradictions when they visit Seattle in April.

Inventing the Salish Sea

Reuben Rose-Redwood and Brian Tucker, University of Victoria

On July 15, 2010, members of the Songhees Nation welcomed government officials and people from across the region to their Longhouse on the southern tip of Vancouver Island. The occasion

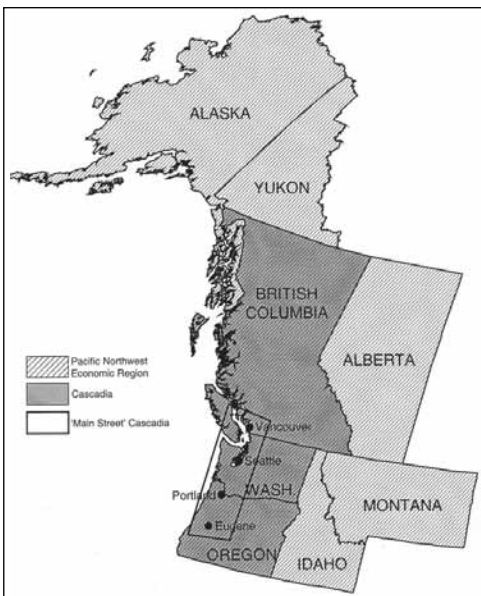
was a ceremony to celebrate the official designation of the 'Salish Sea' as a new name for the inland waters along the coast of BC and Washington. This new name acknowledges the enduring presence of the Coast Salish peoples in the region while also cartographically uniting waterways that had previously been thought of as distinct geographical features—the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Georgia Strait, and Puget Sound—into a new transnational space.

The renaming did not occur overnight. In

1988, Bert Webber (a biology professor at Western Washington University) had applied for the Salish Sea designation to the Washington State Board on Geographical Names as well as the BC Office of the Geographical Names Board of Canada. His chief concern was fostering environmental awareness, and he sought to make a case that, since the three waterways constituted an integrated marine ecosystem, they should be given a collective name. Yet initially Webber's bioregional proposal did not win governmental approval because the new name was not in common usage. Over the next two decades, as the movement to



Seattle Department of Commerce booklet cover, courtesy of University of Washington Libraries.



Map of Cascadia and region by Matthew Sparke.

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envision this cross-border region as Cascadia gained momentum, a growing number of people on both sides of the border began to refer to the region's waters as the "Salish Sea," and so when Webber reapplied in 2008, the renaming was approved.

Given the role that common usage plays in shaping official naming practices, the recent designation of the Salish Sea highlights how the spatial identities of supposedly natural features are socially constructed through toponymic performances. We often lose sight of this performative dimension of place-making. Yet, it is not every day that a new sea is born, and it's precisely during these moments of toponymic transformation that the fluidity of place becomes evident: not least of all in the Salish Sea.

Linking Sustainable Cities

Cameron Owens, University of Victoria

Cities in our region are often seen as innovative exemplars of sustainability and livability. While the familiar ills of North American urbanism – automobile dependence, sprawl, over-consumption, social marginalization – remain evident in Seattle, Portland and Vancouver, the region is also increasingly associated with environmentally sensitive urban planning.



Map of Salish Sea, courtesy of Stefan Freelan, Western Washington University, 2009.

These are cities noted for their environmental consciousness, parks, access to the coastal mountain outdoors, and lively public spaces. Vancouver, the birthplace of Greenpeace and the city that rejected freeways, has been proclaimed "the poster child of North American urbanism." "Vancouverism" has even entered the lexicon of urban professionals. Meanwhile, the so-called Emerald City may not have the green cred of its neighbor to the north, but "Sustainable Seattle" is still seen as a leader in urban efforts to respond to climate change. Further south, Portland is often imagined as America's greenest city: a place where bikes and streetcars are prominent transit options, where green spaces are knit into the urban fabric, and a progressive regional planning culture has evolved to respect urban growth boundaries. And linking up these metropolitan areas, a bigger cross-border project of sustainability is imagined in the form of a high-speed rail line designed to enhance ties along the Cascadia corridor.

This is still a region of voracious consumption, far from any reasonable definition of sustainability. Further, to the extent that discrimination, dramatic inequalities and homelessness are central to the local social experience, these cities are not livable for everyone. However, the evolving planning imaginations of Cascadia still justify our attention.

Peace-Arching Across Cascadia?

Sara Koopman, University of British Columbia

Vancouver, British Columbia is four hours north of Seattle on a train ride that winds along the coast. If you add Vancouver to your conference plans you will pass by the Peace Arch as you cross the border. A huge marble and iron affair with gates symbolically held always open, it was built in 1914 to celebrate one hundred years of peace between, no, not Canada and the US, but Great Britain and the U.S.

But does peace truly arch across this border? Well, the movement for peace and justice has, but only on occasion. In 1952, Paul Robeson, a singer then blacklisted for his activism for justice, was prevented from entering Canada. In protest both the Canadian and U.S. labor movements organized a concert at the peace arch, which he held again for the next three years.

More recently, in 2001 approximately 5,000 Canadian and U.S. global justice activists came together again at the arch. We shut down the border crossing for several hours to protest the negotiations being held in Quebec City for a Free Trade Area of the Americas. This was rather different than the annual "hands across the border" celebration of peace held at the arch most years in June since 1937 – with parade marshals, anthems, veterans and boy scouts. But is peace something to be kept by troops or built through justice? Geography has studied the making of war far more than the making of peace – and recent work on peace has tended to treat it as simply the absence of war. In an era of "new" war, when predator drones now patrol even this "peaceful" border between the U.S. and Canada, the peace arch can serve us as a reminder of how spaces of peace have to be made and made again. ■



A gathering at the Peace Arch.



Amtrak Cascades links the many urban nodes of Pugetopolis.

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