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## Reporting on Cascadia: The Evolution of a Cross-Border Media Ecosystem

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REPORTING ON CASCADIA:  
The Evolution of a  
Cross-Border Media Ecosystem

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the news media environment of the U.S./Canada cross-border region known as Cascadia, which includes British Columbia, Washington state, and Oregon. It analyzes both the journalistic content and processes that drive media coverage in this cross-border region.

To better understand the unique dynamics of reporting about this area, the author conducted in-depth interviews with media practitioners from multiple news publications and outlets. Such interviews not only inform how Cascadia is understood thematically and contextually, but also how the concept of Cascadia drives media attention and audience interest. This research analyzes how news media—as an outgrowth of regional communication and culture—can shift existing views of political, economic and ecological life, especially as the Cascadia concept grapples with concurrent themes of political cooperation, economic prosperity, social responsibility, and environmental protection.

The results show that while reporters and media enterprises on the whole embrace the concept and promise of Cascadia, they are sometimes limited by organizational personnel and/or financial resources. Furthermore, prominent issues in the region—including economic activity and environmental politics—are very much aligned with the same topics at the national or international level. Cascadia thus represents larger issues in North American public life. In particular, the two-nation dichotomy of Cascadia exists in spite of longstanding cultural and economic linkages. The existence of an international border looms large in news production in terms of reporting logistics and expenses, but also in terms of the psychology related to the border. However, ecological events in particular mitigate such boundaries and drive media coverage that situates Cascadia as a more seamless bioregion.

## AUTHOR

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The vision of a culturally cohesive, politically cooperative, and ecologically sustainable Cascadia border region continues to grow in popularity with each passing year. Cascadia is understood as a region that includes much of British Columbia, Washington State, and Oregon—and in particular the geography lying between the Cascade Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. Alper (1996) describes it as a binational and ecological region home to concurrent visions aimed at fostering and improving economic or environmental conditions, and mitigating the effect of its international border. Cascadia presents a compelling case study in how culture and communication shape our understanding of political and cultural space. The ties that bind this region are enhanced not only through formal institutions and longstanding cultural linkages. They are cemented by concurrent visions of how humankind might interface with ecology, urbanity, and industrial/commercial activity in the future. Specific initiatives such as the Cascadia Innovation Corridor, launched in 2017, remind this region's citizens and leaders that pro-active collaboration in commerce, transportation, and the environment can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes for both countries in the Cascadia partnership. At the same time, inter-regional (and international) differences or tensions related to policy highlight the complexity of the region and the importance of civic media in telling Cascadia's story.

While the Cascadia concept is typically understood through interpretations of regional geography, it has gained increasing traction over the decades through social and cultural variables. For example, the Cascadia border region enjoys an enduring appeal with visitors on account of tourism opportunities, which leverage the area's grand open spaces and national parks. Its industries, which include high-technology, transportation and logistics, outdoors apparel and goods, tourism, film production, and resources extraction activities, have made it a prominent location for economic investment. Meanwhile, representations in popular culture such as movies, television, and literature articulate a vision of Cascadia for audiences around North America and the world—one that highlights the unique social character of the region and its unparalleled connection to the natural world.

While some attention has been paid to the concept of Cascadia as a brand, particularly as a place brand (Smith, 2008), far less is known about how contemporary news media interpret the region as an urban and ecological geography. While Cascadia's largest cities feature relatively healthy media markets, including metropolitan broadsheet newspapers along with multiple television and radio stations and digital media enterprises, the overlap of interests between these Cascadia media markets and their journalistic output is arguably downplayed. A similar dynamic exists for local journalism enterprises in smaller communities, with few conceptualized strictly as Cascadia-bound entities. However, producers and consumers of news are increasingly attuned to the possibilities embedded within a Cascadia jurisdiction. That recognition in turn has some influence on the direction of news in the region. In short, news producers are well aware of their existence within a Cascadia concept, even if coverage of the region is not their highest priority.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 CASCADIA'S MEDIA AND NEWS

North America's Cascadia region (see Figure 1). has long been understood through its dramatic geography. It is an area of mountain peaks, rainforests, rocky coastlines, secluded inlets, and storied rivers. This rugged landscape has helped foster an economy that remains immersed in natural resources industries—notably forestry, fishing, mining, and agriculture—and subsequent industries that have arisen from this resources legacy. In turn, Cascadia's economy has driven the growth of social institutions and the region's metropolitan centers. This recent activity is embedded in a much longer human history in the region, driven in particular by the longstanding inhabitation of Coast Salish tribal nations. This confluence of history, culture, and commerce has established numerous cultural forms that collectively help articulate the identity of the region's human population. This includes the news media.

Given this landscape, this study seeks to answer two key questions about the news media in the region. First, what does coverage of the cross-border Cascadia border region look like from the vantage-point of metropolitan, regional, or local news media? Secondly, what are the journalistic processes that impact coverage about Cascadia by reporters and media outlets? To answer these questions, the author conducted in-depth interviews with over a dozen media practitioners, including reporters and editors, who are invested in Cascadia through previous reporting or publishing/editorial activities. Such interviews not only informed how Cascadia is understood thematically, but also how the concept drives media attention and audience interest.

This research, supported by the Border Policy Research Institute at Western Washington University, is relevant not only for media scholars and practitioners and those who are interested in Cascadia as a conceptual geography. It also holds significance for those seeking to understand how communication and culture can shift existing views of political and



Figure 1: Map of Cascadia ([Wikicommons](#) 2020)

ecological institutions, such as policymakers, public communicators, and community organizers. This is especially true as the Cascadia concept grapples with emergent themes of quality of life, economic prosperity, social responsibility, and climate change mitigation.

## 2.2 NEWS VALUES

The production of news has long been understood to be contingent on so-called “newsworthiness,” a term that describes the extent to which a story warrants journalistic attention and media placement. Journalism scholars have for many decades asked the question of “what makes news” (Harcup, 2017) in order to understand what stories get told and how they are articulated or framed. Galtung and Ruge’s news taxonomy (1965) offered 12 factors that help determine what stories are reported in international news: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, people, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, references to elites, and negativity.

Contemporarily, journalism educators and undergraduate textbooks regularly highlight the variables that drive story selection and salience. For example, the seven news values held by media gatekeepers are asserted to be impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, oddity, conflict, and relevance (Walsh, 2013). The degree to which these values are embedded in news is dependent on the unique nature of each media organization, including business model, media format, ownership structure, and the political positions of publishers and editorial leadership: “Different organizations might place deep importance on certain values while considering others less important” (Walsh, 2013, para. 18). Related to this, Schultz (2007) refers to a “journalistic gut feeling” within the professional understanding of how editors and reporters decide upon story choice and emphasis.

## 2.3 SPATIAL AND TRANSBOUNDARY MEDIA FLOWS

Another lens through which to understand the production and mediation of journalism within Cascadia while also considering its larger social impact is cultural economy. As a form of both culture and commercial activity, the production of news makes a significant contribution to the Cascadia economic engine—through the generation of media-generated commerce and trade, but also through promotion, persuasion, and public deliberation of economic topics. In the binational sense, an economic perspective that emphasizes cultural, administrative, geographic, and economic variables fosters understanding of the news media’s important role. The mitigation of national or regional difference through jointly pursued social, political, and economic activity plays a heightened role in fostering greater trade and movement of capital and people between nations or global cities (Estrin, Cote, & Shapiro, 2018).

The relative proximity of the Cascadia region’s three major economic centers in this international zone—Vancouver, Seattle, and Portland—to one another also emphasizes regional flows of media, information, and goods. A Canada-UK collaboration published in



2019—comprised of researchers from the London School of Economics, Western University, and Simon Fraser University—found that the trading of goods is influenced by physical distance. This spatial emphasis helps contextualize the concurrent opportunity for greater movement of media in spite of regulatory hurdles presented by the U.S./Canada border. It also echoes a description of the metropolitan corridor between Portland and Vancouver, including Seattle, as an economic “mega-region” (Florida, 2015). This description is based not only on the region’s economic output of roughly \$600 billion annually, but also upon another material underpinning: satellite images of the region at night (Florida, Gulden, & Mellander, 2007), which visually connote a connected, densely-populated urban geography (see Figure 2).

Finally, regional and cross-border news production is aligned with major political events, ecological crises, economic announcements, and human-interest stories. According to communication theorists Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992), the live broadcasting of world rituals or “media events” have the potential to transform nations and societies. Seen through this lens, these stories can draw global interest to a time- or space-specific event (Dayan & Katz, 1992). As media artifacts, these news stories can transfix local but also international audiences and can situate news events as a public spectacle. Building on a theoretical understanding of news media production as embedded in professional practices but also contextual and political economic considerations, this report is concerned with understanding both what drives news media narratives about Cascadia and how such coverage articulates an understanding of the region.



Figure 2: Salish Sea at Night ([Cascadia Department of Bioregion 2020](#))

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

In order to gauge the opinions of news industry professionals about Cascadia's news, including reporters and editors, this study conducted in-depth interviews with journalists from multiple media outlets in the Cascadia corridor. In explaining the value of the qualitative in-depth interview, McCracken (1988) describes it as "one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory... The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world."

This methodology emphasizes a research sampling philosophy of "less is more" (McCracken, 1988), asserting that it is more important to work longer and with greater care with fewer people than more superficially with too many. To this end, key journalistic representatives from selected publications in the Cascadia corridor on both sides of the U.S./Canada border were invited to participate in long-form qualitative interviews conducted in-person or by telephone and video conferencing. These publications or media companies included the *Abbotsford News/Chilliwack Progress*, *The Bellingham Herald*, *The Daily Hive/Van City Buzz*, *Geekwire*, *Post Media/Vancouver Sun*, *The Northern Light*, *Mt. Baker Experience Magazine*, *Point Roberts All Point Bulletin*, *Puget Sound Business Journal*, *Osoyoos Times*, *Salish Sea Communications/Salish Current*, and *the Seattle Times*. While the Cascadia region is home to hundreds of media enterprises, these organizations were selected because they regularly (or intermittently) report on cross-border stories that impact the larger region. Prior to commencement of the interviews, the research protocol received approval (assigned protocol number EX19-123) from Western Washington University's Institutional Review Board.

The questions posed to these professionals explored the intersection of news production with regional characteristics of Cascadia. These questions pertained to the alignment of the Cascadia theme with news outlets; the potential for greater coverage of the region; and news representation of broad themes such as economy, environment, and the U.S./Canada border. Newsroom professionals were also asked about their personal views on the viability of Cascadia as a region; audience engagement with Cascadia-themed stories; editorial support from editors and managers about Cascadia topics; and engagement with public relations professionals seeking to exchange information about stories pertaining to the region or cross-border jurisdictions. Finally, they were asked about city/state/province/international dynamics, potential drawbacks, logistical hurdles, and the saliency of specific topics, such as the Cascadia Innovation Corridor, Cascadia High-Speed Rail, and the Salish Sea Orcas Task Force.

There are some limitations to such an approach. This method does not offer a quantitative-based overview of the entirety of Cascadia's media systems. Nor does it purport to capture every dimension of media that exists, including its content. Furthermore, the interviews approach means that participants in this survey opted in to such conversations. Some media organizations contacted for this study were unavailable for interview or simply did not respond to requests for participation. Indeed, some media may not have seen their role in Cascadia as centrally as others, perhaps owing to geographic or cultural factors.

This speaks more broadly to the issue of conceptual geography. There is still much debate about the boundaries of the Cascadia region, and it competes with other geographical concepts in terms of defining different parts of the region (for example, the Salish Sea or the Pacific Northwest). Some media entities at the periphery of the region (for example, its northerly/southerly reaches) may not even recognize the region, let alone their relationship with it. Because Cascadia is in many ways socially-constructed and draws from political, economic, and cultural traditions, it is bound to be subject to a wide variety of interpretations from those who interface with it. Sections of the Cascadia region with a more carefully defined geography backed by official designations, such as the Salish Sea ecosystem, are more conducive to site-specific policymaking and indeed research due to their carefully mapped boundaries.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 CASCADIA THE ASPIRATIONAL

In spite of jurisdictional borders, media practitioners recognize the strong linkages of Cascadia and the similarities between cities and communities. In many ways, that connectedness is cultural: a heightened awareness of ecological issues, a pride in the region's major cities, and an appreciation for popular culture, such as food, entertainment, and sport that is unique to the area's collective jurisdictions and cities.

To many reporters, Cascadia is more of an aspired vision or regional utopia than a concrete entity or topic that warrants frequent news coverage. As one journalist lamented, "It's bizarre that in an era of globalization there is so little happening in this fascinating space. The tourists go back and forth but what does that add up to?" Another reporter noted that media professionals sometimes take their cues from civic leaders in addressing the region or prioritizing its policy issues: "It's something that we increasingly hear about, hearing from our elected leaders and business leaders about the importance of the region. On one hand I'm responding to what they are talking about. But sometimes, a natural thing we do in journalism, we look for comparisons (between Cascadia's major cities such as Vancouver and Seattle)."

Some reporters are generally skeptical about Cascadia-wide or cross-border policy and infrastructure proposals, even if they are personally favorable to them conceptually. For example, while they generally agreed that high-speed rail service connecting the Cascadia region from Vancouver to Eugene, Oregon could deliver economic and environmental benefits, they were less inclined to write about the project without tangible progress being made. "The big picture story would work," said one Washington State journalist. "But there would be more coverage of it as it gets closer; when it's more tangible in terms of seeing things being done. It seems like something so far away. But the incremental improvements (of existing rail infrastructure serving the region) would get more traction."

An important foundation for promoting Cascadia-wide initiatives such as high-speed rail would be ensuring that Cascadia is an understood concept and brand within and outside of the region, according to one journalist. That means clarifying the definition of Cascadia and ensuring that it is widely understood with the public. "We have similar industries, similar issues, but it's a matter of how we talk about them together... For the average person, they might not know what the heck we are talking about."

One growing opportunity for media is to focus on cultural linkages. For example, Vancouver, Seattle, and Portland share similarities in terms of food and culinary traditions, including international cuisine and the sustainable sourcing of popular local dishes. Another realm for joint discussion is sport. Journalists noted that the region hosts a number of high-profile events featuring competition within the region, including the Cascadia Cup that is played by

professional teams from Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver in Major League Soccer. Additionally, sporting enthusiasts from British Columbia travel to Seattle regularly for NFL Seahawks games as well as Major League Baseball games between the Seattle Mariners and the Toronto Blue Jays. The National Hockey League has also recognized the sporting and cultural potential of Cascadia. In selecting Seattle for an expansion franchise, the NHL highlighted the ready-made rivalry between the start-up Seattle Kraken and long-established Vancouver Canucks franchises, and the opportunity to grow the sport's popularity across the region. In this sense, culture and sport serve as a beacon for the possibilities of regional exchange and cooperation in a cross-border context.

## 4.2 SYNERGIES BETWEEN MEDIA

While formal collaborations between media entities in the region are fairly rare (at least those between cities), journalists do work with each other in informal capacities to improve coverage of specific regional topics. In this sense, the notion of Cascadia informs reporting even when stories are ostensibly about one city or community. Some journalists hold up reporting from other jurisdictions to provide necessary background context or case studies. One reporter stated that he chatted informally with reporters in other parts of the region to exchange contacts, background information, and sources on similar stories. Reporters based in British Columbia reached out to academics and other experts in Washington and Oregon to inform their reporting, and vice-versa. Some of the topics driving these conversations included urban planning, environmental issues, transportation, housing affordability in urban centers, and the related homelessness crisis.

A significant breakthrough for Cascadia reporting over the past two decades is the rise of social and online media, including news websites, blogs, and social network channels like Twitter and Facebook. Their inherent nature as digital media afford a greater degree of distribution and sharing, including inter-regional and international informational flows. Journalists report taking advantage of online media to incorporate perspectives from different jurisdictions around the region. Speaking about cross-border stories, a Washington State journalist noted that his American readers benefited from the embedding of links to Canadian media stories in those articles where third-party information would widen audience perspectives or further contextualize a complex international topic. The trend toward digital sharing does have limitations, however. A British Columbia reporter indicated that while sharing between Cascadia publications makes good sense, such cooperation is sometimes stymied by intra-regional competition and existing rivalries between media outlets, particularly in-province or in-state.

However, community newspaper reporters are keen to work together on important stories: "It has been a thought," said one journalist. "If a big story was breaking, we would reach out (to other media enterprises as needed)." Reporters are generally favorable towards the notion of a Cascadia-wide news service, though cost and industry constraints are recognized as an

impediment to such a program. One reporter argued that such an initiative could be successful if it drew from expert sources in the region to explain complex stories, such as housing policies, climate change, or how tax policy changes on one side of the U.S./Canada border can lead to consumer shifts on the other. It would be successful “if it’s more of a big-picture type of publication (since) there is a public appetite for those big picture stories,” said the same reporter.

Publications and media outlets more broadly cooperate, even if informally, to better inform their readerships. For example, the McClatchy Company, which owns several major dailies in Washington state including *the Bellingham Herald*, *the News Tribune* (Tacoma), *the Olympian* (Olympia), and *the Tri-City Herald* (Kennewick) is in the enviable position of being able to distribute stories within its regional and national media network. An example of this is the McClatchy-owned *Idaho Statesman’s* extensive reporting on salmon habitat and returns in the Snake River and by extension the Columbia River watershed, which has been featured in other McClatchy publications in the Pacific Northwest, given the topic’s relevance to a larger geographic constituency. However, the company’s newspapers have also shared stories from Canada’s Postmedia Network, which owns British Columbia’s two largest newspapers by distribution, the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province*, among other Canadian metropolitan dailies.

Not all collaborations or story-sharing happen within or between media ownership groups, however. There are grassroots success stories within communities despite ongoing competition between media enterprises. Increasingly, some community newspapers in Oregon and Washington are sharing resources and collaborating to report on regional topics with high civic interest and local impact (Radcliffe, Alvarez, Powers, & Schenone, 2019).

### 4.3 THE PRESENT (AND FUTURE) OF NEWS IS LOCAL

Journalists are overwhelmingly favorable to the concept of Cascadia as a bioregion of global importance, as well as a cultural geography and an increasingly cohesive economic zone. At the same time, ever-shrinking newsroom budgets and staffs means that the focus in news media is increasingly local, with wire services and other news agencies filling in the gaps at the state/province, national, or international levels. Increasingly, news coverage beyond a publication’s immediate jurisdiction is considered a luxury, if not an impossibility. “Our focus has to be local,” said one reporter from a British Columbia community weekly. “I would say we are not ignoring Cascadia, but we are not necessarily focusing on it either.”

While the international border presents a clear political and even cultural marker between communities on either side, major cross-border events have forced journalists to break down those barriers in order to best report on key stories, especially those with hyperlocal geographic implications. A good example of this comes from the Canadian bordertown of Osoyoos in British Columbia’s Okanagan Valley. In 2019, the *Osoyoos Times* covered an 81-hectare wildfire just south of the border in nearby Oroville, Washington. The mountainside fire

was clearly visible from across the international boundary in Canada. Despite having a staff of only two journalists, the newspaper was able to put together a comprehensive news package by drawing from visual imagery, first-hand citizen accounts, and experts via social media channels such as Twitter. This included video footage of the fire itself, as well as official government comments from Oroville and Washington state officials. The newspaper was also cross-referencing its reporting with the Washington Department of Ecology. Reader interest was heightened further when firefighters from Osoyoos travelled to Oroville to help fight the blaze. Establishing a network of cross-border contacts and policy insights would prove to be key for the future, as another wildfire just south of Osoyoos in 2020 warranted similar media attention. Reporting local stories in a Cascadia context thus allows for an interplay of transboundary reporting and civic engagement between jurisdictions. Community stories about impactful environmental events or crises highlight this dynamic.

The international border also looms large in the life of Cascadia in political, economic, and cultural senses. Within the news media, the Canada/U.S. boundary is first and foremost a generator of news. Reporters have covered a range of stories from infrastructure improvements to immigration law, and from cross-border shopping to drug smuggling. But for media, the border also represents a particular kind of challenge in terms of reporting about the region. As one Vancouver reporter noted, “that border is harder than you think it is and should be. Journalistically, it’s a pretty powerful entity.” Another BC reporter pointed out that it looms large in a strictly psychological sense—for reporters but also their readers. Border topics, sometimes even involving individual accounts of crossing into the other country, are a driver of letters to the editor in some bordertown community newspapers. There is also a recognition that border officials in both countries are attuned to local media coverage, especially because community newspapers are often the first to report on changes in travel or customs policy and because they provide first-hand accounts from community members.

Some journalists in bordertown communities personally interface with the border when they travel across for shopping, leisure, or work. One reporter recalled a colleague who happened to be crossing into the U.S. for leisure when a particular crossing went into lockdown (which later turned out to be a false alarm). This is a reminder, however, that journalism ideas and news are often fostered through lived, first-hand experiences of reporters and editors, and Cascadia is no exception in this regard.

#### 4.4 THE RISE OF THE NON-PROFIT JOURNALISM MODEL

As mainstream media entities encounter growing economic challenges resulting from intensifying competition, shifting audience demographics, shrinking profit margins, and technological disruptions, at least one media model is showing signs of resilience. Independent news sites, often operating as not-for-profit organizations or charities, offer readers news and information that mirrors reader interests and citizen priorities.



One such non-profit enterprise is British Columbia's *The Tyee*, based in Vancouver. Founded by David Beers in 2003, the news website offers "fact-driven stories, reporting, and analysis that informs and enlivens our democratic conversation." About half of *The Tyee's* revenues come from a combination of reader donations and advertising dollars. The other half is funded by BC philanthropists Eric Peterson and Christina Munck, who also fund *Hakai Magazine*. And while the website's content is decidedly BC-centric, it also produces stories that speak to BC's "connection to the Pacific bioregion that extends from Alaska to Northern California." In recent times, that Cascadia coverage has included reporting devoted to differing protections of coastal grey whales on either side of the U.S./Canada border; Washington state governor Jay Inslee's alignment with climate change objectives in British Columbia; and the impact of the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion on the Salish Sea's southern resident killer whales.

South of the border, several independent U.S. media enterprises are also looking to the larger Cascadia region as part of their coverage. Seattle-based *Crosscut*, which was founded in 2005, is, like *The Tyee*, an early leader in online-only news. It focuses on themes of sustainability, urban issues like transportation and housing policy, and city/state government topics. In 2015, the publication merged with Seattle's public television station KCTS 9 to become a single nonprofit called Cascade Public Media. The combined staff of journalists produces news devoted to public policy, the environment, race and equity, and the arts.

More recent non-profit media initiatives have centered on the transboundary cultural and ecological experiences of the region. *Cascadia Magazine* was launched in 2018 by Andrew Engelson to focus on the region's diverse range of "cultures, ethnicities, religions, opinions, and beliefs" in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia and to bridge the divide between urban and rural communities while building connections on both sides of the U.S./Canada border. The magazine, premised on the understanding of Cascadia as a bioregion, has included features about the establishment of North Cascades National Park, First Nations salmon fishing traditions, and the housing affordability crises facing Vancouver, Seattle, and Portland. It also featured poems, essays, and interviews with area writers, musicians, and activists before ceasing publication in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated economic downturn.

#### 4.4.1 CASE STUDY: SALISH SEA COMMUNICATIONS

Similar to *Cascadia Magazine* in terms of a bioregional focus, the *Salish Sea News and Weather*, published by Salish Sea Communications, tracks numerous stories across the Salish Sea transborder ecosystem for email subscribers. The publication's weekday content is a curated aggregation of news articles about wilderness areas, industrial projects, beach clean-ups, climate change topics, and border-specific issues. The newsletter's founder, Mike Sato, is also the managing editor of Bellingham-based *Salish Current*, a non-profit news site that serves Whatcom, San Juan, and Skagit counties in Washington State.



The origins of *Salish Sea News* go back to 1997, when Sato began *Puget Sound News and Weather* as part of the membership organization People for Puget Sound to track environmental stories. After leaving the organization in 2012, he renamed the publication as *Salish Sea News and Weather* and expanded aggregation and curation of news articles to both sides of the BC/Washington State border. While coverage is focused primarily on the Puget Sound-Georgia Strait zone, it also looks to interconnected issues playing out across the Northwest, from salmon runs in the Columbia River to debates over wolves in Montana and Idaho.

Between its blog and email services, *Salish Sea News* has about 2,500 subscribers. While this is not a large number compared to mainstream news publications, the publication is influential, and reaches policymakers in science, government, higher education, and transportation.

Sato believes that the not-profit model, which treats news like a public good, is the future for news in the transboundary Cascadia region. A cross-border focus allows publications like the *Salish Sea News* to reach a dynamic urban corridor connecting the Vancouver and Seattle metropolitan regions. "This is an incredible metro area of 7 million people within a 1.5 hour drive," he said. "Think about it that way in terms of doing business. In the media, the first thing we think about is who will pay for it? This area is going to grow, we know that."

With the *Salish Current* publication, Sato is looking to adjoin hyperlocal issues in Washington's State's northwest quadrant to macro-political, economic, and environmental topics. The open-access format publication contains original news content as well as a weekly newsletter that highlights original reporting and a curated aggregation of news from northwestern Washington State. Sato points to the recent closure of an aluminum manufacturing facility in Ferndale, Washington as an example of the kind of story that requires in-depth and multi-dimensional journalistic attention and community reporting. "We want to create a community forum (with *Salish Current*) with people who are thoughtful and can communicate different issues around a subject."

## 4.5 THE BUSINESS OF METROPOLITAN CASCADIA

Though journalism has faced difficult economic times over the past two decades, business journalism has held its ground and in some cases has defied negative forecasts for the media industry. This is in great part due to strong economic activity in British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon over the past decade. Stories about real estate development, aviation and shipping, and high-technology/biotechnology have attracted strong readership locally and beyond the region.

Housing markets present a special focal point. The major metropolises of Cascadia have seen astronomical rises in the price of residential real estate. As one reporter noted, however, Vancouver's market had the earlier start (going back to the early 2000s), and the Canadian

market did not endure the same fall in housing prices that occurred in the United States during the 2008 global recession. Ever-rising prices in the Metro Vancouver region over nearly two decades created significant wealth for property owners and jobs for the construction sector; but they also displaced renters through gentrification. High prices also proved to be a barrier to adequate housing for middle- and working-class individuals and families.

Intense policy debates eventually led to a tax on properties purchased by foreign buyers (the BC Foreign Buyers Tax). Through continual reporting about this issue, Vancouver journalists developed significant expertise in this broader realm which included related threads about offshore investment, developer regulation, urban densification, and affordable housing policies. Lessons from Vancouver's experience were eventually relayed to media publications south of the border, including Seattle, where prices also became untenable for local residents during that city's most recent real estate boom.

While Vancouver's reporters have proven to be well-versed in what causes the price of housing to go up, they are more likely to take their cues from Seattle, and its dynamic economic environment, for stories about technology and innovation. A Vancouver reporter noted that while major companies headquartered in Seattle, including Amazon, Starbucks, and Microsoft, were among the largest in the world, BC's list of corporate leaders was more modest. These differences help determine journalistic expertise in different markets. What is clear is that reporters strive to improve their reporting of certain business topics by looking to other cities in Cascadia, and that is particularly true of the Seattle-Vancouver relationship. "I think we can learn a lot from each other, and we admire each other," said one reporter, speaking to the mutual admiration between the two metropolises.

#### 4.5.1. CASE STUDY: REPORTING BORDERTOWN ECONOMIES

While the COVID-19 pandemic saw the flow of cross-border passenger traffic at land crossings come to a standstill for much of 2020, the British Columbia/Washington boundary region historically enjoys a robust exchange of commerce, including retail and tourism activity. This has created unique opportunities for journalists on both sides of the border. One of those journalists is Dave Gallagher, who covers business issues in Washington State's northwest corner for the *Bellingham Herald*. While Gallagher's work is primarily focused on Whatcom County's economic activity, including commercial enterprises, real estate, and small business, his beat often leads to stories covering relevant developments in British Columbia.

Whatcom County's proximity to the Canadian border presents unique opportunities for various enterprises. For example, some Canadian companies have established operations in border towns like Blaine in order to establish a U.S. market presence. Gallagher provides a well-known case in point: Nature's Path, which is originally from Richmond, BC. The company presents not only a compelling story for readers because of the profile of its retail products; it also employs a significant number of people in Blaine.

For Gallagher, who originally worked with the *Bellingham Business Journal* before joining the Herald in 2005, the border lends a unique dynamic to business coverage in the Bellingham area. He also cites one other crucial variable influencing the prominence of the business stories he covers: his city's location between Seattle and Vancouver. Rising real estate prices and investment in both metropolises have created new business opportunities in Whatcom County, but have also put pressure on the local residential real estate market.

In fact, there may be more substantial stories than local journalists have the bandwidth to cover. Gallagher is among a small handful of U.S.-based reporters who regularly examine economic and political variables in BC to better contextualize business realities in the northwest corner of Washington State. He collects data from a number of sources, including stories that are pitched his way but also cross-border indexes. He actively seeks out relevant information from Canadian sources, including BC media and Stats Canada.

Gallagher is not alone in emphasizing the importance of sources for regional reporting. News reporters maintain that in covering Cascadia's cross-border stories, having ready access to expert sources is key. That is because journalists examining issues in cross-border contexts are often confronted with different regulatory environments and political systems.

According to Gallagher, the infrastructure of existing media systems means that the U.S. press in general tends to under-report what is happening in British Columbia, particularly if their mandate is focused on the state or national level. "For being so close, 20 miles from the border, the lack of information we get about BC is always surprising to me," said Gallagher. He points to the growth of Abbotsford, BC and in particular the success of its airport, which connects BC's Fraser Valley to cities across the continent via national airlines and charter services. The expansion of that airport has led to its emergence as a regional competitor to Bellingham's own airport, as both airports have targeted discount and vacation travelers from the Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley jurisdictions. While the Abbotsford airport's growth story was well-documented in Vancouver media, it came mostly as a surprise to people in Bellingham. Gallagher says that his own coverage of regional airports attracts strong interest, especially in terms of airlines adding new destinations or cancelling existing services.

While Gallagher says his cross-border reporting generally attracts solid readership on both sides of the border, some stories have even gone viral. During 2012, when the Canadian dollar reached near-parity with the U.S. greenback, Bellingham area retailers enjoyed a surge of customers from British Columbia. That meant booming business for Bellingham's retailers but it also led to crowding at popular retailers like Costco, and complaints about parking and shortages on products such as milk. A Bellingham shopper went so far as to start a Facebook page to demand American-only shopping hours at the warehouse retailers. Gallagher's story about the incident for the Herald garnered coverage across the U.S. and Canada, including CNN and CBC, and helped put a spotlight on Bellingham's cross-border retail politics.

Gallagher points to another retail story that attracted strong interest from Canadian and American readers alike: the arrival of Trader Joe's in Bellingham. Though the national grocer does not have a presence in Canada, the Trader Joe's brand was well-known among some Canadians, and the retailer's Bellingham location quickly became a popular destination for cross-border shoppers. Its arrival also led to the unauthorized selling of Trader Joe's products in nearby Vancouver at a retailer called "Pirate Joe's". A subsequent legal battle between the store and Trader Joe's led to much attention from the international press, including the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*.

## 4.6 THE HIGH-TECH CORRIDOR

Within Cascadia, one of the key catalysts for the movement of people and capital is the high-technology industry. The growth of Seattle as a global center for high-technology activity has fostered much regional media coverage but also an influx of national and international reporters. For some media outlets, the linkages between Seattle and other high-tech centers in the Cascadia region such as Portland and Vancouver has expanded the original technology sector footprint from which business journalists report.

Some of this expansion and mobility is driven by economic imperatives. For example, wages in British Columbia's technology sector are significantly lower than technology hubs south of the border, and this has provided incentivization for some Seattle-headquartered companies to move part of their operations north of the border. Another incentive for American companies to locate some of their activities in Canada is immigration law and worker mobility. It is generally easier for foreign technology professionals to immigrate to Canada than the U.S. due to differences in immigration policies and systems.

This has created a dynamic in which some of Seattle's major technology organizations have looked to British Columbia to expand their businesses, in turn fostering media attention regionally and nationally. Recent examples of this north-bound mobility include Seattle-based Amazon, which in December of 2019 announced that it would lease Vancouver's former Canada Post headquarters in order to establish over 1 million square feet of office space for up to 7,000 workers. In 2015, Seattle's Microsoft announced the Microsoft Canada Excellence Centre in downtown Vancouver, which projected a \$90 billion boost to British Columbia's economy. This activity has prompted local media outlets to pursue business and economy stories outside of their traditional jurisdictions as they follow their local companies' expansion into new markets.

### 4.6.1 CASE STUDY: JOURNALING THE GEEK ECONOMY

The technology revolution in Cascadia has fostered like-minded media entities covering stories about start-ups, venture capital, gaming, software, artificial intelligence, digital entertainment, and more. One of these is *Geekwire*, a national technology news website headquartered in

Seattle. *Geekwire* was started in 2011 by journalism veterans John Cook and Todd Bishop, who previously covered the Pacific Northwest technology community. According to co-founder Cook, the publication's relationship with Cascadia helps set *Geekwire* apart from its competitors. "We have that Pacific Northwest DNA," he said, noting that the publication's core coverage area stretches from BC to Oregon to Idaho, with Seattle being at the heart of its reporting. Additionally, its annual *Geekwire* Awards celebrating tech sector successes and start-ups take submissions from across the Cascadia region; while the *Geekwire* 200 Index of Pacific Northwest start-ups includes companies from Portland, Vancouver, and other regional technology centers.

In part, that regional focus is a byproduct of following the evolution of the local technology industry. But it is also premised on the idea that Cascadia's technology companies play an outsized role in international business. "We're not spending resources in each of those (regional) areas, but we're setting out to be a Cascadia media organization," he said. "We come at it as covering the innovation economy here, because what happens here happens everywhere. It's a regional approach that plays into a national approach. We are national but we are also deeply hyperlocal."

The ongoing interplay of national and local media coverage about the Cascadian economy is one that Cook has watched with strong interest over several decades. In the past, the Pacific Northwest often played a peripheral role in terms of its coverage in national media publications like the *New York Times*. Yet the technology industry has changed that. "Nobody cared about what was going on in Seattle and the Northwest...unless it was grunge or some weird outlandish stories," he said, "but now I see a lot of national coverage." He points to recent coverage of Washington State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic by PBS's *Frontline* and the *New Yorker*, which put a spotlight on both public policy health measures and also the work of scientists and medical experts.

## 4.7 THE CASCADIA BIOREGION: ENVIRONMENTAL UTOPIA AND CRISIS

Journalists from most publications, whether in major urban centers or smaller community dailies, maintain that the environment is a critical driver of stories about the Cascadia cross-border region. As one journalist put it: "It is a bioregion that connects us in so many ways: It's a region of salmon and fir trees and rivers." Another editor argued that the bioregion underpins the social life of the Cascadia and Salish Sea regions: "It's really important to think about the region as integrated between the water, the land, the sky, education, economy, and transportation in terms of a shared culture and resources. It has always been the case for environmental protection."

The natural bounty of British Columbia, Oregon, and Washington State has long made the region a favorite for tourists from across North America and the world. As tastes move towards themes of sustainability and outdoor recreation, the region's mountain ranges, coastlines, and

protected wilderness areas have helped grow the region's reputation. This has helped situate Cascadia as a natural utopia in travel brochures and also in popular culture offerings from film and literature.

While this dimension drives some of the news media's coverage, another environmental beat that drives reporting is environmental protection. This genre of reporting enjoys a longstanding tradition going back many decades. In the 1980s and 1990s, for example, there was a strong focus on logging and fishing policy in the region. Independent environmental policies have set up different regulatory frameworks between jurisdictions and countries. A Washington State reporter highlighted Western Canada's role in exacerbating existing environmental problems, pointing specifically to the booming Port of Vancouver along with Alberta's oil and gas economy, including oils sands extraction projects.

More recently, the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion project, which proposes to connect Alberta's oilsands to Vancouver's harbor in order to ship petroleum across the Pacific, has been the focus of intense media coverage in British Columbia and across Canada. But given its ecological implications for the cross-border Salish Sea region, the proposal has also been the catalyst for articles and editorials in stateside publications such as *the Seattle Times*, *the Oregonian*, and *the Columbian*.

The proposal has met public opposition from Washington Governor Jay Inslee, who one Canadian reporter described as hypocritical: "(Inslee) was up here trying to oppose pipelines that would bring tankers to the coast. Meanwhile, Washington State is bringing in tons of coal and oil." Yet a countering view from Washington State is that British Columbia has been slow to mitigate logging of old-growth forests and the farming of Atlantic salmon. "It's a little shocking, frankly," said a Washington State reporter. "We don't go far enough in Washington, but BC lags."

In spite of these political and environmental tensions, there is broad consensus among journalists that more collaboration needs to happen in this area in spite of differing agendas and policies. "We absolutely have a common fate, whether we recognize it or not," said the same U.S.-based reporter. "But it takes political leadership and we (the U.S. and Canada) are not aligned on these issues. We are not heard, period. It's been a very frustrating 18 to 24 months on these issues."

During the 2019 Canadian federal election, some journalists and politicians were surprised to learn that the most pressing political issue among Canadians was climate change and the environment. Yet there remain questions about whether this can translate into significant policy developments, let alone cross-border environmental policy in Cascadia. "Whether this will lead to cross-border collaboration, it's hard to say," said one reporter. "How much can these three states/provinces do together?"

#### 4.7.1 CASE STUDY: HOSTILE WATERS AND THE PLIGHT OF THE SALISH SEA ORCAS

Perhaps no media story is more emblematic of recent politics in Cascadia, and specifically the Salish Sea bioregion, than that of the Southern Resident orcas. The extended family of killer whales, comprised of the J, K, and L pods, spends much of the year traversing the Strait of Georgia, Puget Sound, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Their population has experienced significant declines in recent years, which have been attributed in part to environmental degradation and climate change.

One ambitious journalism project about the orcas, produced by *Seattle Times* reporter Lynda Mapes and her colleagues at the newspaper, is a good indicator of the future of environmental journalism not only in Cascadia but internationally. The *Times*' project, titled *Hostile Waters: Orcas in Peril*, was 2019 winner of the Kavli Science Journalism Gold Award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The series is an ambitious, multi-feature initiative that has featured in-depth reporting alongside rich videography, photography, and an array of maps and illustrations. The series' popularity reached a crescendo in 2018 when a mother orca carried her dead calf over a distance of 1,000 miles.

Mapes has received feedback about the series, and the emotional story of the mother orca Tallequah from across the continent and overseas. In many ways, the plight of the Southern Resident whales stands in for the global ecological crisis given that it touches so many of the contemporary issues threatening the planet: climate change, warming oceans, the diminishing health of rivers and salmon populations, the impact of growing port traffic, and maritime pollution.

In this sense Cascadia serves as a microcosm for the planet, and that has the world paying close attention to stories about the orca pods and their existence within a transboundary setting. "The Salish people don't observe a border, and very intelligently so," said Mapes. "The issue of climate and fish doesn't observe a border. It's a Cascadian focus, and increasingly so."

Mapes asserts there is no shortage of critical environmental reporting that needs to take place in the region. She points to the example of the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion project, which would carry refined and crude oil from Alberta to the BC coast before it is shipped to Asia; and the growth of ports, including the Port of Vancouver. "All of that (shipping) is going through the San Juan Islands and orcas habitat," she said. "This is a fragile area that the orcas need that is in dire risk of an oil spill or worse. It's a delicate place that everybody wants access to. The economic reality of our joint fate is very important."

The heft of Mapes' reporting for the *Seattle Times* along with her colleagues has aligned with larger bets on environmental journalism on both sides of the border. However, such endeavors take time and money, both of which are rare as media enterprises face declining budgets and

reduced staffing. To cover the plight of orcas and other Salish Sea wildlife, Mapes' reporting has required border crossings, ferries, float planes, and other marine transit.

To report on the Northern Resident orcas during 2018, she recalls the difficulty getting to Hansen Island's Orcas Lab during the height of BC's wildfire season, and the special logistics required to get there. "You have to beg rides with scientists, but you want to cover orcas because that is what you do," she said. "It's a lot of work, a lot of hustle, when you add Canada to the equation it's even more, but it's worth it. There is only one way to do this. You show up; you personally witness and generate the research with... a team of editors and reporters."

This philosophy elevates first-hand and experiential reporting. "What we put in the paper is put in the paper because we know it to be true, period," she said. "It is work that we stand behind because we did it ourselves. We are the base of the information food chain."

## 4.8 BINATIONAL CONVERSATIONS: VIVE LA DIFFERENCE

Cascadia straddles two nations and depending on its definition sprawls across at least two states and one province. While the region is well known for its strong cultural and social linkages, political differences do arise, and they are often borne of economic and environmental matters. These inter-jurisdictional or international conflicts in turn serve as a catalyst for media coverage. For example, one British Columbia reporter noted that admonishment of the province by Washington State's governor was not always welcome given that state's import of oil and coal. At the same time, a Washington State reporter lamented British Columbia's track record on cross-border environmental matters, particularly involving the Salish Sea ecosystem. These policy differences underscore the uniqueness of reporting about the Cascadia region.

Reporting across borders in the Cascadia region is primarily conducted by phone and Internet. This is driven not only by the conveniences afforded to reporters through advances in technology; it is also necessitated by budget realities at media outlets and newspapers as well as geographic challenges exacerbated by its maritime setting and associated transportation challenges. For certain stories, however, movement across the border for reporting is a requirement. Respondents noted that for most occasions they did not encounter any difficulty crossing the border to embark on their research or reporting assignments. However, some did express confusion about the border crossing process in the context of conducting research, reporting, and interviews.

Budget and personnel restraints is a universal concern among media outlets in the region. "It's hard for us to do," said one media representative. "We have a finite amount of resources and we have to choose which stories to do each day. As a media organization you don't want to spread yourself so thin that you can't cover your core area or main niche." While national media entities like the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* consolidate their power, and



smaller entities provide hyper-focus on specific topics, medium-sized publications are facing unique difficulties in balancing reporting aspirations with economic realities. “The folks in the middle might be interested in covering on a regional basis. But it’s a hard thing to do if you don’t have the resources. If you think about what it would take to cover the region, it’s not a one-person job.”

## 4.9 MEDIA EVENTS: FROM VANCOUVER’S 2010 OLYMPICS TO COVID-19

The global transmission of Cascadia’s political, economic, and ecological events, with their implications not only for the region but for the world, resembles the conceptualization of media events (Dayan & Katz, 2009). Historically, one of the biggest examples of this in the Cascadia cross-border corridor comes from the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics. While the Winter Olympics were hosted by Canada in terms of financing and venues but also in terms of their marketing and promotion, the Games were of high-interest to media consumers from across the Pacific Northwest, owing in part to the Games’ generation of regional tourism and investment in numerous communities. While international media converged on the host city of Vancouver to cover the athletic competitions and the larger spectacle in which they were contained, it was the infrastructure developments that captured the interest of regional media over the timespan of the decade leading up to the event. One journalist noted that items like improvements to highways and upgrades to border crossings were part of what drove Olympics-related coverage in the local press.

During the spring of 2020, the cross-border COVID-19 pandemic put a very different kind of spotlight on cross-border traffic flows between Washington state and British Columbia, in great part because the first cases in North America were identified in the metropolitan Seattle area. Shortly after the spread of the pandemic across the continent, the U.S. and Canadian governments agreed to close the border to non-essential travel from one coast to the other. In turn, these border restrictions created a number of unique challenges for individuals on both sides of the divide. This included family members who were separated from one another, and the plight of bordertown communities where local economies rely on cross-border tourism and commerce.

The plight of separated couples in particular took hold as a viral story, and it garnered national and international headlines in *the New York Times*, *the Associated Press*, and the *Daily Mail*. One workaround for these individuals that captured special attention was a ditch on 0 Avenue in Abbotsford, British Columbia, which runs along the BC/Washington border. Couples could meet here under border patrol surveillance here as long as they remained socially distanced and on their respective side of the border. Canada’s national broadcaster described the scene as “date night at a border ditch.” Reunions at Peace Arch Park in Blaine, Washington between separated couples and family members were also well-documented locally and internationally.

During the summer and fall of 2020, the curious case of Point Roberts, Washington also received an unusual amount of international media attention. As a five-square-mile U.S. exclave that is reachable by land travel through British Columbia, Point Roberts' case was a unique one. Residents were effectively stranded from the U.S. mainland and unable to travel except for essential purposes because of COVID-19 border restrictions. Their plight received attention from numerous broadcasters, including CNN, CTV, and CBC. A September 1 *New York Times* feature article described a "paradise...beginning to feel more like Alcatraz." *The Toronto Star* even published an article about the possibility of Canada buying the community from the United States. Some of these international articles were subsequently circulated in local or hyperlocal social media forums such as Facebook and Nextdoor, where they generated critique and commentary from local residents. This flow of communication amid media events highlights a unique interplay between international/national media, local newspapers and radio, and hyperlocal social media forums. In some cases this mediation could exacerbate existing tensions or misunderstandings related to border closures, binational issues, or COVID-19 travel regulations. It also provides a reminder that the U.S./Canada border often goes unnoticed by the national media, until there is a major disruption event like 2020's COVID-19 border closure.

#### 4.9.1 CASE STUDY: TOURISM MEDIA

While few media entities cater specifically to audiences on both sides of the border in Cascadia, some are attempting to capitalize on the cross-border tourism itineraries of visitors to the region. *Waterside*, a magazine published by *The Northern Light* and Point Roberts Press in Blaine, Washington, provides one such example. The magazine focuses on recreational opportunities in the Salish Sea region stretching between British Columbia's southern coast and Washington's Olympic Peninsula, including the Metro Vancouver communities of Steveston, Tsawwassen, and White Rock, the Washington State communities of Port Townsend, Anacortes, and Bellingham, and the San Juan Islands. Distributed at hotels and other tourism locations on both sides of the BC/Washington border, the magazine includes feature articles about specific islands and coastal communities in the Salish Sea, but also offers traveler information about whale watching, popular beaches, paddling opportunities and even documentation required for crossing the Canada/U.S. border. The publication is supported by advertising dollars from regional restaurants, hotels, golf courses, summer festivals, and other travel destinations.

Another magazine with a strong tourism pull and an environmental journalism focus is *Mt. Baker Experience*, also published by Point Roberts Press. The free magazine, supported by advertisers primarily located in Western Washington and British Columbia, provides a range of feature articles focused on regional outdoors recreation opportunities such as camping and skiing, but also investigative features on ecological topics such as the impacts of logging and mining on watersheds located in the North Cascades ecosystem or construction a natural gas pipeline through First Nations' territories in British Columbia. Another adventure magazine,

*Outdoors NW*, similarly targets outdoors enthusiasts by focusing on recreation and ecology. It is available in markets in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho and also features outdoors recreation coverage from British Columbia.

## 4.10 A TRADITION OF TRIBAL AND MULTICULTURAL MEDIA

Perhaps one of the most important contributions to the Cascadia media ecosystem is that of Indigenous and First Nations news outlets. The late Valeria Alia, a former Distinguished Professor of Canadian Culture at Western Washington University, articulated in her book *New Media Nation* the ability of Indigenous news media to transcend national borders around the world. These cross-border media flows have come to represent a vision of the Cascadia and Salish Sea regions that reflect local values, according to Alia: “The cultural and political divisions between Indigenous people in Canada and the United States have been artificially created and manipulated by state governments.”

In Washington State, Alia was immersed in fostering Native American media projects with the Lummi Nation, including a local newspaper and newsletter. More recently, the Lummi have produced digital media and a television newscast called Northwest Indian News—itsself carried by television feeds across the northwestern United States and into British Columbia. At the same time, Canada is home to the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), which in addition to news broadcasting also provides a national venue in Canada for Aboriginal-produced entertainment and cultural performance. Meanwhile, the *Sqwo! Quol: Xwlemi Nation News* serves Lummi Nation tribal members with a mix of community news, tribal government updates, and local opinions. Further south is TULALIP TV, which provides Native American and Indigenous news, sports, and entertainment programming to Tulalip tribal members and to Indian country. A 24/7 digital livestream of the network feed is available via website as well as on streaming devices.

The Cascadia region is also home to a strikingly robust multicultural news industry, representing the diversity of the region’s demographics, and notably residents of its largest metropolitan areas. For example, Metro Vancouver’s ethnically diverse population is reflected in newspapers such as *Ming Pao Vancouver Chinese News*, *Sing Tao News Corporation*, the *Philippine Chronicle*, *Punjabi Tribune*, *Planet Philippines*, *The Link*, the *Indo-Canadian Times*, *Asian Pacific Post*, *Charhdi Kala*, *CK News Group*, and the *Indo-Canadian Voice* (National Ethnic Press, 2020).

In the past decade, Punjabi-language newspapers in particular enjoyed a growth spurt. By 2015, there were as many as a dozen such newspapers in BC’s Lower Mainland, while in 2012 Postmedia launched *Vancouver Desi*, an English-language news site for South Asians. The company also created a similar concept, *Taiyangbao*, which is a web-based Chinese-language version of the *Vancouver Sun* (Melanson, 2015).

The Vancouver metropolitan area's migration networks and diasporas also contribute to media voices representing nations from across Europe and the Americas. These include *L'Express du Pacifique*, *Gazeta Informacyjna*, *Latin American Connexions*, *L'Eco D'Italia*, *Il Marco Polo*, *Scandinavian Press*, *Swedish Press*, and *Spanglish Magazine* (National Ethnic Press, 2020). Similarly, Seattle is home to a multitude of ethnic and multicultural newspapers serving the Puget Sound region, including publications serving African Americans as well as Mexican, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and South Asian immigrant and diaspora communities. The University of Washington's Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project provides a useful starting point for learning about many of these newspapers and their communities (Seattle's Ethnic Press, 2020). Like their Vancouver counterparts, most of these newspapers focus on their metropolitan region or community, though some coverage of the larger Cascadia region, including cross-border news, is reflected in coverage. These publications include *The Skanner*, which is published for African American audiences in Portland and Seattle; as well as the *Seattle Chinese Times* and the *Seattle Chinese Post*. The City of Seattle's Ethnic Media Program maintains a database listing of 142 ethnic publications, which reflect the vibrancy of the city's multiculturalism and its robust local media market (Seattle.gov, 2020). Across the region, the buoyancy of media representing diverse ethnic and immigrant populations is a strong reflection of Cascadia's increasingly diverse metropolitan centers but also media investments being made by start-up organizations and much larger news enterprises.

## 5. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has set out to better understand the nature of reporting and media systems in the Cascadia region. By doing so, it offers specific insights into the nature of news in a regional, cross-border context; and it also offers generalizable lessons about the challenges facing the journalism industry as it contends with a convergence of political and economic challenges. An in-depth interview methodology provided unique insights into not only what draws media thematically to Cascadia, but also how the news industry can grapple with an increasingly complex array of issues specific to this region: ecological politics, the high-technology economy, binational culture and social lives, urban planning, and much more.

### 5.1 FUTURE RESEARCH

A key focus of this study was on traditional media outlets, notably newspapers and online news sites. However, there are countless broadcast outlets, newsletters, digital publications/blogs, and organization-produced media publications that could also be bundled into such a study. Future studies might look to the granularities of these media and how they interface with the unique personality of this cross-border region. For example, Cascadia has historically played an outsized role in the evolution of environmental advocacy and activism, with Greenpeace being founded in Vancouver in 1971. Other environmental organizations have sprung up across the region in the decades since. Future research might look to the unique in-house media and strategic publicity generated by these entities and how they have influenced the nature of environmental reporting not only locally but also internationally.

### 5.2 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONCLUSION

Cascadia is home to a robust and dynamic media ecosystem that draws from a shared cultural heritage but also aspirations for economic prosperity and ecological sustainability. The latter theme—which situates Cascadia as an international biozone—is perhaps the most important catalyst for short- and long-term media activity and readership interest. Journalists interviewed for this report repeatedly noted that, unlike political, economic, and cultural institutions, the natural world does not recognize national borders—at least not to the same extent. Cascadia is also home to ecological stories that are of strong interest not only to those living in the region, but also to media audiences nationally and globally. This is not surprising, as Cascadia’s global reputation is increasingly linked to its national and regional wilderness areas, its legacy of environmental activism, and its traditional green urban planning in its major metropolises.

Bluntly put, the world—and the global news media—increasingly see Cascadia as a bioregion of high interest in relation to the planetary ecological crisis. Some of its highest-profile stories also stand in for larger political and cultural debates. For example, the public debate surrounding the reintroduction of grizzly bears to Washington State’s North Cascades

ecosystem has attracted interest across the American West and Canada, in great part because the debate symbolizes larger tensions playing out in contemporary U.S. life, including differences between urban and rural populations. Perhaps the best example of heightened media interest emanates from the plight of the Salish Sea's Southern Resident orcas. Their story has drawn from the expertise of policymakers and scientists in the U.S. and Canada, and has attracted strong interest from audiences overseas. The region's killer whales have become a symbol for the planet's ecological crisis. Their health is interconnected to numerous ecological and industrial variables, including salmon populations, the health of rivers including the Columbia and Fraser watersheds, and impacts of regional fishing, forestry, and mining sectors.

A second key driver of the growth of Cascadia news coverage is business, technology, and innovation. High-technology in particular is helping to reshape the region's major cities, but it is also reconfiguring relationships between jurisdictions. This is evidenced in the expansion of companies like Amazon and Microsoft, which has material implications for fiscal, immigration, and transportation policies. The complexity of these media stories requires journalists who are fluent in investment, trade, and corporate governance topics in a bi-national context. Further to this, Cascadia exists not only as a region within North America, but indeed as a key region of economic and cultural activity within the Pacific Rim. This dimension is often underplayed when media coverage takes on a "provincial" or inward-looking track, even as the region's largest airports bolster air connections to the rest of the world. Thus, contextualizing the region's economic linkages to Asia and the Americas remains critically important for journalists. Adjoined to these themes of bioregionalism and economic development is the role of Cascadia's urban centers in fostering quality of life for its residents through solutions in residential real estate, transportation, and human health. This more broadly echoes the Cascadia Innovation Corridor's assertion that the key to achieving long-term sustainability for the region is through housing and development, transportation, and environmental protection (Cascadia Vision 2050, 2020).

Finally, there is a cultural dimension that offers a massive growth opportunity. The region's rich heritage—including its multiculturalism, its social and religious institutions, its culinary traditions, its sporting teams, and its vibrant fine and performing arts communities—often drive prominent stories about Cascadia. In some cases, however, blind spots emerge, and media or civic leaders are caught off guard by news events. This was the case when enthusiastic Toronto Blue Jays baseball fans from British Columbia clogged border crossings on their way to the Seattle Mariners' T-Mobile Park during the summer of 2019, creating traffic congestion and hours-long line-ups at multiple Canada/U.S. crossover points. Emphasizing Cascadia's cultural alignment and flows of commercial, cultural, and recreational activity would allow media publications to showcase a wider range of topics and allow institutions to benefit from this regional exchange, instead of merely reacting to it.

There is also a significant role for higher education in helping to both foster stronger linkages within the Cascadia region and communicating the region's unique attributes nationally and

globally. Universities in the region, including Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria, the University of Washington, and Western Washington University, have devoted significant curricular and scholarly resources to building U.S./Canada bridges, integrating the binational experience into curriculum, and facilitating scholarship in the area. For example, Western Washington University's Border Policy Research Institute, the funder of this study, has served as an important source of expertise for journalists reporting about the cross-border Cascadia region and in particular stories about the border itself. The Institute's platform for experts and research studies provides an important resource for journalists, by helping to inform stories not only for regional publications, but also for national and international media. This was evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the Institute helping to explain the granular dimensions of cross-border policy, commerce, and governance to a global audience.

Meanwhile, off-campus entities such as the Discovery Institute's Cascadia Center for Regional Development offer venues for media to engage with academics and policymakers focused on regional transportation and sustainable development issues. While specialized institutes and research centers have facilitated regional conversations previously, there is an opportunity for schools of journalism, media, and communication to embed Cascadia-specific content into curriculum and future scholarship. While journalism schools often focus simultaneously on news reporting at the local and national levels, Cascadia offers a unique laboratory for students to immerse themselves in pressing environmental, economic, and social issues in a regional but also international context.

Given the simultaneous enthusiasm for coverage of Cascadia topics and concern over economic challenges facing the news media industry, one potential innovation that could provide some benefit to media producers and consumers is a formal sharing of news. As noted in the study, this does exist to an extent within integrated media groups such as McClatchy or Black Press Group/Sound Publishing. This could also take the form of sharing between wire services, competing newspaper chains, or not-for-profit news production entities. The potential for such developments provides an important reminder that while Cascadia news media production is very much a journalism story serving the public interest, it is also a media management story.

In 2019, the Cascadia Innovation Corridor conference in Seattle brought together business leaders, entrepreneurs, and government leaders together to discuss collaborations in technology, innovation, and infrastructure. A part of this event was a media panel featuring editors and publishers from leading news and business publications. Such a panel could easily be expanded to be a conference in its own right, given the multitude of themes worthy of discussion, including environmental topics, high-technology, arts and culture, and region-wide political concerns. Thus, a final recommendation is to provide a larger forum for further discussion and collaboration between media professionals. This might be facilitated by a more narrowly-focused academic institute (such as the Border Policy Research Institute or Salish Sea Institute), a government agency or not-for-profit institution (such as the Cascadia Center for Regional Development or Cascadia Innovation Corridor), or a journalism school. The University

of Oregon's Agora Journalism Center already hosts symposiums for journalists in the Pacific Northwest, and widening this mandate to include British Columbia journalists would also help bolster Cascadia-wide media discussions. Bringing media professionals together from around the region would foster needed progress in a range of topics: solutions-based journalism, media entrepreneurship and business models, cross-border travel policies, reporting logistics, and engagement between media enterprises and government/business/academic institutions. Building networks of expertise is an outgrowth of this engagement. Journalists across Cascadia have highlighted the importance of being able to reach out to government representatives, scientists, policymakers, and other experts to speak to issues that impact constituents across the region.

It is not surprising that Cascadia's media ecosystem mirrors the regional knowledge economy of high-technology, natural resources extraction, and offshore investment it often reports on. The region's complex media ecology is comprised of longstanding industry leaders but also feisty digital start-ups and independent news producers. Yet while there is a boom and bust legacy that continues to be in play for some regional media amid challenging economic times, the individual and enterprise-wide journalism successes have been many. They have fostered critical public engagement on topics that directly impact the region's vaunted quality of life and its ability to successfully navigate the opportunities of the century ahead. The challenge is to integrate and support a news media industry that in turn can energize the next phase of the Cascadia story.



## APPENDIX

### SELECTED MEDIA AND PUBLICATIONS CITED

[Aboriginal Peoples Television Network \(APTN\)](#)

[Abbotsford News](#)

Asian Pacific Post

[Bellingham Herald](#)

[Business in Vancouver](#)

[Cascade Public Media](#)

[Cascadia Magazine](#)

Charhdi Kala

[Chilliwack Progress](#)

CK News Group

[Columbian](#)

[Crosscut](#)

[The Daily Hive/Van City Buzz](#)

[Geekwire](#)

[Hakai Magazine](#)

[Indo-Canadian Times](#)

[Indo-Canadian Voice](#)

[KCTS 9](#)

Latin American Connexions

The Link

[Mt. Baker Experience Magazine](#)

[Northern Light](#)

[Oregonian](#)

[Osoyoos Times](#)

The Philippine Chronicle

[Planet Philippines](#)

[Point Roberts All Point Bulletin](#)

[Puget Sound Business Journal](#)

Punjabi Tribune

[Salish Current](#)

[Salish Sea Communications](#)

Seattle Chinese Post

Seattle Chinese Times

[Seattle Times](#)

[Ming Pao Vancouver](#)

[Sing Tao](#)

[The Scanner](#)

[Squol Quol: Xwlemi Nation News](#)

Taiyangbao

[The Tyee](#)

[Tulalip TV](#)

Vancouver Desi

[Vancouver Sun](#)

### POLICY/RESEARCH PROGRAMS CITED

Agora Journalism Center, University of Oregon

Cascadia Center for Regional Development, Discovery Institute

Cascadia Innovation Corridor

Ethnic Media Program, City of Seattle

Salish Sea Institute, Western Washington University

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