



**When the sea does have character:
post-Brexit maritime cooperation as place-
consciousness**

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Challenges and outlooks from the case of post-Brexit English Channel Space

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Brexit: Our Starting Point

- Brexit discontinued the INTERREG Programmes across the Channel/Manche;
- This affects the 'place-consciousness' that local bodies and communities has been coproducing around across the Channel for decades;
- A stormy stretch of water (physical features) able to produce its own 'character of life' (or cité: Sennett 2019);
- This also has some bearing on how space is being produced across/around the Channel: from a place of connection/separation/co-operation to UK's **insular mentalité**.

How to create maritime space-consciousness

- Communities contribute, through spatial production, to infusing their character of life into a specific place (cf. spatial turn);
- It turns the geographical features and the natural environment into a cultural environment;
- From the ontology of the Channel to its being meaningful to its communities: **Channel as a repository of their character of life.**
- **The topic has been usually studied in relation to the production of the landscape.**
- Kentish landscape/infrastructures: from connection to its arcifinous post-Brexit role (cf Hubbard 2022)
- Dunkerque/Dieppe/Calais: from **villes portuaires** to **villes frontalières** involved in the production of space (**Picouet & Renard**).

But ... the sea?

- The idea of the production of space usually refers to land not to the sea;
- Cf **terrestrial landscapes**: patterns of things on the land (Castree et al. 2003);
- Territorialised paradigm accounts for how we humans get hold of a given territory and make it meaningful and useful to us (cf. Nicolini 2022);
- The sea does not have character (Schmitt 1950); **territoire vide** (Corbin 1990); humans pass through it; **'Il ne laisse pas de trace, sauf ses poubelles'** (Frémont 1996).

Interreg and the Channel

- The Channel: a stretch of water and **not** a tract of land (Thomas 2006):
- Dover and Calais but also Dieppe, Dunkerque, or Brighton are not true binational (Heddebaut 2001);
- Funds intended only for terrestrial frontiers (cf Art. 10 Reg. (EEC) No 2052/88);
- **Imaginative leap**: the Tunnel (fixed link under the Treaty of Canterbury: the **Weald-Artois Anticline?**) persuaded the Commission.
- Channel: turning its 'maritime' nature into a 'terrestrial' one.

The Imaginative Leap

- Kent and Nord-Pas-de-Calais were deploying their own place-consciousness and were coproducing their own character of life through ‘an appropriation and transformation of space and nature’.
- They were projecting their own imaginative geography onto ‘their’ stretch of water.
- In coproducing the Channel as a maritime space, these communities conveyed the outcomes of their imagined geographies and ‘reproductive’ practices.
- In so doing, they turned the Channel into a lived geography and changed the meaning of the maritime border.

And the law?

- They changed the interpretation of Art. 10 Reg. 2052/88: their imaginative geography promoted a change in how to regulate cross-border cooperation;
- The law as a performative practice involved in spatial production: Its features are enriched by new factors without the necessity of formally altering the law.
- **This gives expression to the view that, as the place-space-environment nexus changes over time, so too should the meaning of the law.**

An act of 'geo-graphing'

- The Channel and maritime cooperation reflect the culture-specific relation between the community and 'its' marine space.
- The seal of the former is impressed into the waves and subsequently entrenched into the EU legal framework for cross-border cooperation.
- This makes asymmetry between the partners (UK counties and French departments or regions) less problematic;
- Loose formalisation of cooperation is unproblematic: cooperation is consonant with constitutional orders.

Brexit: challenging the character of the Channel

- Robert Tombs (2022): the UK as ‘a European country’ unlike any other; it gravitates towards the continental landmass, which it ‘rarely’ joins’.
- Revitalising imperial ambitions (e.g. ‘Global Britain’ or the ‘Anglosphere’).
- Brexit as an oceanic enterprise: new routes.
- Brexit means Brexit: discontinuing maritime cooperation

The 'deep topography' of the Channel

- à la recherche of the legal-spatial practices that still make up the Channel's character of life in the aftermath of Brexit.
- If they want to take hold of their maritime place, communities must rearrange their imaginative leap through a constant exercise in legal geographical creativity to fit imagined legal geographies into the complexity of the post-Brexit real world.

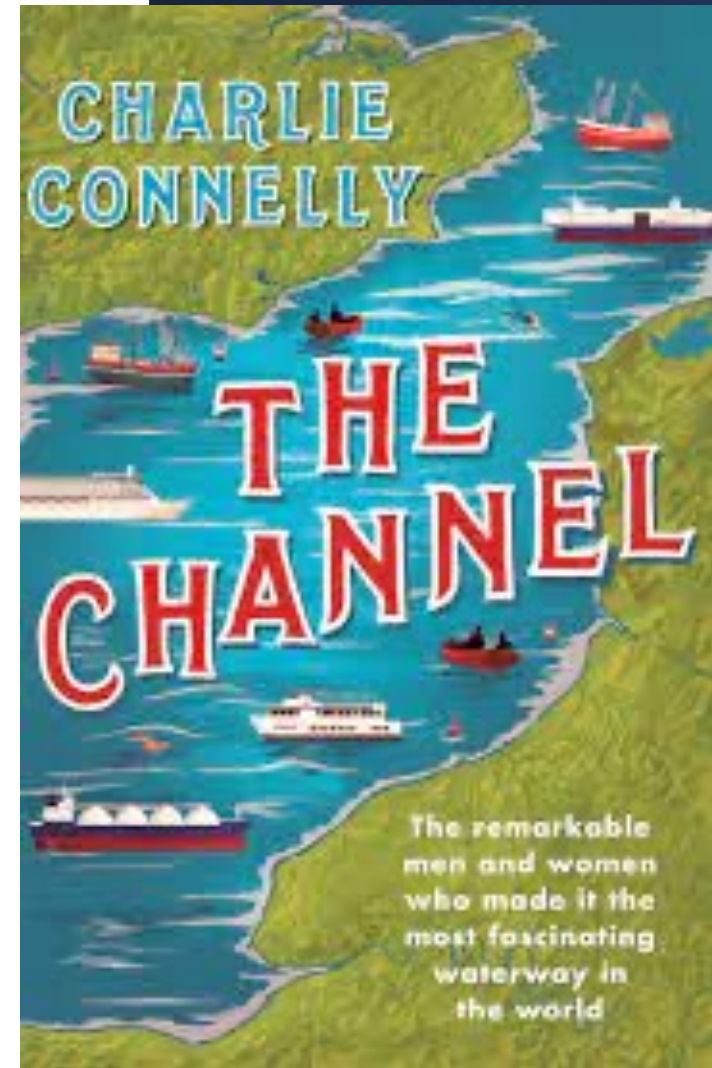
Coastal liquidity and the paradox of Brexit

- Art. 3 and 4 of the Treaty: from geometrical lines to coastal liquidity as regards the fixed link and police control
- The White Horse (1998), the Pride of Brexit (2019), the SOS Message;
- Brexit 'borderscape', which has been developed to mark 'a fluid, mobile, open zone of differentiated encounters – a border zone without borders' (Anderson et al.)



Normalising the Channel

- A real place of encounter, where identity and belonging are forged when, in Hubbard's words, the 'edge of England' and mainland Europe, merge into each other.
- Charlie Connelly has entitled his recent book *The Channel* – not *The English Channel*.
- The University of Caen website hosts the Atlas TransManche, which displays the whole area (the sea, the coast, and local authorities) bordering it.
- The Channel as 'common sense' and a 'sense of commonness'.



Concluding Remarks (1)

- Brexit might be able to strip away most of the layers related to the Channel's place-consciousness;
- It may have turned the Channel's character of life into a politically contested and socially fractured context;
- BUT: the Channel is a powerful legal-geographical feature;
- The imaginative leap has impressed lost-lasting marks on the Channel;



Concluding remarks (2)

- Brexit challenged the coastal liquidity of EU maritime cooperation formalistically;
- It considered the Channel a merely synthetic jurisdiction, not the outcome of a process of legal-spatial production;
- Deleting the Surface layer (the EU legal framework) did not entail erasing the other spatial practices making up the Channel's character of life.
- With its ebbs and flows, could Brexit realistically submerge the vivacity of the communities across the Channel, imposing on them a new character from "outside"?
- Political (local) cooperation (Straits Committee) demonstrates that the character of life with its imaginative leap is still there.