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Boundaries as Social Practice and Discourse: The Finnish–Russian Border

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PAASI A. (1999) Boundaries as social practice and discourse: the Finnish–Russian border, *Reg. Studies* 33, 669–680. Boundaries are a key concept in political geography, where they are typically understood as empirical manifestations of state power and territoriality. This paper suggests a multidimensional approach to the analysis of boundaries in a world of de-territorialization and re-territorialization. Boundaries are understood as institutions and symbols that are produced and reproduced in social practices and discourses. The meanings of the Finnish–Russian border are discussed at the scale of both the Finnish state and a locality that was divided by the new border after World War Two. The roles of this border have been highly varied, reflecting not only Finnish–Russian relations but also changes in global geopolitics. Current economic practices and discourses strive to open up borders and permit freer movement of capital and people, but in terms of Finnish foreign policy, security discourses and territorial control, this border is still a relatively closed one.

Boundary Discourse Foreign policy Spatial scale Finland–Russia border

PAASI A. (1999) Les frontières en tant que facteur d'habitude et de discours sociaux: la frontière entre la Finlande et la Russie, *Reg. Studies* 33, 669–680. Les frontières sont des concepts clés de la géographie politique, étant considérées comme des preuves empiriques du pouvoir d'Etat et du territoire. Cet article avance une façon multidimensionnelle d'aborder l'analyse de la notion de frontières dans un monde de démantèlement et de reconstruction de frontières. Les frontières sont considérées des institutions et des symboles qui se produisent et se reproduisent à partir des habitudes et des discours sociaux. Les significations de la frontière entre la Finlande et la Russie se voient discuter à l'échelle de l'Etat finlandais et du point de vue d'une région divisée par la nouvelle frontière suite à la deuxième guerre mondiale. Les rôles de cette frontière ont varié sensiblement, ce qui reflète non seulement les rapports entre les Finlandais et les Russes, mais aussi l'évolution de la géopolitique sur le plan mondial. Les habitudes et les discours économiques en vigueur cherchent à ouvrir des frontières et à faciliter la libre circulation du capital et des personnes. Toujours est-il que, vu la politique étrangère du gouvernement finlandais, étant donné les discours concernant la sécurité et quant au contrôle des territoires, cette frontière reste relativement fermée.

Discours Politique étrangère Echelle géographique
Frontière entre la Finlande et la Russie

PAASI A. (1999) Grenzen als gesellschaftliche Praxis und Diskurs: die finnisch-russische Grenze, *Reg. Studies* 33, 669–680. Grenzen sind ein Grundbegriff der politischen Geografie, in der sie typisch als empirische Bekundung der Staatsgewalt und dem Raumbedürfnis der Bewohner aufgefaßt werden. In einer Welt der Gebietsauflösung und erneuten Gebietsbildung regt dieser Aufsatz ein multidimensionales Angehen der Analyse von Grenzen an. Grenzen werden als Institutionen und als Symbole verstanden, die in der gesellschaftlichen Praxis und Diskursen gezogen und nachvollzogen werden. Die Bedeutungen der finnisch-russischen Grenze werden sowohl auf der Ebene des finnischen Staates wie der eines Ortes diskutiert, der nach dem 2. Weltkrieg durch eine neu festgelegte Grenze geteilt wurde. Die Rollen dieser Grenze sind sehr verschieden gewesen, und spiegeln nicht nur finnisch-russische Beziehungen wider, sondern auch Wandel in der globalen Geopolitik. Gegenwärtige wirtschaftliche Praxis und Meinungen gehen dahin, Grenzen zu öffnen und den Austausch von Menschen und Kapital zu erleichtern, aber für die finnische Außenpolitik, Sicherheitsbesprechungen und Gebietskontrolle bleibt die Grenze nach wie vor verhältnismäßig geschlossen.

Grenze Diskurs Außenpolitik
Räumlicher Maßstab Finnisch-russische Grenze

INTRODUCTION

Boundaries have become objects of substantial interest within various academic fields since the early 1990s. Scholars from various disciplines are studying intensively not only the material functions of boundaries

but, increasingly, also their symbolic and metaphoric meanings and their roles in the constitution of identities. Simultaneously, several new border research institutes have been established and new journals launched (NEWMAN and PAASI, 1998). Many interdisciplinary books have been published on borders in general (e.g.

ANDERSON M., 1996; WELCHMAN, 1996; SHAPIRO and ALKER, 1996; MICHAELSEN and JOHNSON, 1997) and on the meanings of boundaries in various spatial contexts, mainly in Europe (EGER and LANGER, 1996; O'DOWD and WILSON, 1996; ANDERSON and BORT, 1998).

The main background to this current interest has doubtless been the collapse of the rigid post-World War Two dichotomy between eastern and western blocs. The disappearance of the 'Iron Curtain' has profoundly altered the world's geopolitical landscape and created a number of new boundary disputes. The simultaneous rhetoric of globalization and the increase in various flows – cultural, economic and human (migrants, refugees) – have made boundaries, border crossings and questions of identity particularly topical. Some authors have been ready to announce the 'death of the nation-state' in a 'borderless world' (OHMAE, 1995) while others have called for more analytical approaches to scrutinize the changing roles of the state, boundaries and sovereignty in a globalizing world (ANDERSON J., 1995, 1996; HIRST and THOMPSON, 1996). Despite the effects of globalization, the changing meanings of sovereignty, environmental problems and post-nationality arguments, the state – as the key medium in the governance of the international system – will apparently remain the ideal form of organization for most 'nations' in the near future. Therefore, rather than mechanically repeating the arguments regarding the disappearance of states and boundaries, the challenge for border scholars is to develop new approaches for understanding their changing meanings (PAASI, 1998).

Political geographers, in particular, created the language of border studies at the turn of the current century in order to depict a modern world that was becoming territorialized along rigid boundary lines that characterized a state-centred system. Formerly loose frontiers were replaced by exclusive lines. Thus state territoriality came to be crucially shaped by the ideas of boundedness and exclusion. Political geographers, too, were involved in the creation of a 'territorial trap': an image of the world as divided into distinct territorial units (AGNEW, 1994). This rigid, modernist boundary language has maintained its position in political geography up to recent years (PAASI, 1998). Traditional border studies in political geography have typically regarded boundaries as lines that shape and modify all forms of interaction and make cross-border links possible. The major context for these studies has been the border area or border landscape itself, and many descriptions of those local contexts have been produced and their meanings compared.

In this paper, boundaries will be understood not merely as static lines but as sets of practices and discourses which 'spread' into the whole of society and are not restricted to the border areas. The production and reproduction of boundaries is part of the

institutionalization of territories – the process in which their territorial, symbolic and institutional 'shape' is determined (PAASI, 1991). Therefore boundaries manifest themselves in numerous social (economic, cultural, administrative and political) practices and discourses that may be simultaneous and overlapping. Power and governance are part and parcel of the construction of boundaries, and this is particularly obvious in the case of state borders. Boundary discourses may also become materialized, as can be seen in the 'iconographies of boundaries' that manifest themselves in legislation, memorials, films, novels and education, for example, all of which produce, express and reproduce territoriality, as well as in the concrete boundary landscapes (PAASI, 1996; NEWMAN and PAASI, 1998). Boundaries exist and gain meanings on different spatial scales, not merely at the state level, and these meanings are ultimately reproduced in local everyday life. Boundaries are rarely produced in the border areas themselves, however, since these are usually national peripheries in an economic sense and their essential meanings as far as foreign policy, the national economy and politics are concerned are typically produced in centres. This means that many competing discourses usually exist on the roles of boundaries.

The present paper analyses the Finnish–Russian border as a set of social practices and discourses. This border is a fitting illustration of the de-territorialization and re-territorialization processes occurring in Europe and elsewhere, as well as of the recent increase in cross-border activity. During Soviet times it was the longest border between a western capitalist state and the leading socialist state, a much-used example of a closed ideological border but, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, cross-border activities have vastly increased. On the other hand, with Finland's entry into the European Union in January 1995, it became the only border between the EU and Russia. I will scrutinize the meanings of this border both on the scale of the Finnish state and on a local scale.

First, a historical overview of the development of the border is presented, evaluating both its pre- and post-World War Two meanings. This is followed by a discussion of the roles of the border in the post-Soviet context, evaluating in particular the current forms of cross-border co-operation. Finally, the meanings of the border for the local population will be discussed by considering the case of Värtsilä, a small Finnish community that was divided between Finland and the Soviet Union as a consequence of World War Two. The paper draws on diverse materials such as historical documents, statistics and media discourses. Local experiences are illustrated using mainly interview materials collected in the Värtsilä area between 1987 and 1992. As Finland's entry into the EU in 1995 changed the international, national and local meanings of the border still further, the information received from these interviews was filled out in spring 1998 by means of

telephone interviews with some key actors in local enterprises, administrative organizations and voluntary associations in the Värtsilä area.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FINNISH–RUSSIAN BORDER

The meanings of boundaries are not constant but may change crucially according to social and political situations. The ‘truths’ and arguments regarding a state, its relations to other territories and the consequent meanings of boundaries are historically contingent. This is obvious in the case of the Finnish–Russian border. The Finnish state gained its independence in 1917 after being an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia since 1809, and before that an administrative part of Sweden from the 12th century onwards. During the autonomy period Finland did not have a foreign policy of its own, even though it had a national economy and a customs border with Russia. Before 1917 this border was an open one and very much a formality, and there was intensive economic and cultural cross-border interaction (PAASI, 1996). After 1917 Finland’s territorial strategy changed, however, as it tried to secure its boundaries and use them to signify the territoriality of an independent state. The eastern border of the state was finally confirmed, in effect created, three years later, in the Peace of Tartu (1920). Before that – and in practice up to 1922 – even its location generated conflicts between Finland and Russia because of a Finnish-speaking population remaining on the Soviet side, and becoming part of the Workers’ Commune of Karelia in 1920 and the Autonomous Republic of Karelia in 1923.

For Finland, the construction of exclusive political boundaries was a crucial part of the process of nation-building and strengthening the state, and this found expression in many ways. One aim was to develop the living conditions in border areas – to ‘nationalize the peripheries’ in order to increase the political reliability of the inhabitants. The border also became an economic one; whereas in 1910 almost 30% of Finnish exports had gone to Russia, in the 1930s only 0.5% went to the Soviet Union (MICHELSEN and KUISMA, 1992). The orientation of public policy in the 1920s and 1930s was to create economic connections with Western Europe and the US.

Foreign policy and popular discourses regarding the Soviet Union also changed. Before World War Two, Finnish publicity and education painted a dark view of the Soviet Union as the ‘Other’. The border became a mythical manifestation of the ‘eternal opposition’ between two states and a crucial constituent of Finnish national identity (PAASI, 1997). Finland’s refusal to cede some parts of her territory to the Soviet Union led to the Winter War of 1939–40; and in the subsequent Continuation War of 1941–44 justifications were sought for the extension of Finland’s territory towards

its ‘natural boundary’ in the east, when Finnish troops moved over the old border to occupy Russian areas in Eastern Karelia (PAASI, 1996). As a consequence of the war, however, Finland had to cede huge amounts of its territory to the Soviet Union. The border was confirmed in the Treaty of Paris in 1947, along a line that had already been established in the Peace Treaties of Moscow in 1940 and 1944.

THE POST-SOVIET GEOPOLITICAL ORDER AND CONTESTED BORDER DISCOURSES

Foreign policy can partly be seen as a set of boundary-producing discourses that are exploited in the creation of territorial identities (CAMPBELL, 1992). The boundary discourses of foreign policy experts may differ radically from those prevailing in civil society and those outside the state. This is clear in the Finnish case. In the Cold War geopolitical order, Finland, defeated in the war but still an independent state, belonged to the neutral but disputed camp between the Eastern and Western blocs. The ‘neutrality’ which formed the cornerstone of Finland’s official foreign policy discourse up to the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union formally placed Finland outside the blocs, but in practice international images were strongly coloured by the pacts which Finland had concluded with the Soviet Union after the war. The Soviet Union also tried to exert influence on Finnish foreign and security policy in many unofficial ways. Finland had been a ‘western’ country in the geopolitical literature of the period before World War Two, but many post-war representations placed it in Eastern Europe – one famous manifestation of this was the idea of ‘Finlandization’ (PAASI, 1996). Finland’s entry into the EU and western links in security and defence policy have once more altered its location in the geopolitical imagination. The EU, in particular, has become an important instrument in Finnish security policy.

A modern state usually has several territorial strategies (TAYLOR, 1994). As a ‘power container’ it tends to preserve the existing boundaries, whereas as a ‘wealth container’ it strives towards larger territories. Furthermore, as a ‘cultural container’ it tends towards smaller territories, even though national representations of a homogeneous culture are crucial in most narratives of nationhood. Taylor’s ideas also apply to the meanings of the Finnish–Russian border. During the Soviet period the border was closed and it became a taboo subject with co-operation formally organized and controlled at the state level. But since the collapse of the Soviet system the border has become a significant topic in economic, political, military and cultural discourses. These have found many forms and modes of expression, including entry into the EU (and the decision to join the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)), speculations on possible NATO membership

and the future of national identity in relation to a general European identity.

One theme draws together many recent Finnish discourses: the question of the location of the border. Its roots lie in the debates over the Karelian territories that Finland had to cede to the Soviet Union after the war. This area amounted to 12.5% of Finland's territory, and its loss led to the resettlement of 420,000 people to other parts of the country. This created a national trauma that has come out into the open only since the demise of the Soviet Union. Before that, during the 1970s and 1980s, the ideological interests of the organizations for resettled Karelians, the economic interests of local authorities and the emerging heritage industry all combined to give rise to a kind of 'reconstructed Karelia' in the border areas of eastern Finland. War memorials, houses built in the Karelian style, the symbols of Orthodox religion, and events exploiting the Karelian heritage mushroomed in this part of the country and created a symbolic space that provided the Karelians with cultural representations that perhaps partly compensated mentally for their lost territory, while at the same time stimulating tourism (PAASI, 1996).

This substitute was not enough for all Finns, however, and during the 1990s some organizations began actively promoting debates on the future of the ceded areas. The intention was to interest the leading politicians and apparatus of 'statecraft' in the Karelian issue, which was regarded by these associations as a problem (KARELIAN ASSOCIATION, 1996). The Peace of Tartu Movement, in particular, has been very active in promoting such views, mainly in newspapers, and has openly challenged the prevailing statecraft. It has called for these areas to be restored to Finland, at times using Ratzelian, organicist rhetoric when describing the 'sufferings' of the 'wounded body' of the state which could be healed only by re-establishing its organic connection with the ceded areas. Some muted discussion along these lines had been going on in civil society since the war, but the Soviet collapse turned these demands into a public debate which has at times been a very lively one, particularly in 1997 when President Yeltsin asked the Finnish media to put an end to it.

Official foreign policy and the Finnish Border Patrol Establishment have been thinking along different lines. The current boundaries have been confirmed in three peace treaties and no territorial claims exist. This stance is also linked to the broader geopolitical framework of the EU, where one criterion for new members is that they should not have any border disputes. Official foreign policy in Finland coincides with that of the Russian authorities, and surveys among the Finns also show that the great majority (80% in 1995) would not demand any reopening of negotiations with Russia on these matters. Similar surveys have also been carried out in Russia, where 70% of the people answered in

1998 that the ceded areas should not be returned to Finland (MIKKOLA, 1998).

Whereas the discourses calling for restoration of the ceded areas have been aimed at the de-territorialization of the current territorial frame in a very concrete way – or re-territorializing it by moving the border – foreign policy as such has tried to maintain the current framework while also de-territorializing it in a very different way. There are several examples from the last few years that point to a de-territorialization of the traditionally exclusive forms of foreign policy. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finnish foreign policy has taken long strides towards the west – principally through membership of the EU and EMU – but simultaneously it has struggled to keep its ties with the east and even strengthen the links that would integrate Russia into this larger European space. The first effort was perhaps the 'neighbouring area co-operation' agreement of 1992, aimed at promoting peaceful, stable development, strengthening economic relations and minimizing environmental problems. In this context a whole new discourse has emerged, not only on Finnish–Russian relations but also on the new 'regionalizations' in the Baltic Sea and Barents regions (FORSBERG and VAAHTORANTA, 1993). It should be noted that border questions are not included in this agreement. Later, the Finns adopted a visible role in preparations for Russian membership of the Council of Europe. Current discussion of the 'Northern Dimension' in EU policy is also illustrative, since this initiative came originally from Finland. Its aims are complex ones: firstly, to emphasize co-operation and economic benefits in order to lower the old barriers between west and east based on traditional power politics; and secondly, to bring the energy resources of the Barents region and North-western Russia within the reach of the EU. The effort to create co-operation with Russia is, therefore, not just a matter of economy and co-operation but also one of security policy.

Concomitantly with this relative de-territorialization of the border, foreign and security policy practices and discourses are continually evaluating the limits of sovereignty, which in turn imposes limits on de-territorialization. In 1997 President Yeltsin suggested to Finland's President Ahtisaari that the two states could undertake 'common border control', but Ahtisaari reminded him that 'sovereign states always take care of border control independently'! Finland's entry into the EU and resulting responsibility for the EU's only border with Russia actually points towards organizing a more effective patrolling system, since customs operations are now carried out on behalf of the whole EU area. Border surveillance has become increasingly technical in nature – with cameras and electronic monitoring systems adopted during the 1990s – which makes control over the boundaries of the national space more effective and less visible. The nature of the patrolling operations has also changed. Whereas this

action was very formal in Soviet times, it is now characterized by increasing co-operation and exchange of information with the Russians, e.g. on criminal activities. On the other hand, border controls are very strict, and the number of refugees who have entered Finland by crossing this boundary has been very low, varying from seven to 45 per year between 1994 and 1997. The number of people turned back from the border has been increasing continually, though the total, some 800 in 1997, is still low relative to the intensity of passenger traffic over the border.

DE-TERRITORIALIZATION, FLOWS AND CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITIES

Even though there had been extensive trade between Finland and the Soviet Union, the border was strictly controlled and cross-border activity was permitted only in certain controlled places, which facilitated some tourist traffic and joint construction projects. Co-operation was thus regulated and organized at the state level. The Finnish economy was highly dependent on this bilateral trade, with more than 20% of Finnish exports going to the Soviet Union in 1985–86, for example. But with the decline of the Soviet system this export market collapsed, so that the above proportion was only 13% in 1990 and less than 3% in 1992 (SWEDLER, 1994). Now it is rising again, however, so that 6% of exports went to Russia in 1996 and 7.1% of its imports came from there. Thus Russia ranks fifth among both the countries of destination and origin in the Finnish foreign trade statistics (SUOMEN TILASTOLLINEN VUOSIKIRJA, 1997).

As far as the whole border area, almost 1,300 km in length, is concerned, 70 years of almost no activity across the border itself had made the peripheral areas on both sides highly dependent on their own national political and economic centres, typical ‘alienated borderlands’ (MARTINEZ, 1994). However, cross-border traffic began to intensify in many places around 1990. Finnish travel to Russia became increasingly a matter of business and shopping trips and visits made by people of Karelian origin to their former home areas. A new phenomenon was Russian travel to Finland. Where 8,500 Russian cars came across the border in 1991, the figure was almost 170,000 in 1996, while Russian visitors spent a total of 455,000 nights in Finland in that same year, which puts them in third place after Swedish and German visitors (SUOMEN VIRALLINEN TILASTO, 1997). Local attitudes towards Russian tourism have also become more favourable, as they spend a lot of money, and it is now becoming increasingly popular to study the Russian language, e.g. in south-eastern Finland (AROLAINEN, 1996).

Since the signing of the ‘neighbouring area co-operation’ agreement in 1992, local authorities on both sides have actively promoted cross-border schemes to open up routes, establish connections and develop the

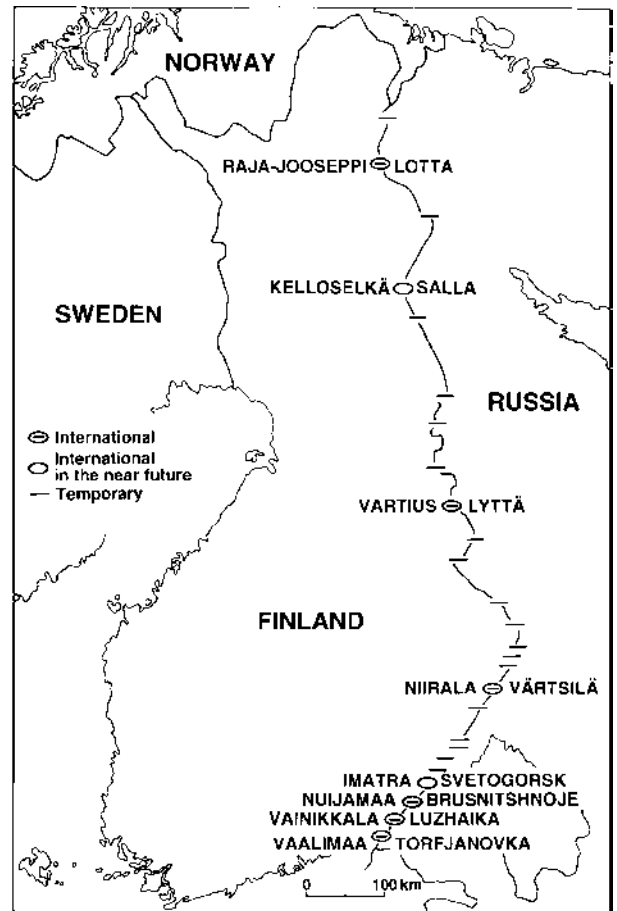


Fig. 1. Crossing points on the Finnish–Russian border

economy of the border area. This agreement arose from the break-up of the Soviet Union, and it gave more power to the republics to look after their own foreign relations, for instance, provided their actions were not in conflict with central government policy. The total number of crossing-points is now 26 (Fig. 1), including six that are open to international traffic, the other 20 crossing-points being for goods traffic – mainly timber transport – and/or crossings by Finnish and Russian citizens only. Two new international border stations (Imatra and Kellosele) are being financed through the EU TACIS programme (SIUKONEN, 1998). Total border crossings by passengers rose from 0.96 to 4.1 million between 1990 and 1996, the number of Russian passengers having increased rapidly since 1994 to almost 2 million in 1997, while the number of Finns seems to be decreasing after the initial boom (Fig. 2). The increased flows of people have also led to images of undesirable elements, with smuggling, organized crime and the control of alcohol flows among the popular themes in media discourses (e.g. ÖSTERBERG, 1996; NAULAPÄÄ, 1998).

The partial de-territorialization of the border has not only given rise to various ‘flows’ but has created new social practices that are gradually turning the border areas into ‘interdependent borderlands’

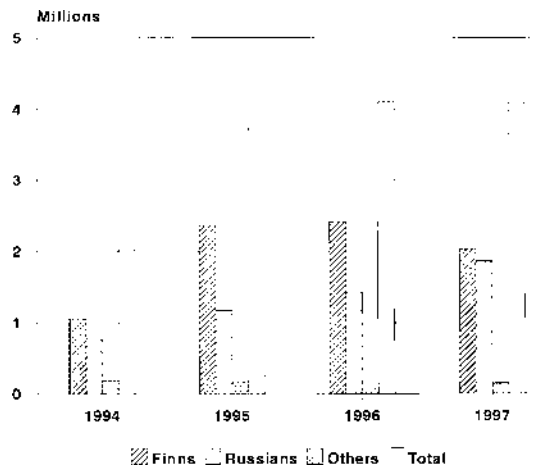


Fig. 2. Crossings of the Finnish-Russian border in 1994-97

Source: Statistics from the headquarters of the Border Patrol Establishment.

(MARTINEZ, 1994). Cross-border interaction is becoming more diverse, varying from cultural to environmental, from economic development to humanitarian projects. Actors in Finnish border communes are looking forward to shedding their peripheral location and opening up communications with areas in Russia, with an optimism that is partly motivated by the chance to obtain resources through the EU INTERREG programme and from the TACIS programme, which was founded specifically to foster co-operation between EU and CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries. Several TACIS-based projects are in progress in the Finnish-Russian border area, and much effort has been concentrated on developing the infrastructure for border crossings (customs houses, services). In addition to actual land use planning and construction activities, the opening of the border has encouraged the 'place-marketing' (KEARNS and PHILO, 1993) of border-crossings. Finnish local authorities and consulting firms have been active and many plans have been produced or are under development to realize the potential of the prospective corridors, gateways and regionalizations.

The Russian area beyond the border is divided between three larger territories: the St Petersburg region; the Republic of Karelia; and the Murmansk region. These areas are perceived by the Finns as offering different opportunities. The future international crossing point at Kellosekä, for instance, has been represented in the media as a 'ventilation hole' for north-eastern Finland, not only opening up links for business travel and goods transport but facilitating the passage of European tourists to the Kola Peninsula and of Russians shoppers to Finland. Local actors are also placing their trust in the future exploitation of the gas and oil fields in the Barents region (VÄLIMAA, 1997). In south-eastern Finland expectations are high because of the potential represented by two large

Russian cities, St Petersburg and Vyborg. Russian trade and visitors are seen as being increasingly important to this area although, alongside the beneficial effects, there are social and health worries about increasing rates of crime, alcohol consumption, prostitution and venereal diseases, topics which have been very visible in the media.

However, in spite of the increasing cross-border activity and optimism, serious obstacles persist. The border continues to run between two completely different societies, and the gap between the standards of living on the two sides is among the largest in the world – often likened to the situation prevailing on the US-Mexico border (SWEEDLER, 1994). Recent surveys show that one in four of the Russian Karelians see their personal economic situation as catastrophic. As JUSSILA *et al.*, 1997, point out, the vast majority of Russian Karelians have experienced a huge deterioration in purchasing power since the Soviet collapse, even though some people have managed to accumulate enormous wealth. This simply means that most Russians are not 'happy border-crossing consumers', nor will they become such for a long time. It is thus very unlikely that this area will become an 'integrated borderland' (MARTINEZ, 1994), where people, goods and ideas flow without restriction.

The location of the border areas was strategically important during the Soviet period, and thus their territorial structure was shaped to a crucial extent by the strategic thinking and regional and production policies of those times. The Russian population areas beyond the border are largely urbanized, with urban dwellers accounting for 93% of the total population of the Murmansk region (approximately 1.1 million) and 74% of that of the Karelian Republic (approximately 0.8 million). Whereas the strategy in Finland was to 'nationalize' the peripheries of the territory after 1917, the Soviet idea was to peripheralize and 'de-nationalize' the border area because of a fear of the emergence of Finnish border communities (LYNN and FRYER, 1998). This process continued after World War Two and took place both ideologically and in terms of settlement policy, as a result of which the population of Russian Karelia, for instance, finally consisted predominantly of non-Karelian people. People from Russia, the Ukraine and Belorussia began to settle in the area soon after the war, and the proportion of the Finnish population is today some 2-6% (PAASI, 1996).

The Russian border also has become more open to economic flows. The number of firms with foreign investments has increased rapidly, so that where the number of foreign firms registered in Russia in 1987 was only 23, they numbered nearly 2,000 in 1990 and almost 15,000 in 1995. About 85% of these were joint venture companies usually with a partner from an industrialized western state, chiefly the US or Germany (ESKELINEN *et al.*, 1998, p. 21).

The economic policy of the Karelian Republic relies

on its border location and natural resources, and legislation has been established to encourage foreign investments (LYNN and FRYER, 1998). The Republic stresses resource-based industries (timber, fishing and mining) but activities related to the border such as tourism, transport and communications are also important (KORTELAINEN, 1997). The number of firms with foreign investments has also increased in Russian Karelia. Whereas there were 20 registered firms of this kind in 1990, they numbered 170 in 1992 and more than 400 in 1995. ESKELINEN *et al.*, 1998, p. 23, remind us, however, that the distinction between registered and operational firms is a crucial one, since only 211 of the 400 firms were actually operative in 1995, i.e. they reported having employees and pursuing actual business activities. The proximity of Russian Karelia to Finland is reflected in the number of small investments and other local forms of co-operation across the border. This activity has taken many forms (ESKELINEN *et al.*, 1998). Firstly, companies in eastern Finland have sub-contracted assembly work to Russian Karelia; secondly, various civil and public organizations have been involved in numerous local projects; and thirdly, numerous training and development schemes have been launched. One motive behind these activities is the belief that they will improve the physical and social infrastructure for future interaction.

Nevertheless, a certain scepticism has infused the hope and enthusiasm prevailing on either side of the border since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In eastern Karelia, for instance, debate soon arose as to whether the aim of the Finns was ‘neo-colonization’ of the Karelian areas in an economic sense and exploitation of their natural resources (SYKIÄINEN, 1993). From the viewpoint of foreign capital, Karelia has been seen primarily as a source of raw materials, mainly because of its huge forest resources, making up 70% of the surface area of the Republic. More recently, as far as the EU Structural Funds are concerned, the lack of information has at times led to suspicions that the Finns are using their Russian partners in order to benefit from the programmes. The actors in the border communes in both Finland and Russia have organized joint seminars to promote trust among the partners and to clarify the aims and possibilities of the EU programmes. Co-operation over the boundary works quite well at the political level, but the practical situation is different, because the Russians lack financing capital and many cultural and institutional factors prevent real commitment to co-operation (SIUKONEN, 1998). On the other hand, surveys carried out among the Russian business partners show that they feel that their western counterparts are being passive (ESKELINEN *et al.*, 1998).

Finnish foreign policy during the post-war period stressed good relations with the Soviet Union; feelings in civil society were more complicated, mainly because of the violent history of the border areas. A lack of

trust still characterizes the current situation and may prove an obstacle to future cross-border activities. Social representations are often galvanized by old, deeply embedded visions and judgements, and this is perhaps still the case on this border between a western capitalist state and the former leading socialist state (PAASI, 1996). Surveys carried out among local people on both sides of the border (KINNUNEN, 1995) indicate that the Finns and the Russians do not know much about each other, and that the Russians have a more favourable opinion of the Finns than the Finns do of the Russians. Also, Finnish opinions are polarized, so that some people favour co-operation while others have deep prejudices and suspicions. As far as the development of cross-border activities is concerned, only about half the Finns see this as a good thing, whereas two-thirds of Russians are of this opinion. One-third of the Finns do not approve of the opening of the border, but only a small percentage of the Russians think in this way. This survey was carried out in northern Finland and Russia in 1994 (*ibid.*) but it is obvious that, at least in Finland, the results are indicative of a broader band of opinion that prevails in civil society. KINNUNEN, 1995, writes that the attitudes of Finns and Russians regarding the opening of the border perhaps reflect the readiness for social change in these states. He points out that the Finnish media, in particular, have tended to stress the problems in Russia, thus painting a negative image, whereas Russians are more or less forced to seek contacts with the West, and Finland is their nearest western neighbour.

Not all members of the security elite have been unreservedly delighted at the post-Soviet developments either, or at the challenges to infrastructures, for instance, presented by the new de-territorializations. Some military leaders have been worried about the strategic changes that might take place once new road connections have been built over the border, particularly in northern Finland. This infrastructure is crucial for organizing any kind of cross-border activity, however. No explicit threat from Russia is experienced in military circles, but old images of an enemy still existed after the Soviet collapse, even though not explicitly directed at Russia (JOENNIEMI, 1993). The comment made by General Häggglund, Commander-in-Chief in the Finnish Army, is perhaps indicative of a new era: ‘The Finns should not turn their backs on Russia, but keep up their links’ (KOIVISTO, 1996). All the above examples illustrate the fact that boundaries are not only lines in the forest but also meaningful symbols and institutions which are deeply sedimented in various social practices and discourses.

LIFE IN A DIVIDED COMMUNITY: THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL EXPERIENCE

Narratives constructed on national identities and threats, and on bounded, exclusive national spaces,

are expressions of national socialization processes and boundaries usually play a crucial role in these narratives (PAASI, 1996, 1997). Questions of identity, culture and memory become complicated, fragmented and diversified in daily life, depending crucially on where people live – space makes a difference. SHILS, 1981, argues that individual histories always include elements of the history of a ‘larger self’ – a family, neighbourhood, locality or nationality. This collective memory unites individuals as parts of the histories of these entities. In daily life on the local scale, questions of distances, well-being, culture, economics and administrative practices become very concrete ones, and in border areas the social control of people in relation to the border is typically very strict, i.e. the local scale and the state coincide in very concrete terms.

During the Soviet period it was impossible to visit the ceded territories freely. The loss of these home areas was therefore a bitter experience for the spatial identities of evacuees. The Karelians preserved their lost landscapes and homes in their collective memory, their literature, collective action and myths. A return

to their homes and the past became the major goal for most of them. A visit to the ceded areas became a Utopian dream (PAASI, 1996).

Värtsilä was a rapidly developing community before World War Two and was located some 100 km from the border. It was the main centre of the iron industry in Finland, with about 1,000 of its approximately 6,000 inhabitants employed in the iron works (see Fig. 3). The locality had emerged during the 19th century as a typical product of the rise of industrial capitalism. People living in the community often had a long local family history and therefore had a strong identity with the place and the industrial milieu. After World War Two, Värtsilä was split by the new border which ruined the whole infrastructure of the commune; the iron works, the central built-up area and all services were on the Soviet side, and in 1947 a frontier zone was established on the Finnish side which considerably restricted movement in the border area. Foreigners, for instance, needed permission from the Finnish security police to visit the zone. The border became a closed, controlled, mystic phenomenon. The ceding of the

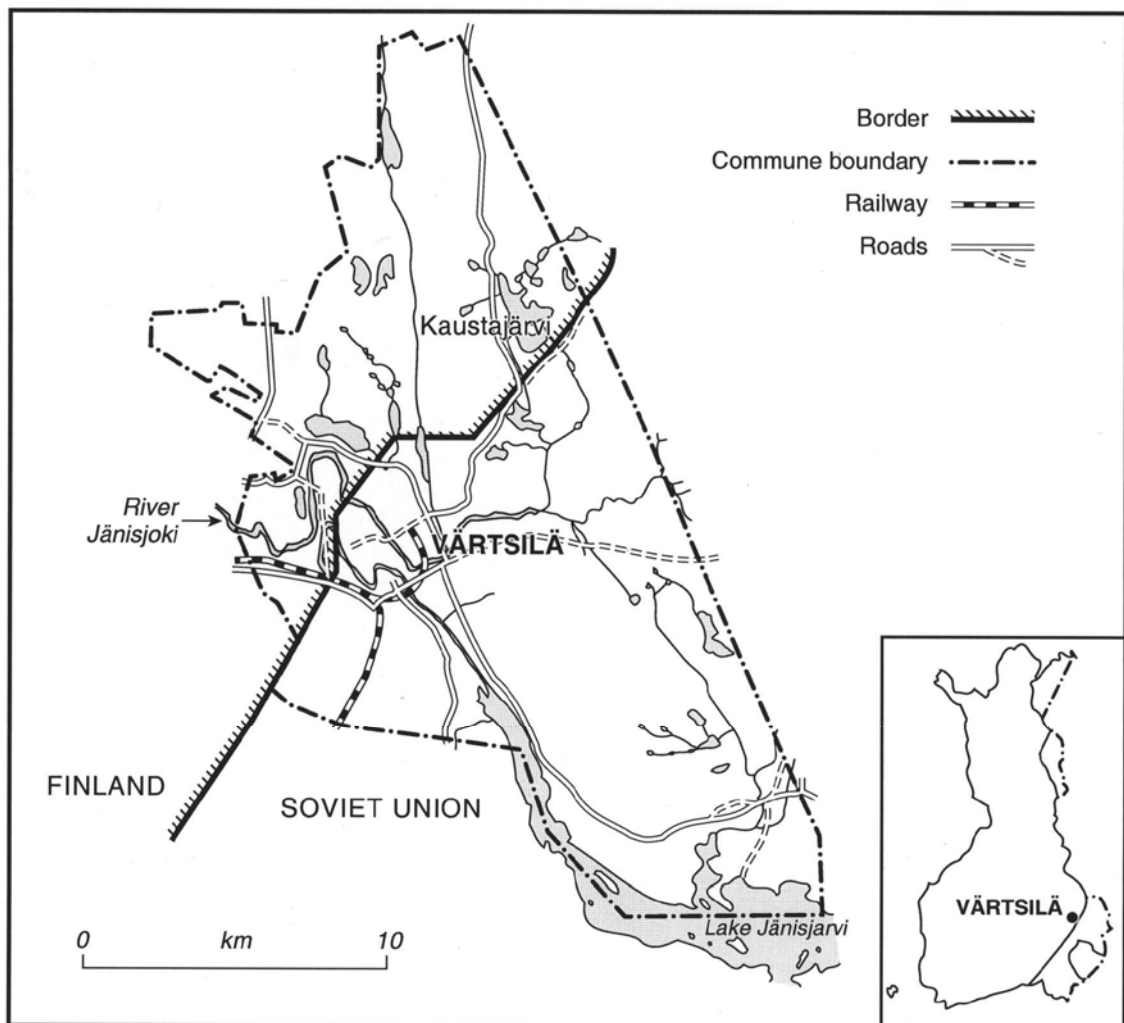


Fig. 3. Location of the commune of Värtsilä and the border established after World War Two

area also destroyed the population base. Värtsilä had had some 6,000 inhabitants before the war and was left with some 3,000 afterwards, but since the area could not provide jobs, out-migration continued at a rapid rate, so that the population was 2,000 in 1950, about 1,700 in 1960 and 922 in 1980. Today there are about 700 inhabitants (PAASI, 1996). The population of the Russian community of Värtsilä beyond the border was some 3,000 around 1990 (PAASI, 1996). The iron works that employed 1,000 during the Soviet era today provides work for some 600 people (TYKKYLÄINEN, 1998).

In practice all Finns were evacuated to Finland from the areas that were ceded to the Soviet Union as a consequence of World War Two. The Finnish-speaking population is a small minority in the ceded areas today, representing the descendants of people who moved to Russia from the 17th century onwards, those who remained on the Soviet side when the border was established in 1920 and those who moved there on ideological grounds in the 1930s. The inhabitants are therefore mainly Russian speaking. A further reason for this lies in the settlement policy of the Soviet authorities after World War Two, in that the people who were first allowed to move to the ceded areas of Karelia were mainly Belorussians and Ukrainians (PAASI, 1996). This was also evident in Värtsilä. New inhabitants and factory workers were recruited from other parts of the Soviet Union, being chosen by the Party, which allowed only reliable communists to become members of the border community.

The complete closure of the border destroyed the spatial basis of the traditional local identities. It took almost 50 years after the war before the Finns were allowed to visit their old homes beyond the border. Russian Värtsilä, which became part of the larger administrative area of Sortavala, could still be seen from the hills on the Finnish side. It was formally forbidden to even look across the border to the Russian side, but people did so, anyway, to keep their memories alive. All activities in the Finnish commune of Värtsilä were directed towards Finland, and only a rail connection for the transport of timber joined the two sides of divided Värtsilä. The period of 50 years was long enough to produce many overlapping territorial identities among the people living in the locality, and the in-depth interviews carried out on the Finnish side in 1987–89 showed that attitudes towards the boundary varied a lot between the generations (PAASI, 1996). Those who had experienced life in the old, ceded community, the creation of the new border and the loss of their homes seemed to be living in a world where memories of the lost community still formed a crucial part of their regional identity, whereas the younger generations who had not experienced the war years seemed to live their daily lives in a context which had always been limited by geopolitical facts. For these people the boundary had always been there and the

rules for acting in border areas had always been part of their daily routines. These people simply did not have any experience of a different situation or of the former territorial disputes. There was also another important difference between the generations. It was typical for the older people to be afraid of the new border after the war, but for younger generations the boundary had been rather a neutral phenomenon, part of what was taken for granted in everyday life.

When the border was gradually opened for personal travel, the number of border crossings increased rapidly since it became possible for the older people to bring their Utopian dream alive and visit their old home areas in the ceded territory. The opening of the border came at an opportune moment, for there were some 180,000 former refugees still alive who had been born there, and an immediate boom in nostalgic journeys to Karelia ensued. The total number of border crossings increased rapidly, and this was also the case at the Niirala crossing point in Värtsilä. The number of border crossings had already reached 26,000 by 1989, and in 1997 it was about half a million (Fig. 4). Most Finns soon became familiar with pictures depicting former refugees searching Karelia for something that might bring back their local memories and identities from the past which had been broken off 50 years previously.

Like many Karelians, those born in Värtsilä also established associations, one in Joensuu in eastern Finland and one in Helsinki. The Värtsilä Association in Joensuu today has less than 200 members and scarcely 30 of these are active. It has concentrated on maintaining local forms of identity and heritage and on organizing visits to their former home area beyond the border. As with the Karelian people in general, the number of nostalgic trips has now decreased, largely due to the fact that the Utopian land they were

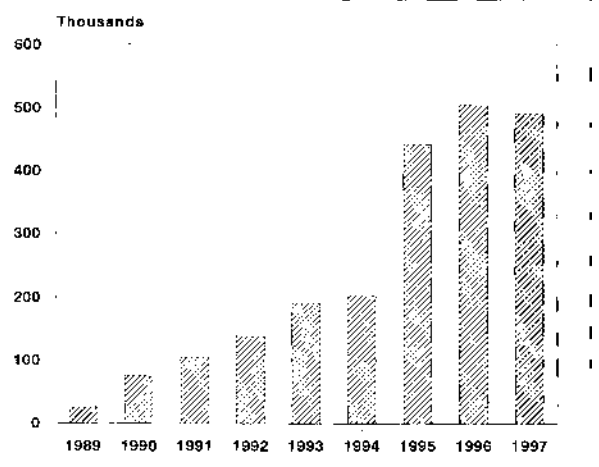


Fig. 4. Crossings of the border at Niirala in Värtsilä in 1989–97

Source: Statistics from the headquarters of the Border Patrol Establishment.

looking for no longer exists; if the war did not destroy everything, the Sovietization of landscape and infrastructure did away with the rest (PAASI, 1996). The first visits were enough to demonstrate the huge gap in standards of living, and one new form of local participation has been to take clothes and other forms of aid to the children and elderly people in Russian Värtsilä.

Värtsilä was one of the first localities where cross-border activities were seen as a serious challenge for the future and it is still one of the major routes to the east. Soon after the opening of the border, plans for a great future to be achieved by co-operation were laid down and the idea of Värni, an industrial estate, was devised and soon registered in 1992. The partners were Finnish, Karelian and Russian firms together with five local authorities in eastern Finland. The idea was to provide Finnish, Russian and other firms with the opportunity to operate in a context that would open the way to exploiting the 'enormous eastern markets' (OKSANEN, 1994). Economic success has not been forthcoming, however, even though the number of border crossings has increased enormously. The early expectations and plans that followed the opening of the border were perhaps too optimistic, in Värtsilä as elsewhere. Local Finnish entrepreneurs criticize the Finnish and Russian bureaucracy, the lack of financial resources and Russian investments and, finally, cultural and institutional differences. One example of a more successful project is a small sawmill company, Karlis Ltd, owned by four Russian partners and one Finnish one. This project – a real example of the emerging capitalism rather than an initiative from the local authorities – employs some 35 people, only one of whom comes from Finland. The Finnish co-owner's office, from which he conducts his business, is just on the Finnish side of the border; 90% of the sawn timber is supplied to customers outside Finland. The wage level is about 1/8th–1/10th of that prevailing in Finland, but for the local people it provides a clear alternative to unemployment (TYKKYLÄINEN, 1998).

Cross-border interaction has also had an effect in shaping the forms of local culture. According to the telephone interviews that the author carried out in spring 1998, the number of people who are able to use a combination of the Russian and Finnish languages is increasing continually, and friendships have grown up between Finnish and Russian families. Local inhabitants often have long term visas which allow them to go shopping in Russia, where motor fuel and cigarettes are cheaper. Increasing interaction can also be seen in the fact that mixed marriages between Finns and Russians are becoming more common. The opening of the border has had its effect on the local 'moral landscape' also, as became obvious in my interviews at beginning of 1998. Seven Finns, mostly men, had recently divorced their Finnish spouse and married a Russian, causing quite a stir in a small community of

some 700 inhabitants. The processes of de-territorialization and re-territorialization of the border, are thus also manifesting themselves in a reshaping of the borders of social and personal spaces as well.

CONCLUSIONS

Much of the recent discourse concerning the roles of the nation-state and boundaries has suggested that both are fading away in the post-modern, globalizing world. Territoriality is still explicitly linked with nation-states in the current world, however, and with the socialization processes aimed at the continual production and reproduction of the national social space. Boundaries play a major role in the symbolization of this space. While the current world is becoming increasingly characterized by flows, boundaries still exist as symbols of the sovereignty of states, even if they do not have such a dramatic role in distinguishing territories as they had in earlier times.

This paper has illustrated the complexity of boundaries by analysing the changing meanings of the Finnish–Russian border. The collapse of the Soviet Union radically altered the formerly closed, peripheral position of the border area, and Finland and Russia now share a motivation for cross-border interaction and co-operation. The implications of the Russian transition and the opening of the border have been understood in similar ways on both sides, and the strengthening of economic ties is an important challenge for local and regional development. The problem is that the infrastructural prerequisites for cross-border co-operation are weak in the area. Much of the effort to strengthen co-operation has been concentrated on creating these prerequisites (buildings, roads, customs houses, education of the population). The challenges are substantial ones, as ESKELINEN *et al.*, 1998, p. 47, remind us, since transport routes towards the border were not fostered during the Soviet era, the border regions are sparsely populated and the urban centres with their service facilities are usually located considerable distances apart. The political separation of neighbouring regions also has produced remarkable cultural and institutional differences. All these problems are structural ones, which makes their eradication very difficult.

The collapse of the Soviet Union transformed not only Finnish economic policies but also political, security and military practices and discourses regarding the border areas. The political role of the border has changed now that it serves as the border between the EU and Russia. In Finland this larger institutional space is used both as a new scale for identification and as a resource for organizing cross-border activities. The military, border guarding and foreign policy elites maintain traditional national narratives of sovereignty, but the new security policy discourses are also characterized by different forms of de-territorialization. One

example of these is the fact that Finland has been very active within the context of the European Union in opening up new connections with Russia and including that country in a larger European space. Finnish political elites were very active in efforts to have Russia accepted as a member of the Council of Europe, and their efforts to develop a 'Northern Dimension' in EU policy have the same aims of creating economic links with Russia, integrating Russia into the larger European space and preventing environmental problems. These new connections are therefore not only economic ones but also illustrate the changing strategies of the security policy elite (PAASI, 1999).

All these examples show that the traditional inter-

pretations of political geography regarding boundaries as lines are perhaps too narrow for our contemporary world which is characterized by processes of de-territorialization and re-territorialization. Boundaries are complicated, historically contingent phenomena that are concomitantly both contextual social institutions and symbols and are constituted on various spatial scales in various institutional practices and discourses.

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