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## **Cross-Border Cooperation in the Periphery of the European Union: Reinterpreting the Finnish-Russian Borderland**

*James WESLEY SCOTT*

**Abstract:** *The profound socio-spatial transformations that have occurred in Post Cold-War Europe are becoming visible in border regions in terms of the influence of civil society co-operation, intermarriage, business networks, the increasing mobility of labour, local cross-border trade and tourism, etc. These processes suggest an acceleration of rapidly re-territorializing (e.g. 'post-national') dynamics in Europe. The Finnish-Russian case of 'Karelia' highlights the complexity of re-territorialisation in 'emerging' European Borderlands. Karelia is, on the one hand, a regional idea – part of an attempt to selectively use history, geographical representations and discourses of regional integration in order to create a sense of common purpose. This paper will present evidence of regionalisation processes taking shape in 'Finnish-Russian' Karelia based on the construction of 'familiarity' This region-building strategy harks back to the well-known Euroregion model developed within the context of European integration. However, if Euroregions can be seen as largely public sector projects of 'place-making' the construction of familiarity is a much more socially grounded process. In concluding I will speculate to what extent this European Borderland can be seen as a laboratory of post-national identity-formation and development practices.*

**Keywords:** *border, cooperation, Finland, Russia, Karelia region*

### **Introduction**

In this essay, the author will focus on the issue of cross-border 'region building' as the (re)construction of familiarity between Finnish and Russian Karelia. As is the case with many areas situated at the new frontiers of the European Union, Finnish-Russian border regions are characterized by new patterns of interaction and changes in local perceptions of borders, neighbours and regions. These processes are partly specific to the post-Soviet context but also due to the increasing impact of the European Union beyond its borders. Finnish-Russian border regions are, in fact, a microcosm of regional transformations that are occurring in Central and Eastern Europe; new nation-building projects are taking place at the same time that demands for greater regional autonomy and community rights as well as attempts at local cross-border co-operation are increasing. Post-Soviet and new EU (Schengen) border regimes have reconditioned political and economic orientations – disrupting interaction in some cases and creating new incentives for cross-border networking in others.

In this essay I will apply the concept of borderland. In traditional academic debate, the term 'borderlands' has generally referred to a space of transition between (national) societies (Rumley and Minghi 1991) and hence a zone of indeterminacy in terms of allegiances, citizenship and belonging. However, as Newman (2006a/b) points out, the indeterminacy – and hybridity – of the borderland is dependent upon the nature of the border itself, its functions, its history and its symbolism. The Finnish-Russian border, and thus the borderland, is an emblematic case of political change in Post Cold War Europe. Of rather recent creation after Finnish independence in 1917, this border has been shaped as a consequence of wars, several territorial shifts and decades of closure. Despite friendly and stable relations between the Soviet Union and Finland after WWII projects and a number of industrial co-operation projects, very little interaction took place across the border.

Since 1991, the border has been open and accessible to citizens on both sides. Directly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, nostalgia, curiosity and the search for new opportunities generated new cross-border flows of people. Contacts between universities intensified and representatives of local and regional governments sought to develop working relationships. Despite this opening, Finnish-Russian and EU-Russian relations in particular have not promoted a radical liberalization of border and visa regimes. As a result, there has not been cross-cultural interaction here in the same measure as at other former Soviet borders; the bazaar economies, labour flows and border trade visible in the Polish-Ukrainian, Romanian-Moldovan and Hungarian-Ukrainian cases have not materialized to similar extents between Russia and Finland. Furthermore, with Finland's accession to the EU in 1995, bilateral relations changed as the political (although not military) neutrality of Finland was partly suspended by community policies. The EU-Russian relationship since 1991 has thus been one of cautious, perhaps uneasy, interaction; driven by pragmatism and the recognition of interdependence but yet informed by historical (mis)apprehensions. As a result, the Finnish-Russian border has remained in many ways a hard, separating border, albeit definitely more permeable since the elimination of Soviet-era travel restrictions.

Within this restrictive environment, I argue that processes of Russian-Finnish borderlands formation are taking place in several ways. This essay will therefore explore different aspects of 'region-building' between Finland and Russia that reflect political and socio-cultural change and the reconstruction of a sense of familiarity across the border. Politically and economically motivated cross-border co-operation (partly supported by the EU) is one aspect of this process. Equally as important are the uses of history and landscape and townscape symbolism in creating narratives of cross-border 'regionness'. Thus, at one level, we can understand the Finnish-Russian borderlands as a product of 'place-making' in the intentional sense of regional identity politics capitalizing on border locations, cross-border co-operation and a historical notion of cross-border region (Karelia). At another level, these borderlands are characterized by more subtle and unguided process of intercultural dialogue. Finally, the borderlands can be understood as a state of mind in which local and regional identities reflect life on borders and where changes in the political, functional and symbolic meanings of historical landscapes have had deep impacts on local communities and consciousness. It is important to emphasize, furthermore, that broader political and geopolitical contexts are at work here. Finnish-Russian cross-border interaction is strongly influenced both by Russia's post-socialist modernization project, the changing nature of Finnish-Russian relations and the increasing role of the EU as agenda-setter of regional co-operation. In concluding, the author will speculate on the potential significance of this borderland in terms of creating a sense of familiarity and common regionness within a historically difficult context. While scenarios of a future 'post-national' space are certainly exaggerated, I suggest that the borderland could remain an important strategy of local development and an important frame of reference for cultural dialogue.

### **Borderlands and Socio-Spatial Transformations**

The collapse of state socialism, the Soviet Union and geopolitical logics of bloc confrontation in Europe have subjected the continent to a profound reconfiguration of state-society relationships and deep processes of social change (see Hamilton et.al. 2005 and Kostecki, Zukrowska and Goralcyk 2000). More than twenty years after the 'Fall of the Wall', these processes are far from having taken their full course. Moreover, it now appears more than evident that the relative stability of the Cold War was an interlude –

albeit a very important one – in European history. The current political struggles within the European Union and in many neighbouring countries remind us that territorial relationships, the roles of borders and the quality of interstate relations are rarely ‘fixed’ in time and space. Within this context of change, questions of identity play a central role. In terms of everyday life-worlds and personal identities, post-Socialism has brought with it an individualization of life choices and risks but has also opened new opportunities for self-realization. At the same time, group identities and ethnic-cultural tensions ‘frozen’ during the Cold War have now resurfaced in many regions of Central and Eastern Europe. Language and national identities have re-emerged as controversial and divisive elements and thus at the centre of ‘culture wars’ both within the EU (as the Hungarian-Slovakian case reminds us) and at the external borders of the EU (for example, in the case of Estonia and Russia or between Romania and Moldova).

By the same token, the reassessment of common historical experiences and relationships has served in several cases to develop a new sense of ‘neighbourliness’. Russian-Finnish and Polish-Ukrainian relations are but two examples where this is (cautiously) taking place (Belokurova 2010, Sagan 2010). Identity issues are by no means limited to national belonging and politics of national memory. Processes of regional transformation have highlighted the existence and potentialities of multilevel identities (i.e. local, regional, national) within states as well as emerging transnational identities at the local and European level (Enyedi 1998, Kennedy 2002, Popescu 2008).

Borderlands can be seen as microcosms of these regional transformations. While borderlands experiences cannot be easily generalized – they are historically contingent and context-specific – local cases all reflect in their own specific ways more general processes of ‘re-territorialization’ (see Newman 2006a) and shifting state-society relations in Europe. The term ‘Borderland’ does not describe an objective spatial category in and of itself. Similar to the notion of ‘region’, it is fundamentally relational and can be interpreted in several ways. In more traditional schools of human geography, ‘borderlands’ have been typically understood as frontiers between nations in the process of ‘becoming’, as zones of transition between societies and their emerging nationhood (see Rumley and Minghi 1993, House 1980, 1982). In Ladis Kristof’s (1959, p. 281) famous formulation: “the frontier (*as borderland*) is characteristic of rudimentary socio-political relations; relations marked by rebelliousness, lawlessness and/or absence of laws”.<sup>1</sup> A much more flexible understanding of borderlands is offered by the social anthropology of Barth (1969) and others who implicitly understand borderlands as permeable frontiers between ethnic groups; these can act as catalysts for change and hybridization, and not necessarily the ‘nationalization’, of group identities. The concept of borderland is thus cartographically ambiguous and describes a fluid rather than static social space (Newman 2006b, Rumley and Minghi 1991). Unlike classical notions of ‘frontier’ as a regional situation that precedes the consolidation of state territoriality within formal borders, a borderland can also describe an area that closely reflects the physical, political and social impacts of state borders. There is generally, but not of necessity, a cross-border dynamic involved. Borderlands and borderlands communities often engage in cross-border trade, work, co-operation and other forms of interaction. However, even in situations of closed borders and limited interaction, borderlands societies and mentalities can be identified. As Alexander Izotov (2011) reminds us, Soviet-era Sortavala had no cross-border ties to Finnish counterparts or even a concept of what might be on the other

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<sup>1</sup> Word in italics inserted by the author.

side of the border, but the identity of a garrison town at the border, protecting the motherland from foreign enemies, had a powerful influence on local consciousness.

Borderlands thus reflect historical memories of life at borders and how lifeworlds of borderlanders are characterized by a cognitive engagement with changing border symbolisms (see Meinhof 2003). This is not to suggest, however, a unilateral dependence of borderlands development upon the characteristics of state borders. Indeed, any temptation of deterministic explanation must be avoided. The processes that contribute to borderland 'formation' operate at different levels and involve a dialectic relationship between local societies and territorial spaces defined by borders. Borderlands are thus formed through processes of cross-border regionalization at different levels and in different realms of agency: cross-border co-operation, political projects of 'place-making' as well as everyday economic, social, family and cultural practices of transnationalism.

Cross-border regionalization implies a shift in the political geography of the state. It involves institutional change in state-local relationships and is defined by multilevel interaction within specific political contexts. It is, in effect a 'production of space' through the promotion of a regional idea and by linking actors, developing agendas and negotiating regional coalitions. Both the definition of a 'region' and of its 'identity' are, as Paasi (2001) argues, subject to very different interpretations, often influenced by national and local experience. Jones and MacLeod (2004, p. 433) write that: "...the formation of any given regional map is reflective – and indeed constitutive – of an unevenly developing, often overlapping and superimposing mosaic of economic practices, political mobilizations, cultural performances and institutional accomplishments". Furthermore, as Michele Byers (2003, p.36) argues: "our ideas about spaces are mediated by the myths through which they have been anchored to our social reality".

Borderlands formation reflects a socio-spatial dialectic between rules and practices than underlie bordering processes. Similarly, Giddens (1984), through his notion of regionalization, supports a relational notion of region-building in term of a permanent process of spatial signification and bounding (boundary-formation). Regionalization as understood in this abstract fashion is a complex process of space-time zonation that is place and group-specific and that is subject to multilevel influences. Political institutions, governance principles, attitudes, local experiences, and regional identity-formation all contribute to spatial bounding and signification. Therefore, to quote Paasi (2001, p. 16):

(...) the region should not be regarded merely as a passive medium in which social action takes place. Neither should it be understood as an entity that operates autonomously above human beings. Regions are always part of this action and hence they are social constructs that are created in political, economic, cultural and administrative practices and discourses. Further, in these practices and discourses, regions may become crucial instruments of power that manifest themselves in shaping the spaces of governance, economy and culture.

At one level, a borderland can emerge in terms of an intentional project that seeks to extract benefit from border proximity and notions of a common cross-border region. This is often supported by uses of symbols and historical narratives that give substance to claims of a unique cross-national heritage. In the case of (Finnish-Russian) Karelia, we see a partial downplaying of strictly national perspectives, both in terms of historical interpretations of Karelia and place-making practices that reference natural and cultural landscapes. At a more everyday level, borderlands can emerge cognitively, as elements of local consciousness and identity, and as webs of social interaction between communities and groups. The increasing complexity of societal interaction, politically, economically, culturally and socially has in fact transformed Karelia from a static borderland of national

histories to a more 'lived' space of Finnish-Russian relations. As Alexander Izotov (2011) argues in the case of Sortavala, a border city within Russian Karelia, a process of individual and group 'repositioning' has taken place in which the new openness of the border has elicited a cognitive remapping of the world and Russian-Finnish relations.

### **Karelia as a Finnish-Russian Borderland**

#### *Historical Background*

The Finnish-Russian border acquired its present form in the aftermath of the Second World War. In geographical terms, this 1340-kilometre border does not follow any clear-cut natural barriers to human interaction. For the most part it runs through forests and sparsely populated rural areas. In a cultural and political sense, this region has formed a historical demarcation zone shaped by 'East-West' rivalries. These rivalries have been prompted by tensions between eastern and western Christianity, the rise of the Swedish and Russian empires, the ideals of nation-state and Communist revolution, and most recently by European integration and post-Soviet change and the gradual shaping of relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation.<sup>2</sup> Between the two world wars, a hostile military border was established between Finland and Soviet Russia. Between 1939 and 1945, two wars were fought here, with Finland losing about one-tenth of its territory, including a large part of what is known as 'Karelia'. The population of the ceded areas moved to Finland while new settlers came from various parts of the Soviet Union. This created a clear-cut ethnic and cultural border. During the Cold War years, the Finnish-Russian border marked a dividing line between two rivalling political and economic systems; the border was thoroughly militarized and heavily guarded on both sides.

This at first glance straightforward story of border closure and alienation is rather complex. From a local and regional perspective, the border was sealed off. Yet the two countries did establish broad bilateral agreements, and the volume of trade between the two countries was large. In the aftermath of World War II, Finland and Russia were considered to enjoy a special relationship nurtured by the Soviet leadership and by Finnish presidents such as Paasikivi and Kekkonen who religiously maintained Finland's status as a non-aligned country. The Finnish political elite believed that political neutrality and good personal contacts with the Soviet leadership were a necessary condition for maintaining state sovereignty, a market economy and democracy. In return, Finland enjoyed access to almost unlimited purchases of fuel and raw materials and to an enormous Soviet market ready to absorb any Finnish goods. About a quarter of all Finnish exports were in fact delivered to the Soviet Union. Certainly, a relatively high dependence on the undemanding Soviet market decreased the overall competitiveness of Finnish goods. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic crisis in the 1990s also heavily affected neighbouring Finland. Nevertheless, for several decades 'special' relations with the Soviet Union were a tool to develop Finland's national economy and to maintain social stability.

The fundamental condition for friendly bilateral relations was the 'defusing' of territorial issues. As stipulated by the Treaty of Paris, Finland ceded to the Soviet Union the Karelian Isthmus (with the city of Vyborg), a strip of land along the eastern boundary known as White Sea Karelia (with the city of Sortavala), and Pechenga (Petsamo) in the north, which between 1920 and 1944 was the only Finnish port on the Barents Sea.<sup>3</sup> At the level of interstate relations, the Soviet Union always denied the existence of territorial

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<sup>2</sup> For a thorough analysis of the Finnish-Russian border: see Paasi (1996).

<sup>3</sup> Within the Russian empire, Petsamo was part of the Russian Arkhangelsk province. It is now within the Murmansk Region.

issues with regard to Finland, as well as with any other neighbouring country. In order to maintain 'special relations' with the Soviet Union, the Finnish government carefully avoided raising territorial claims. In 1975 Finland signed the founding document of the OSCE, confirming the integrity of post-war boundaries in Europe.

After the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia continued to deny the existence of territorial issues. Indeed, it was feared that their recognition could lead to a total revision of Russia's boundaries as all its neighbours, from Ukraine to China, could potentially stake border claims. Indeed, by the early 1990s Estonia, Latvia and Japan had already done so. Having opted for the membership in the EU, the government of Finland was opposed to any official discourse which could provoke a conflict in the relations with Russia. It clearly preferred integration and co-operation to traditional geopolitical logics of zero-sum games. This fundamental geopolitical factor contributes to regionalization of border areas and to the creation of favorable social perceptions. In the Finnish-Russian case, common histories and politics of memory are not as emotionally loaded as they are in the case with Poland or the Baltic States. In these countries we see continuous battles with Russia for self-assertive identities at the national level, and these have a direct impact on peripheral border areas and cross-border co-operation (Davydova 2008, Kolossov 2006). In addition, Finland, unlike the Baltic countries, did not apply for NATO membership after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

#### *The Emergence of Regional Finnish-Russian Cross-Border Co-operation*

Before 1991, cross-border co-operation between Finland and the Soviet Union was largely limited to specific industrial sectors, such as mining, wood products and paper pulp. This economic co-operation was particularly important for Northwest Russia and Eastern Finland as the locus of industrial activities was 'twin towns' on the border such as Svetogorsk/Imatra and Kostmuksha/Kuhmo (see Zimin, Kotilainen and Prokhorova 2011). However, the movement of persons across the border was severely restricted. In addition, political co-operation was largely of a symbolic nature, largely instrumentalized as gestures of peaceful co-existence and friendship. The border was only opened in any real practical sense towards the end of the Soviet Union, as Perestroika gradually succeeded in liberalizing the political system.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, interaction between the two countries has been conditioned by deepening European integration and globalization, as well as by the effects of Post-Soviet transformation on the Russian side. Hence, relations between Finland and Russia have been reconstituted as part of the wider geopolitical shifts in Europe. Concrete indications of the new situation include, for instance, new border crossing points and logistical infrastructure, the abolition of travel restrictions on the Russian side and co-operation programmes aiming at strengthening cross-border links. Finnish membership in the European Union in 1995 increased these border-spanning activities in various forms and at various spatial levels.

Relations between Russian and Finnish border regions are considered by both sides as a laboratory of co-operation between Russia and EU at the regional level<sup>4</sup>. New actors, economic enterprises and civic organizations, have entered the field that was earlier controlled by bilateral agreements between the states. In an administrative sense, the regional councils (formed as confederations of municipalities in 1994) have been granted a major role in implementing EU programmes and administering EU funds (see

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Eskelinen, Liikanen and Oksa (1999), Laine and Demidov (2011), Liikanen (2004) and Shliamin (2002).

Kettunen and Kungla 2005). EU funded programmes such as INTERREG (aimed at cross-border regional development within the EU) and TACIS (a programme earmarked for comprehensive development projects in post-Soviet states) have thus become an important part of promoting cross-border interaction on the regional level. In institutional terms, Finnish-Russian cross-border co-operation at the regional level has become part of policy frameworks and administrative structures that originally served regional development and co-operation within the European Union. The adaptation of EU administrative practices in Finland and the constitution of new democratic and administrative institutions in the Russian Federation have led to a continuous restructuring of administration on both sides, and in the Russian case to sharp political and administrative discontinuities. Since 1995, Finnish EU membership has led to a manifold 'Europeanization' of the border and systems of European multi-level governance have been introduced on the Finnish side as part of the structural fund policies that condition CBC (Eskelinen 2000, Laine 2007). The implementation, for example, of INTERREG programmes has been institutionally linked to the integration of European and Finnish regional development policies.

These developments have also impacted on Finnish administrative structures which traditionally have been characterized by a combination of strong central power and broad local self-government. It is important to mention that the strengthening of the intermediate level – in this case of the regional administrations of Finnish Karelia – in the management of EU funds and programmes occurred outside the confines of traditional Finnish politics. As a result, the agenda of local and regional-level CBC projects has been strongly affected by regional level administrative organizations, regional councils and intermediate-level state administration, which together administer and allocate funding from EU instruments of CBC. Indeed, new EU instruments have, however, opened opportunities for new kinds of regional level co-operation in the field of education, health care, social work and environmental protection. In public-sector co-operation projects, state level agreements and strategies have also played a vital role in shaping the CBC mechanisms. At the municipal level, there were some, highly regulated CBC contacts with a para-diplomatic exchange of official delegations even in the Soviet times (Varkaus and Petrozavodsk were twin towns, Kuhmo and Kostamuksa developed links on the basis of a major construction project). These relations have continued, grown in number, become less formal, and started to utilize EU support.<sup>5</sup> On the regional level, the challenges of new cross-border co-operation opportunities were thus directly affected by the introduction of new European policy frames and instruments available to local civic and economic actors. Similarly, the inclusion of Russian regional actors in co-operation projects increased the complexity of coordinating projects between the INTERREG programmes on the Finnish side and the TACIS initiative on the Russian side.

Although the Russian federal government has considerably liberalized its border regime, it has not been active in the field of CBC *per se*. In practice, the Russian federal government has been rather restrictive with respect to cross-border initiatives of Russian regions and municipalities.<sup>6</sup> At best, the government has provided financial guarantees to

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<sup>5</sup> Still, in today's Finland, there seems to be both positive and negative views on using municipal tax income to support CBC projects: "why to give money to the other side, we have already paid the war indemnity". On the Russian side, given the lack of financial resources at the municipal level, the question of funding CBC from municipal sources is not even raised.

<sup>6</sup> In summer 2005, the Russian Parliament adopted a Law on Special Economic Zones, and the federal Ministry for Economic Development and Trade has begun to develop plans for setting up Free Trade Zones. It can be expected that a few of them will be set up in Russian border regions.



regions participating in CBC projects that have invested in Russian infrastructure. In addition, the government has supported the construction of new international border-crossing checkpoints (usually funded by the EU) and roads leading to checkpoints. However, despite difficulties in Russia-EU relations and in particular, the lack of a general treaty on their strategic partnership, the Russian federal government has recently expressed its desire to become a full-fledged participant in CBC programmes. CBC was one of the central themes of Russia-EU summit in May 2007 near Samara and both sides agreed on co-funding of joint CBC projects within the ENPI.<sup>7</sup> New programmes are focused on the improvement of borders' infrastructure, transport and transit, the creation of logistics' systems and terminals, economic development along transit corridors, telecommunications, and energy and environment protection.<sup>8</sup> Since 2010, the Russian Federation has in fact begun to devise a CBC strategy. It thus appears that regional cross-border co-operation may enjoy greater political priority within the Russian government's foreign policy agenda.

### **Karelia as a 'Region-Building' Project**

With increasing cross-border interaction of a political, economic and socio-cultural nature, Karelia, a historical region that straddles the Finnish-Russian border, has become the focus of new processes of 'region-building' that mirror more general socio-spatial transformations taking place in Europe. As suggested above, Karelia has become a regional idea that both 'Europeanizes' and 'localizes' identities in a transnational context. This of course does not mean that a new regional identity has been created that transcends national loyalties or the mental barriers that exist between many Russians and Finns. What this 'regional idea' implies is a selective reframing of local structural and political conditions as well as of personal everyday activity spaces. The 'selectivity' of this phenomenon is of critical importance; we by no means even suggest that a majority of Finns and Russians living in Karelia would actively subscribe to the idea that they share an emerging transnational space. Karelia is, rather, a transnational space for those political actors, businesspeople, civil society organizations and 'ordinary citizens' who understand it as a resource and a specific place within Europe with common issues. In the following, Karelia will be discussed as a region-building project which is on the one hand politically motivated and closely tied to projects of cross-border co-operation between Russia and Finland but, on the other hand, is also a product of shifting local perceptions of regionness and the border.

#### *Karelia: The Role of Historical Symbolism and Historical Memory*

In terms of its historical development, Karelia can be understood as a zone of transition, politico-religious division and, most recently, of a Finnish-Russian rapprochement and re-evaluation of common experience. The case of Karelia also reminds us that borderlands are often rich in historical memory and the nationally symbolic. In the past, Karelia has referred to an indeterminate territorial but very symbolic space that has

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<sup>7</sup> About 600 Million euros have been earmarked for EU-Russian CBC during 2008-2013. EU and Russian federal budgets will contribute 122 Million euros, EU countries will provide 360 Million (see [http://www.utrade.ru/about/news\\_prime.html?ELEMENT\\_ID=20492](http://www.utrade.ru/about/news_prime.html?ELEMENT_ID=20492)).

<sup>8</sup> Still, Russia needs to create a legal basis which can allow co-funding of border regions CBC programmes and harmonize norms of financial reports and auditing. In particular, Russian regions have no specialized funds and institutions which could consider the projects submitted by local authorities or private companies. For many years the State Duma has not been able to adopt a law on CBC - a number of bills were declined or postponed. This law would facilitate easier the coordination of different federal institutions' policy regulating cross-boundary flows and relations. This is a reason why seven joint programs worked out by Russian and European experts were not really launched yet.

been charged with meaning for the formation of Finnish national identity. Karelia is the source of the sagas and songs that form the basis of Finnish (mythic) folk culture as well as the landscapes, the villages and vernacular architectures with which Finland and Finnishness have been popularly associated.

As John Lind (2004) has convincingly described, Karelia, the Karelian Isthmus in particular, was historically situated on a vital East-West trade route and bore the brunt of competition between the Swedish Empire and the expanding State of Novgorod. This competition was also reflected in the politico-religious landscape and confrontation between Catholicism (and later Protestantism) and Eastern Orthodoxy. In a way similar to Rob Shields' (1991) notion of liminal spaces, Häyrynen (2004) has described Karelia as a periphery within the Finnish national landscape imagery but also as a place of powerful nostalgic significance. In the Finnish national imagination, Karelia has been understood as the birthplace of the Ur-Finnish peasant, surviving in a land of dense forests and lakes (Häyrynen 2008) – and as documented during the late 19th Century by the photographer Konrad Inha. Similarly, Böök (2004) describes the significance of Karelia (particularly the areas ceded to the Soviet Union after the war) as a past 'heartland' of Finnish Orthodoxy and the mythical last reserve of the 'original Finnish' Kalevala culture.

Attempts to convert this indeterminate space into a more a cartographically fixed territory were encouraged by the emergence of Finnish nationalism and the achievement of Finnish independence in 1917. Finnish national definitions of Karelia were promoted, furthermore, by the wars with the Soviet Union in 1939/1944 and organizations such as the Karelian Association, founded in 1940 (Prozorov 2004). Supporters of the Karelian Association argued that Russia should respect the 'historical division' between Swedish and Russian Karelia as well as the rights of the Finnic population which dominated there before World War II. After 1945 and the closure of the border, landscape images were idealized as constitutive of Finnishness and Finnish cultural identity itself before and during the Cold War period. In essence, an ambiguous politics of memory was played out in which war memorials, lost territories, borders, battlegrounds, sites of conflict, abandoned homes, settlements, etc. served to construct national identities – evoking notions of 'dark tourism' (see Foley and Lennon 2007). Thus, in post-war Finland, the lost territories of Karelia were idealized as prototypically Finnish, while the Soviet (Russian) attitude towards the territories was largely determined by ideologies of Soviet nationalism.

Isachenko (2009) argues that during the last one hundred years, there have been three main stages in the development of Karelian cultural landscapes: Finnish, Soviet, and Russian (post-Soviet) all of which affected the development of settlement systems, townscapes, vernacular and public architecture and land use. All three phases are visible today, although to different degrees, and now form a mosaic border landscape that is being recast as a common historical (and hence 'familiar') heritage. More recently, wartime experiences, expulsions and annexations have been mixed with more positive historical associations with Czarist Russia in which Finland enjoyed a "pre-national" autonomy (Jukarainen 2009). As Pashkov (2004) points out, the Vyborg Karelia area and the area around Lake Ladoga (popularly known as 'Old Finland') were popular tourist destinations for middle-class Russians before Finnish independence.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Karelian regional imagery has become more complex and contradictory; much of this has to do with the increased transitional function of the Karelian Isthmus (i.e. the routes from Finland through Vyborg and onto St. Petersburg) between Russia and the European Union. Indeed, Isachenko (2009) argues that emerging transboundary cultural landscape of Karelia is indicative of a cultural and historical bridge between Russia, Finland and the European Union as a whole. This is

substantiated by a rediscovery of the Karelian past on the Russian side as well with an increasing interest among Russian inhabitants to uncover, rehabilitate and make present the history and pre-war reality of the region. (Böök 2004). In present-day Russian Karelia, remnants of pre-war cultural landscapes, villages and buildings are still evident even though often ghostly in their state of disrepair and neglect (Nuikko 2009). As Raivo (2004) explains: “memories of Finnish Karelia have been erased, transformed and brought to life again (...) The more recent revival of Finnish memories has been brought about not only by the Finns but also by Russians who have wished to tell the present-day inhabitants of Karelia about the forgotten and suppressed details of its more recent history”.

While the Karelian historical landscape has changed, intercultural dialogue (as a result of nostalgic tourism and greater general interaction) has now contributed to a shared notion of Karelia, with different discourses of region possible; post Soviet images are now cognizant of the political reality and the multicultural nature of Karelia (Nuikko 2009). The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the opening of Russia in the early 1990s allowed Finns to re-discover Karelia. This did stimulate discourse about the re-unification of Karelia, though it has been never clear where the boundaries of Karelia are. But at the same time, the re-discovery of Eastern (Russian) Karelia offered the best evidence that it was an illusion, in particular, because of the loss of Finnish symbols and landscapes.

Cross-border contacts have allowed both sides to gain basic knowledge about the living conditions of their neighbours thus fostering mutual understanding (Laine and Demidov 2011). Although the memories of Finnish-Russian confrontation during the WWII are still alive amongst the older generations of Finns, Russia is no longer perceived as an enemy, but rather as a needy neighbour and in this context, cross-border co-operation is seen to serve as a channel of assistance contributing to a peaceful Finnish-Russian neighbourhood. If, as Häyrynen (2009) argues, the present-day Karelian landscape is a nostalgic construction, it is one informed by political, social, economic and cultural motivations. To an important degree, cross-border co-operation involves re-telling the history of Karelia through tourism, media representations, cityscapes, etc.

#### *Cross-Border Co-operation and the Euroregion Karelia*

Cross-border co-operation has been promoted as a way of breaking down differences between societies – at least in the sense that administrative and mental borders no longer create obstacles to addressing everyday problems and issues that affect communities on either side of state boundaries. When Finland joined the EU in 1995, conditions governing CBC faced a significant transformation. On the one hand, the previously bilaterally-governed co-operation across the border became part of the broader dynamics of international politics and EU-Russia relations. However, on the other hand, regional and local actors also have taken a more active role in “international affairs” by co-operating directly across the border. In addition, EU funding via the Tacis and Interreg Programmes and, most recently, the ENP-Instrument to which Russia has become a partner, has made cross-border co-operation increasingly project-based. A number of regions participate in recently created Euroregions along the former Soviet boundary and the boundary of Russia with its western neighbours (Kolossov, 2006).

To a major extent, the Finnish-Russian Karelian regional development agenda has been shaped by the problems experienced by the Russian side. The study has revealed that the most common problems for Russian border communities have been the following: (1) crisis of municipal services and infrastructure, (2) unemployment and poverty, (3) alcoholism and drug abuse, (4) crime and lack of security, and (5) poor investment climate. Correspondingly, a significant number of CBC projects have addressed these

problems with a varying degree of success. Amongst the most serious obstacles to CBC in the field of human contacts, the respondents have noted cultural and linguistic differences, high costs of Schengen visas and the lengthy procedure of obtaining them, lack of public cross-border transport links, and security problems on the Russian side. Problems connected to these issues have led to attempts to build coordinated regionally based institutional structures in the Karelian context.

The Euregio Karelia, established in 2000, covers 700 km of land border between the EU and Russia, and it consists of four regions: the provinces of North Karelia, Kainuu and North Ostrobothnia on the Finnish side and the Republic of Karelia on the Russian side. Since Euregio Karelia was the first Euregio on land borders between the EU and the Russian Federation, the key figures behind the venture willingly promoted it from the beginning as a European model (Liikanen, 2008a). It was seen as a pilot project for future joint administrative structures between the EU and Russian regional authorities (Shliamin 2001). The idea was that the structures developed in the Euregio Karelia region would with time gain broader European significance. From the Finnish perspective, the institutional forms adopted on the Russian border were seen as exporting 'border know-how': they would generate a model or at least a set of experiences that could be useful for the elaboration of European border policies after the eastern enlargement (Cronberg 2000, Eskelinen 2000). With the adaptation of the European Neighbourhood Policy framework, a crucial future question remains as to how to adapt regional perspectives of external relations to existing institutional models and how to bring Russian regional actors into the implementation and targeting of new policy instruments. In this setting, it is interesting to see if the concept of 'Euregions' can be further elaborated as an arena of adjusting regional, national and supranational interests, policy frames and instruments.

Correspondingly, Finnish-Russian CBC in Karelia has developed in areas such as environmental protection, forest management, environmental tourism, agriculture and the alleviation of unemployment. After Finnish EU-membership, the promotion of democracy and civil society in Russia and humanitarian assistance to Russian social welfare institutions, as well as cultural and educational exchange gained importance as well. Within the Finnish private sector and among the Finnish civil society organizations, local and individual initiatives play an important role.<sup>9</sup> At the level of CBC coordinated by the Euregio Karelia, CBC funds (for the period 2001-2006) were focused on business activity, transport and communication, as well as upgrading expertise and regional co-operation. The Finnish project design has been perceived in the first place as part of the structural funds administration of the EU.

Co-operation between cultural associations, as well as education and research organizations has been very active in the border regions. On the regional level the role of humanitarian aid associations is also seen important in everyday co-operation. Their priorities derive from local level initiatives and from specific needs on the Russian side. In public discussion, humanitarian aid is accepted on both sides: in the conditions prevailing on the Russian side, people accept the help with gratitude, and on the Finnish side public opinion is keen to promote a national image of selfless benefactor. However, Finnish and Russian priorities do not necessarily coincide. Russian partners are usually interested in either long-term administrative co-operation or direct implementation of particular

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<sup>9</sup> Obtaining EU support for local initiatives tends to be, however, difficult for groups and organizations not familiar with the workings of regional administration. Most successful actors are those involved in organizations, which have enough social and cultural capital to successfully apply for and utilize EU funds and CBC instruments.

investment projects, while the EU and the Finnish partners prefer to provide assistance in the form of educational projects, consulting, research and advice on the implementation of reforms on the level of regional public sector. In the Leningrad region these negotiations are carried out through the special Joint Finnish-Russian CBC Commission, while in Russian Karelia they are channelled through the Euregio Karelia and sectoral ministries of the Republican government. In most cases the European and Finnish approach prevails for obvious reasons.

Civil society actors have a vision of Karelia as a 'pilot region' in developing different and transferable practices of cross-border co-operation (Liikanen 2008b, Laine and Demidov 2011). This is closely connected with the overall positive evaluation of CSO development in Karelia. CSOs are viewed as channels through which cross-border co-operation can actually grow dynamically. The desire to co-operate among Russian Karelian CSOs goes beyond working with traditional partners and neighbours (Finland and Sweden) and there is a clear willingness to work with CSOs operating in Baltic countries, Norway, the USA and other EU countries outside the Baltic Sea or Northern European regions. Some of the CSOs, such as the Red Cross as an example have been actively working with CSOs from the UK and the Netherlands.

Furthermore, cross-border co-operation between CSOs was assessed as an activity that has helped develop social agendas. Heads of Russian women's organizations have stressed that it was their partners from Scandinavia that for the most part contributed to the spread of gender discourse in the Republic of Karelia. Another interesting fact is that cross-border co-operation is developing between partners operating on different scales. For instance, the majority of the Finnish partners with which Karelian CSOs collaborate are umbrella organizations operating at the national level in Finland (such as the Union of Invalids of Finland) and these are the main donors for Karelian CSOs. This situation is due to the weak presence of national Russian CSO organizations in Karelia.

#### *A New Economic Image*

In both Russian and Finnish Karelia the influence of the border has been a dominant factor in regional development.<sup>10</sup> Due to the closed nature of the border and the systemic differences between Finland and the Soviet Union, economic exchange was limited. Nevertheless, the economic activities that took place across the border were vital for both sides; a synergistic relationship developed between industrial firms in the area of wood, paper and pulp production and mining. This situation intensified the domination of extractive industries and low added-value economic activities (round wood, aluminium, paper sacks, newsprint, cellulose and ferrous metals) as well as the export dependency of both Finnish and Russian Karelia.<sup>11</sup> By the same token, there are few exportable manufactures. Thus, Karelia has been 'trapped', as local economists argue, within an

<sup>10</sup> The term 'Russian Karelia' refers to the Republic of Karelia or Karelian Republic, a constituent part (or 'subject') of the Russian Federation. These terms are used interchangeably.

<sup>11</sup> In comparison to Finland's overall economic relations, economic relations between Finland and Russia are based relatively more on trade and only to a limited degree on investments. Finland is the first economic partner of the Republic of Karelia (in 2006 30% of the total turnover, or about 500 mln. dollars) and one of the most important partners of Leningrad region (about 12%) and Murmansk region (23%). The trade between Finland and neighbouring Russian regions in 2000-2006 more than doubled. A rapid increase of Finnish investments could also be observed, though it is relatively modest in absolute figures. The total amount of Finnish investments in Karelia in 2006 reached 81 mln. dollars. They have significantly contributed to the modernization of Karelian economy.

unfavourable resource-export development path (Druzhinin 2004).<sup>12</sup> To exacerbate the situation, regional politics have at times tended to favour conservation rather than restructuring of weakly competitive industries a development path that has been recognized as inefficient and unsustainable. More recently, regional administrations on both sides of the border have begun to try to stimulate inward investments into higher-value-added industries, such as environment technologies, eco-tourism and more sophisticated forms of wood-processing.

Cross-border interaction has received attention as a solution to the structural problems of Eastern Finland since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Recent development trends in Russia, that is, the relative stability of political conditions and economic growth, have led to a new wave of interest in cross-border activity in the Karelias. Economic connections have grown and 'Russian connections' are seen as a key strategy in regional development in eastern Finland where concrete measures have been prepared for their enhancement (Etelä-Savon maakuntaliitto 2005). Significantly, and in contrast to the more traditional and central state oriented regional development policies employed in Russian Karelia, cross-border regional economic co-operation has since the mid-1990s been conceptualized in terms of creating a new economic regional image. While this 'image-making' objective has been more pronounced on the Russian side, it has resonated with local and regional actors in Finnish Karelia who are also seeking to counteract perceptions of peripherality and economic backwardness. The principal economic vision in this regard is the cross-border framing of Karelia as an ecoregion – basically as a touristically attractive region concerned with sustainability, trade, non-polluting manufactures and entrepreneurial development in improved extractive technologies. This ecoregional vision is largely inspired by the natural landscape and rural character of Finnish and Russian Karelia. Allied with the ecoregional image is the promotion of Karelia as a special region in Europe with a specific history and cultural/historical commonalities and as a fascinating point of contact.

Progress in this area has been slow in terms of large investments. Amongst Russian enterprises with Finnish Karelian participation only the Stora Enso's saw mill, PKC Group's automobile wiring plant, Helkama's refrigerator plant and a number of timber-logging enterprises and subcontracting ventures in the clothing industry stand out. At the same time, tourism and trade have increased considerably.

### **Concluding Remarks on the Construction of Familiarity**

Often understood as a pragmatic exercise in coordinating public and societal action across borders, cross-border co-operation more often than not involves an orchestration of identity politics in order to create a sense of mutual familiarity. This is, furthermore, a highly selective process, understood and exploited largely by those who sense a long-term benefit in CBC and persons dedicated to intercultural dialogue. Nevertheless, it would be dangerous to generalise about CBC as a means to promote a 'de-

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<sup>12</sup> In the Leningrad region, by contrast, its influence has been combined with other powerful factors, such as the proximity to St Petersburg, direct access to the Gulf of Finland and generally more developed transport infrastructure and communications. During almost a decade of economic growth, Leningrad region demonstrated much higher rates than the country in average, and has considerably improved its position in the list of Russian regions. Its economy is directed in-ward and has little to do with cross-boundary interactions. Regional authorities, both in Russian Karelia and in the Leningrad region, have been rather enthusiastic about CBC.

bordering' of European societies. The case of Karelia is a positive case of a mutual rediscovery and exploitation of historical commonalities, common landscapes and regional traditions, but it is not immune to the vicissitudes of security policies, strict border and visa regimes as well as the ups and downs of EU-Russia relations.

To be somewhat provocative: the political construction of familiarity between Finnish and Russian Karelia has its limits. The decisive role belongs to those whose everyday practices of cross-border interaction have contributed to the emergence of cross-border lifestyles; these are Finns and Russians who spend their weekends and own property on the other side, who have close friends and/or relatives there and often run a business venture of cross-border nature. At present, it is primarily (but by no means only) Russians as well as former Russian citizens of Finnish (Ingrian) ethnicity allowed to migrate to Finland) who lead these cross-border lifestyles. For them, the Finnish-Russian trans-border region has already become a reality. Their exposure to both cultures makes them bicultural, i.e. capable of efficiently utilizing the opportunities existing on both sides of the border. It is expected that under the present conditions this small stratum will grow and eventually become capable of political self-organization with the aim to defend their interests. In addition, this group could provide a resource for future cross-border interaction.

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