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Anssi Paasi
*University of Oulu*

Petri J. Raivo
*University of Oulu*

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BOUNDARIES AS BARRIERS AND PROMOTERS: CONSTRUCTING THE TOURIST LANDSCAPES OF FINNISH KARELIA

BY

DR. ANSSI PAASI, PROFESSOR

AND

DR. PETRI J. RAIVO, PROFESSOR

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
UNIVERSITY OF OULU
LINNANMAA
FI-90401 OULU, FINLAND

ABSTRACT

Boundaries have become significant foci of interdisciplinary research during the last decade, but their roles have not been discussed very often in the context of tourism which, in fact, is crucially linked with many contemporary tendencies such as the opening of borders between formerly closed realms of the world or flows of capital and people. This paper analyses the historical and geographical roles of the Finnish-Russian border in relation to tourism. The border was strictly guarded and almost entirely closed in Soviet times. It was a taboo that interested many foreign visitors to Finland. It interested the Finns as well, because on the other side was the ceded area of Karelia that had been part of Finland before the war but which was now totally inaccessible to foreign visitors or former residents. It was also the transformation zone of imagined cultural landscapes. When the physical border shifted westward after the war, so did the Karelian cultural landscape and its representations. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the border has become much more open and tourism has increased enormously.

INTRODUCTION

Boundaries have become increasingly significant foci of social and cultural research in the last 10 years or so, largely in response to the collapse of the rigid global geopolitical division between the eastern and western blocs, and the simultaneous increase in economic and human (refugees, migrants, tourists) flows has made the changing roles of boundaries particularly topical. Where border research has by tradition been a special area of political geography, it has now become increasingly an interdisciplinary field. Furthermore, boundaries are understood not merely as physical entities but also as metaphorical and symbolic elements (18, 16).

State boundaries in particular have for a long time, at least from the beginning of the current century, been understood as fixed, stable and concrete entities which divide the global space into bounded units and which change mainly as a consequence of conflicts between territorial powers (28). They have been understood as the key markers of sovereignty—not only physical markers but also symbolic and cultural ones. The existence of national identities and the continual
legitimation and signification of boundaries have thus been understood as two sides of the same coin. Much scientific research has also contributed to this state-centred outlook on the world. As far as the acceptance of nation and state as given are concerned, Agnew talks about methodological nationalism, noting that this idea has lain behind both mainstream and much radical social science (1). Methodological nationalism also effectively implies a view of the world as a grid of territories with more or less exclusive boundaries.

Following the radical changes in the global geopolitical landscape, boundaries are now increasingly being interpreted as vanishing elements in spatial transform rather than stable physical lines. This will, as many scholars have argued, reduce the meanings of state boundaries and sovereignty and, finally, lead to de-territorialization and re-territorialization, i.e. changes in the functions and meanings of boundaries. These notions are commonly associated with the works of the well-known philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, who developed them to describe the effects of capitalism on previous fixed orders of class, kinship and space, but they have become much-used metaphors for cultural, social and spatial change in the current geopolitical literature (18).

Much of the re-/de-territorializing discourse is linked with the ideas of globalization or the economic, cultural and environmental transformation of the global space. Scholars are not unanimous about the meanings of this phenomenon or its effects on global-local relations and on boundaries, but the new rhetoric reflects changes in global activity spaces. This rhetoric often represents boundaries as symbols of a past world characterized by a space of places that will be replaced by a dynamic world characterized by a space of flows, to employ the concepts of Castells (4). This flow rhetoric is persuasive and has been used increasingly in many contexts. The space of flows, it is often argued, will reduce the roles of the 'sover­eignty' and 'identities' of states and challenge national identities and boundaries. Side-by-side with these tendencies, nationalism and ethno-regionalism, linked with the flows of displaced people and refugees, are creating new boundaries and challenging the relations between existing social and physical spaces. In many cases this has given rise to conflicts and the drawing of new boundaries between social groups, i.e. re-territorialization.

In spite of the new interest in all kinds of 'flows' across boundaries in the contemporary world, scholars have not paid much attention to the roles of boundaries from the perspective of tourism. Besides its immense economic role in the contemporary world, tourism is a field where border crossings occur on all spatial scales, from personal and local to global, from sub-national boundaries to international ones. In this context borders may be landscape elements of value for tourism as such (e.g. ideological or cultural borders) or they may be just obstacles that manifest themselves as ‘friction’ restraining movement. A few authors have evaluated the meanings of borders for tourism and cross-border shopping the last few decades, but as shown by Timothy (29, 30; see also 3), the mapping of the links between tourism and borders has been a marginal topic for both political geographers and tourism researchers.

This paper aims to provide some theoretical and concrete ideas for border studies in connection with tourism and to serve as a background to a discussion of the arguments that have been put forward regarding the ‘disappearance of boundaries’ (and nation-states)
in the current world. Some theoretical perspectives will be discussed that might be useful for multidimensional boundary studies. The key argument is that instead of understanding boundaries as fixed lines, we should understand them as more multidimensional phenomena.

Boundaries are not only lines but meaningful, historically-contingent symbols and institutions which are in many ways sedimented in social practices and discourses, and which manifest themselves on different spatial scales, from personal and local to global (17, 18). This means that an understanding of the contemporary meanings of specific boundaries requires several ‘keys’ which are linked with economics, politics, administration and governance as well as with legislation and local and national/local attitudes/identities. All these elements reflect power relations in complicated ways. Boundaries may be simultaneously historical, natural, cultural, political or symbolic phenomena and each of the above elements may be exploited in diverging ways in the construction of territorality and the ideas of borders as prohibiting and allowing spatial interaction—including tourism.

Borders may exist as one part of the ‘discursive landscape’ of social power which extends itself into the whole of society and is produced and reproduced in various social and cultural practices and discourses. This means that different borders may have different meanings in different contexts. Therefore, as has been suggested earlier (17, 18), it is crucial to approach borders contextually. The context is not merely a specific border area in itself, as has typically been the case in traditional border studies in political geography, for each border receives its meanings from broader contexts in the societies in question and from the links between these societies and larger geopolitical, cultural and economic contexts. It is also crucial to approach borders historically, since their meanings are not stable but change as the contexts change.

To illustrate these points, we will analyse the historical development and geographical roles of the Finnish-Russian border in relation to tourism. The meanings of this border have varied greatly in the course of the years both in Finland and in Russia, and the prevailing, dominant interpretations have provided different possibilities for tourism. Before World War II it was the ultimate barrier and dividing line that separated the East from the West and essentially eliminated tourism but, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has become much more open and tourism has increased markedly.

FINNISH-RUSSIAN BORDER LANDSCAPES AND TOURISM BEFORE WORLD WAR II

The Finnish-Russian boundary and border area are located partly in the area of Karelia, where the western and eastern cultures meet. Its location has changed many times as a consequence of territorial disputes. From World War II onward this border was the longest ideological boundary between a western capitalist state and the Soviet Union. Finnish-Russian border areas have for a long time been characterized by the signs of national peripherality: dependence on resource-based industries, the large significance of the public sector in employment and low population density. Therefore the recent opening of the border to tourism and other cross-border interactions may be seen as being of crucial importance for the development of the peripheral areas on both sides and for integration of these areas into the wider economy.
Finland became an autonomous state in the Russian Empire in 1809, after being part of Sweden for 600 years. This change was crucial, as it meant that the focus of the emerging flows of tourism moved eastwards and St. Petersburg became a new power centre for the upper classes. Autonomous Finland became a 'foreign country' for these classes and Finnish tourism services began to develop rapidly. Towards the end of the 19th century, tourism emerged as a new industry in Eastern Finland. Some visitors were also interested in the border with Russia, the 'Bear of the East' (14, p. 119-120), and a particularly visible element in the emerging tourism landscape was the Terijoki villa area, established in the 1870s. This area was on the Finnish side of the border, but it emerged mainly as a result of the strong regional influence of St. Petersburg and the predilections of rich Russian families.

When Finland gained its independence in 1917, this caused a very significant change in territorial strategy. Whereas the border between Finland and Russia had been open during the years of autonomy, the new independent state had to secure its boundaries and use them to signify its territoriality. The boundary established in the Peace of Tartu (1920) was located on the same place as that of the Grand Duchy of Finland, but its practical significance was completely different. The power of the state was expressed in the border areas in the form of a border guard system and, thus, whereas interaction and communication over the boundary had been possible earlier, the new boundary was closed.

The closure of the boundary marked a radical change in the conditions of life for the less developed areas of eastern and southeastern Finland and promoted both their economic peripheralization and altered symbolic and cultural roles as outposts of the western cultural realm. Commercial connections with the east were severed (19), particularly with the significant economic sphere and market area centred on St. Petersburg. Illegal interaction over the boundary occasionally took place, which caused diplomatic conflicts. The villa area of Terijoki now became a destination for Finnish tourists, and the new, closed border itself became an increasingly important object for the tourist gaze. Visits to Finnish border villages were recommended, particularly for the younger generations, the motives being bound up with ideological education as well as tourism (25, p. 126).

**Tourist Images of the Karelian Border Areas**

The Karelian area has never in its entirety been a part of Finland, but has been divided between Finland and Russia in various ways (Fig. 1). In spite of this, the Karelian heritage is an integral part of the Finnish national culture and the landscapes of the region have been represented consistently for more than a hundred years as a part of the national imagery of Finland. The emergence of the Karelian territorial myth can be traced to the rise of nationalism and a nationalistic culture in 19th century Finland. An especially strong boost was given to this process by the publication of the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, containing folk ballads collected from Karelia. This transformed the popular impression of the remote, primitive territory of Karelia as a distant, poor, miserable and backward forested borderland into that of a mythical seat of folk culture that has conserved its timeless natural wonders and cultural treasures over the centuries. Around the turn of the century the Karelian culture in general and the Karelian landscape in particular were the main themes in the thinking of the national
romantic movement of Finnish artists and intellectuals. Painters, writers, architects and composers as well as folklorists, historians and geographers were seeking their inspiration from the natural scenery and cultural environments of this region. Soon the eastern forests and the expanses of hills and lakes were being regarded as an ideal Finnish landscape and a fundamental part of the national landscape gallery (22, p. 118-119).

But the eastern borderlands of Finnish Karelia were not only a part of the ideal representation of a nation state, they were also an area of cultural otherness, the core area of the Finnish Orthodox culture. Before the Second World War, most of the Orthodox population lived in the eastern part of Finland, mostly in the Karelian borderlands, and it was also in this region that the visible traits of Orthodox culture—churches, chapels and cemeteries—were seen in the local landscape more frequently and more powerfully than anywhere else in Finland. In other words, it was the heartland of a Finnish-Karelian Orthodox culture.

Before the Second World War, the Finnish Orthodox Church had some 70,000 members, less than one percent of the total population (11). Even in Finnish Karelia the Orthodox represented only a small minority among the inhabitants, but their different religion, their ties with Russian culture and the fact that they lived near the border made them a visible element in the processes of nationalization that took place in the peripheral areas of the young nation.

The territorial aim of boundary reinforcement in the 1920s and 1930s was national integration within Finland. A great effort was made in developing the peripheral border areas and improving the living conditions of their inhabitants. The key motive was to foster a spirit of nationalism and to increase the political reliability of the population. While these activities are a good expression of the nationalization of peripheries, it was at the same time difficult for the local people to comprehend why they had been ‘relocated’ into a periphery and why their rights, which once extended fairly freely across the border, now had to be curtailed (17). During the 1920s the boundary became a symbol through which both the distinction between Finland and the Soviet Union and their dependence on each other were expressed. The meanings of the boundary were hence effectively politicized.

The inhabitants of the Karelian borderlands were especially under scrutiny. Because the core area of the Orthodox Church was also the border area between Finland and the Soviet Union, the loyalty and patriotism of its inhabitants was vital to the state authorities. Thus the nationalization processes had two goals: to integrate the Orthodox people more deeply into Finnish society—which served the needs of national security and defence—and to represent them and their cultural landscape to the rest of the Finns as an essential, if peculiar, part of the nation (22, p. 118-125).

Travel and tourism was one significant strategy that was adopted to make the borderland area of Karelia and its culture known nationwide. Travel within Finland, and especially in the borderlands, was seen as a part of the process of nationalization, designed to strengthen the feeling of togetherness and thus to foster a sense of an ‘imagined community’ called Finland, a community with clearly-defined borders (2). As Siiskonen (25, p. 124) writes, domestic tourism was understood as significant both for ‘national integration’ and for the ‘spiritual and physical condition of youngsters’ and ‘the will for national defence’.
The tourist images of the Karelian border areas in the 1920s and 1930s were of a landscape of cultural peculiarity, but not too peculiar. Under the national tourist gaze, the borderland Orthodox culture and the local landscape were used to symbolize the Kalevala heritage, local religion, a sense of community and the conservative values of traditional country life. These images presented Orthodox Karelia as different, strange and extraordinary, but at the same time very familiar and, above all, very Finnish. It was a territory where, in the stereotypical words of contemporary travel books and brochures, there lived a lively, talkative, colourful people known as the Karelians who, despite their different dialect, habits and faith, were Finns in exactly the same way as everybody else. Thus the Karelian Orthodox culture acquired meanings associated with the values of both ancient and national aspirations, allowing the local Orthodox culture and its landscape elements to be seen as parts of wider nationalization processes in the border areas (22, p. 118-128).

Even the Orthodox monasteries which still existed in Karelia, and which were mostly seen as strange, medieval Russian institutions that had no place in an independent, Lutheran, western Finland, were now tolerated. The monastery of Valamo, for example, was classified as one of the sights on the main tourist route through Finland. It was now a place that offered tourists a sense of the East, an opportunity to take a look at a Russian culture that no longer existed elsewhere (25, p. 130). For the emerging tourist industry of a young nation, it offered a feeling of otherness within the home country at relatively low cost (23).

The tourist image of the Karelian borderlands was hence both discriminating and connective. The distinctive images of the local culture and its traits were presented and tolerated while at the same time ethnic, cultural, and historical unity with the rest of the nation were stressed. Thus, the nationalistic element was a fundamental underpinning of the emerging tourist traffic.

The border itself also held some excitement for tourism, again very much in the nationalistic sense. The waterways which were part of the Finnish-Soviet border up to World War II became significant symbols of the border for the Finns. The River Rajajoki in particular became a national landscape, and the Rajajoki bridge took on the status of an internationally-renowned crossing point between the two worlds, a place that western tourists often visited. Russian refugees referred to this place as the “Gate to Hell” (17). In the Finnish national rhetoric, even the physical environment of the river represented a strong symbolic border between two major European landscape regions: the “Finnish” and “West European” Karelian Isthmus to the west and the “Russian” and “East European” grass steppe to the east (20, p. 37-38). Consequently, the physical landscape in the other parts of Karelia, especially the Baltic Shield as a common bedrock underlying the Scandinavian areas from the Atlantic to the White Sea, was seen as an area of homogeneity and thereby as a part of the natural region of Greater Finland (13).

THE KARELIAN TOURIST LANDSCAPE SINCE 1945

Rebuilt Uniqueness

World War II changed the situation permanently on both the symbolic and the concrete, material level. Finland was forced to cede to the Soviet Union huge territories that included the Petsamo and Salla areas in Lapland and most parts of Karelia, which together constituted about 10% of the total
area of the nation-state. This also meant that 420,000 refugees had to leave their homes (12, p. 86). Evacuation marked the end of the previous cultural territorial system and the beginning of a new one. The closing of the border at its new location as a consequence of the Second World War altered the spatial dimensions of the Karelian territorial myth once again. In the new situation most of the Karelian heritage, including the border landscapes, had to be re-created and re-invented in the areas that remained on the Finnish side.

After the war, images of the ceded areas were removed from the national landscape gallery, although they continued to exist as distant landscapes of nostalgia—the beautiful and beloved lost Karelia (6, p. 109). A new Karelian landscape now had to be found inside the Finnish territorial borders. Fortunately a candidate territory still existed in the new eastern border area, the region called Northern Karelia, and quite soon after the war its hilly, lakeside landscape came to be treated as a new icon of Karelia itself (17, 24).

In the 1950s, two new national parks, Oulanka and Petkeljärvi, were created along the border, replacing the former ideal Karelian landscapes on the other side (6). Fortunately the old Karelian landscape symbol, the hill of Koli, still existed on the western side of the border, and this was represented as the dominant symbol of Finnish Karelia through a wide range of picture books and travel prospectuses. Koli became an important travel destination, partly on account of the beauty of its physical landscapes and partly because it symbolized the Karelian heritage (24).

Thus it was not just the physical environment of Northern Karelia that fitted into the framework of an ideal landscape, it was also the cultural heritage of the area. Following the Second World War, the new border area of Northern Karelia was the only region where the Orthodox Church had once had a significant role as a part of the local culture. Nevertheless, Northern Karelia and its Orthodox environment were different from the lost border territories. Despite the long history and tradition of the local Orthodox parishes, the area actually lacked many of the visible features of that tradition (22, p. 208-209).

Regardless of the marginality of the local Orthodox heritage, a conscious representation and manifestation of this phenomenon began in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and from that time onwards the old symbols of the Karelian border areas such as national costumes, traditional Kalevala rune-singers and the Orthodox faith have been used to convey a popular impression of the region. In addition, the Orthodox culture has played a significant role as part of the local territorial identity-building processes in Northern Karelia. There has been a desire to see both the visible and imagined Orthodox landscapes not only as a setting for the local Orthodox parishes but also as a distinctive feature of the whole territory, regardless of the fact that only around 7 percent of the local population belong to the Orthodox Church (22).

The new “visibility” of the Orthodox culture in Northern Karelia has been manifested particularly in the most recent examples of the built environment, so that Orthodox features are present in the landscape today through various neo-traditional symbols and elements. New churches built according to the heritage of the Karelian wooden chapels, Greek-style “traveller’s crosses” by the roadsides and traditional Karelian-Orthodox graveyard memorials are all representations of the emerging identity of the Finnish Or-
thodox population. In these cases, to be in the landscape is also to be seen in the landscape. On the other hand, these neo-traditional manifestations and representations are also part of the intersubjective territorial images created by tourism, which it is hoped will increase in Eastern Finland in general and in Northern Karelia in particular. Many of the newest elements in the traditional Orthodox landscape have been built with substantial support from the local authorities and tourist enterprises, and this introduces new elements into the meanings associated with the landscapes. These landscapes are now read and interpreted through the medium of the heritage industry, by tourists who expect to see them regardless of how genuine or otherwise they actually are (17, p. 129-131; 22, p. 222-234).

In the case of a lost past and lost territories, the notion of nostalgia is a key element in heritage interpretation. The word nostalgia is normally used to mean a longing for something from the past, including a longing to escape from the present to past times and places and to the social structures related to them (9). Karelia and its landscapes, both those remaining within the national borders and those on the other side of the border, have been implicated in continuous processes of nostalgia. In post-war Northern Karelia this has been manifested as a distinct heritage and a set of memories related partly to the lost territories, and travel brochures and tourist advertisements since the 1960s have represented the region as a nostalgic, static land of memories (8).

As a part of this heritage-making and sense of nostalgia, the historical sites and landscapes of the Second World War have emerged as borderland tourist attractions of a new kind. During the last ten years or so, all manner of war sites such as battlefields, old dugouts and pillboxes, and also heritage centres and museums, have become a visible part of the historical landscape across the eastern borderlands, particularly along the tourist road of the Bard and Boundary (Fig. 2).

The tourist image of the present-day border area of Eastern Finland contains mixed elements of untouched, picturesque sights and cultural factors such as Orthodox environments and traditions, the heritage of the Kalevala and the historical battle sites of recent wars (5, p. 31). The eastern heritage, especially the Orthodox religious culture, is now seen as an essential part of this nostalgic image of the area. The idealistic and nostalgic past and the imagined landscape related to it can be located in a distant, marginal border area, where they have been marked, conserved and preserved, or even re-built or reproduced, to meet the needs of modern heritage making and tourism.

**The Ideological Border as a Tourism Destination**

Looked at on the scale of world geopolitics, Finland belonged after World War II to the disputed, indeterminately neutral camp located somewhere between East and West. Its eastern boundary became the longest interface between the leading socialist state and a Western capitalist state, over 1200 km in length. It also became a fitting illustration of an ideological boundary, and was quoted as such in political geography textbooks from time to time (21).

The area became concomitantly an interesting object for western tourists. Since the mid-1960s tourism has become an increasingly crucial industry in these areas. As Kosonen and Pohjanen write: “(for these people) the mystical border between east and west was often an overwhelmingly interesting object” (10, p. 451). This meant
problems for the closed border, and more and more violations were recorded. Most foreigners travelling by car went to southeastern Finland, but since the border was closed and strictly controlled, the increase in tourism simply meant more work for the Finnish Border Guard Service. During the mid-1960s, Kosonen and Pohjanen write, the border, frontier zone and border guard activities themselves became significant objects for tourists! More and more people were arrested in the frontier zone, but the number of actual illegal crossings remained very small. The increase in pressure on the border area was much greater in the southeastern part of the country than in Northern Finland, due mostly to the fact that access to the border areas was much more difficult in the northern periphery than in the southern part of the country.

FROM A CLOSED BORDER TO AN OPEN ONE

The collapse of the communist regime has radically altered the economic, political and military landscapes of Europe, and changes have also occurred in the peripheral areas around the Finnish-Russian border. The political and economic changes in eastern Europe have been crucial as far as the image of the border is concerned, and we have now entered a new stage in the interpretation of its roles and the establishment of economic practices. The idea is now emerging of the border as an interface, a point of contact or even a frontier with a new social and economic significance based on personal interaction between traders. Its economic implications are now being realized increasingly extensively on both sides (19). The border area is expanding and the forms of interaction are becoming more versatile. The formerly distant border areas are now turning into ‘interdependent borderlands’, to employ the terms of Martinez (15). Many of the local authorities on the Finnish and Russian sides have been ready to play an active role in this, hoping to open up routes and connections in the future and thereby develop the economics of both areas.

Even though interaction over the boundary has increased markedly, the border still is a line between two completely different societies, and the gap in the standards of living is among the largest in the world. Hence, it is probable that the Finnish-Russian boundary will continue in the near future to be relatively strictly controlled on both sides. These areas will not be transformed very quickly into ‘integrated borderlands’ where unrestricted movements of people, goods, and ideas prevail (19).

Although there had been extensive trade between Finland and the Soviet Union, the border had been strictly controlled and movement across had been permitted only in certain controlled places. This made some forms of tourism—mainly to the former Finnish city of Vyborg and to Leningrad—possibly for the Finns, and also there were joint construction projects. Co-operation was nevertheless strictly regulated and organized at the state level. The Finnish economy was greatly dependent on Soviet trade, and more than 20% of Finnish exports went to the Soviet Union in 1985-86. With the decline of the Soviet system, exports collapsed, so that the proportion was only 13% in 1990 and less than 3% in 1992 (27). Now it is rising again gradually, so that 6% of exports went to Russia in 1996 and 7.1% of imports came from there. Russia now ranks fifth among both the countries of destination and the countries of origin in the Finnish foreign trade statistics (19).

As far as the whole present border area, almost 1300 kilometres in length, is con-
cerned, 70 years of virtual inactivity had made the peripheral areas on both sides highly dependent on their own national political and economic centres. They had hence become typical ‘alienated borderlands’ (15). Cross-border traffic began to intensify in many places around 1990, and the former Finnish ‘city tourism’ to Vyborg and Leningrad became increasingly a matter of business and shopping trips and visits made by people of Karelian origin to their former strictly-closed home areas.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union finally opened up Russian Karelia to tourism. When the border became more open there were still about 180,000 of the Finnish refugees from the region alive, and an immediate boom in nostalgic return journeys ensued, with a total of 1.26 million crossings of the border in 1991-1992. Every Finn became familiar with TV programmes and newspaper photographs showing former refugees searching the fields and forests of Karelia for reminders of their lost homes and past spatial identities which had been broken off as a consequence of the war. These border crossings were visits to the lost past as much as journeys undertaken in the present (17).

An almost completely new phenomenon has been the greater freedom of Russian travel to Finland. This can be seen clearly from the statistics. Where 8500 Russian cars crossed the Finnish border in 1991, for instance, the figure five years later was almost 170,000. Russian visitors spent a total of 549,000 nights in Finland in 1997, which ranks them in second place after Swedish visitors (26). While relations between the Finns and Russians have been for a long time highly sceptical, local attitudes towards Russian tourism are gradually becoming more favourable. They are now perceived as being a significant factor for the economic success of the Finnish border areas, as they spend a lot of money there. Russian has never been a particularly popular language among Finnish students, but economic facts are now making it increasingly more popular, e.g. for the facilitation of business in south-eastern Finland (19).

Since the signing of the agreement on ‘co-operation between neighbouring areas’ between Finland and Russia in 1992, the local authorities on both sides have actively promoted cross-border action to open up routes, establish connections and develop the economy of the border area. The total number of crossing-points is now 26, including six that are open to international traffic. The other 20 crossing-points are intended for goods traffic—mainly timber transport—and/or crossings by Finnish and Russian citizens only (19).

Total border crossings by passengers rose from 0.96 to 4.1 million between 1990 and 1996, the number of Russian passengers increasing rapidly from 1994 onwards, to reach almost two million in 1997, while the number of Finns seems to be decreasing after the first boom. This is probably due to the fact that the old Karelian refugees have now visited their former home areas and have often failed to find any concrete features to match against their memories, so that this specific form of tourism and movement across the border has reached ‘saturation point’. On the other hand, visits by Russians to Finland have been increasing continually, in spite of the serious economic problems. The well-off Russians are increasingly eager to come to Finland to spend their holidays at spas and other holiday resorts. The increasing flows of people have also created images of undesirable elements, this having been particularly true at the time when movements across the border were first beginning. This has meant that topics
such as smuggling, the threat of organized crime and control of alcohol flows have been common in the Finnish media during the 1990s (19).

The activities associated with the opening of the Finnish-Russian border have not only given rise to various ‘flows’ but have also created new social and economic practices that are gradually turning the border areas into ‘interdependent borderlands’, to employ the concept of Martinez (15). Civil servants and entrepreneurs in Finnish border communes are looking forward to shedding their former peripheral location and opening up links with areas in Russia, an optimism partly motivated by the chance to obtain resources for this through European Union programmes. Much effort has been concentrated on developing the infrastructure for rendering border crossings easier—particularly customs facilities and other services. The opening of the border has also increasingly encouraged the ‘place-marketing’ (7) of border crossings: Finnish local authorities and consulting firms have been active and many plans have been produced to realize the potential of the prospective new regionalizations, gateways and corridors (19). The future international crossing point at Kelloselka in Northern Finland, for instance, has been presented in the Finnish media as a ‘breathing hole’ for north-eastern Finland, not only opening up links for business travel and goods transport but also facilitating the passage of European tourists to the Kola Peninsula and of Russians to Finland for shopping purposes. On the other hand, future expectations in south-eastern Finland are based very much on the huge population potential represented by the two large Russian cities, St. Petersburg and Vyborg. Russian trade and visitors are seen as being increasingly significant for the economic development of the area, but alongside the beneficial effects, the increasing rates of alcohol consumption and crime, together with the rise in prostitution and venereal diseases, have been very much to the fore in the media (19).

Thus major problems still exist in the border areas, in spite of the increase in activities and general optimism. The border still separates two completely different societies, and the gap in standards of living between the two sides is among the largest in the world. The vast majority of Russian Karelians have experienced a huge deterioration in purchasing power since the collapse of the Soviet Union, even though some people have managed to accumulate enormous wealth. As far as movement across the border is concerned, it is clear that most Russians are certainly not ‘happy border-crossing consumers’, nor will they become such for a very long time. It is thus very unlikely that this area will become an ‘integrated borderland’ where people, goods and ideas ‘flow’ without restriction (19).

EPILOGUE

Contrary to traditional ways of understanding them as fixed lines, boundaries have meanings that are historically and spatially contingent. This contingency is also manifest in the possibilities for spatial movement and, hence, tourism. Our concrete example in this paper has been the changing meanings of the Finnish-Russian border, which is a particularly interesting example of a formerly closed but now increasingly open border. It was strictly guarded and to a great extent closed in Soviet times, partly due to the fact that it was the only border between the leading socialist super power and a small western capitalist state. While it was often presented in the international literature of political geography as an example of an ideological boundary, it was a taboo in Fin-
nish discourse that was seldom discussed in public. This reflected the vagaries of history, in that Finland had had to cede more than 10 percent of its area to the Soviet Union as a consequence of World War II, meaning the loss of the eastern part of its territory, the need to evacuate and resettle more than 400,000 Finns and the signing of agreements that linked the state politically to the grey zone between east and west.

Since the 19th century, Karelia and its culture have been closely related to Finnish nationalism and the imagined geography of Finland. When the physical border was moved westwards after the Second World War, the whole of former Finnish Karelia did so too: its people, its heritage and even its symbolical landscapes. Thus the local culture of the Karelian borderlands was conserved, maintained, re-produced and represented after the war in those areas carrying the name “Karelia” that still existed inside Finnish territory. Since then, these “new” areas have been promoted as tourist re

sources representing a historically and geographically authentic Karelian heritage.

The border was of interest to many foreign visitors to Finland, and also the Finns themselves. Since it was closed, tourist traffic was allowed across it only at certain points, to certain Soviet cities, while most of the ceded areas were completely closed. The former inhabitants did not have any chance of visiting their former homes. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the border has become much more open and all kinds of activity over it have increased enormously, including tourism. An evaluation of the roles of this border shows that the same border can have different meanings according to the prevailing historical and social conditions. All the above examples illustrate the fact that boundaries are not mere lines on maps or in the forests, but extremely meaningful symbols and institutions, which are deeply sedimented in various social practices and discourses. Besides its economic and cultural functions, tourism is one of the major indicators of the more general meanings attached to borders.

REFERENCES


Contemporary regional divisions of Karelia. Finnish Karelia, or Western Karelia, has traditionally included the areas of Northern and Southern Karelia (still existing by these names on Finnish side of the border) and the territories that Finland had to cede to the Soviet Union after the Second World War (the Karelian Isthmus, the Lake Ladoga area and the Karelian borderlands). On the Russian side, the Karelian Republic consists of the historical areas of Viena and Aunus and most of the ceded territories. The Isthmus belongs to the Leningrad administrative region (oblast).
Reconstructing the Karelian socio-cultural space and tourist landscapes in Eastern Finland. The Road of the Bard and Boundary and the numbers of military, Orthodox and Karelian memorials and events advertised in the various Finish Border communes in 1992.