New neighbourhood and cross-border region-building: Identity politics of CBC on the Finnish-Russian border

Ilkka Liikanen

a Professor and Director of the Karelian Institute, University of Joensuu, Finland


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2008.9695706

Please scroll down for article

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
New Neighbourhood and Cross-Border Region-Building: Identity Politics of CBC on the Finnish-Russian Border

Ilkka Liikanen*

Abstract: This paper examines European cross-border region-building from the perspective of identity politics. How is cross-border regionalization conceptualized in the documents outlining EU policies of cross-border cooperation? How do these definitions meet, challenge and clash with the understandings of territoriality and identity on the regional level? The analysis is built on three case studies that examine the conceptualizations of supra-national, national, and regional territoriality in the case of Karelia, the historical region situated on the Finnish-Russian border. According to the results, the perceptions of local actors do not bear witness to the birth of a strong regional cross-border identity. In the Russian and Finnish border areas, more intensive cross-border co-operation can hardly be seen as proof of new European cross-border regionalism. As a conclusion, it is suggested, that instead of promoting above-given Europeanness, EU policies of CBC should be more open to the many European ways of combining regional, national and supranational perspectives, and avoid rhetoric equating cross-border regionalization and Europeanization.

Introduction

The question of cross-border region-building has been one of the key themes among new emerging trends in the study of borders and border regions (Houtum 2005; Kolossov 2005). Especially, EU programs of cross-border co-operation (CBC) have been seen to promote a variety of border spanning activities that lay the groundwork for a new type of cross-border regionalization. In academic analysis and political discussion, the New Neighbourhood policy document (2004) has in particular been seen as an example of the recent attempts to soften national dividing lines and to promote a gradual Europeanization of the institutional and discursive practices connected to borders (Scott 2008). Sometimes this tendency has been linked to broader visions of a historical turn towards a new age of post-national borders (Berezin and Schain 2003; Ohmae 1990). This study attempts to analyze to what degree this type of rhetoric has actually characterized EU documents concerning cross-border co-operation, and to what degree there are traces of this type of conceptual change visible in Finnish and Russian discussion concerning borders and border areas.

In recent literature, the notion of a new emerging cosmopolitan or “post-national” concept of European identity and citizenship has been severely questioned. It has been pointed out that in a broader European perspective it is both theoretically and empirically problematic to conceptualize European integration as a shift from nationally

*Liikanen is a Professor and Director of the Karelian Institute at the University of Joensuu, Finland.
motivated identification and bordering towards a new supra-national understanding of Europe and its borders (Brubaker 2006; Calhoun 2007). In order to approach this question in more concrete terms there is a need to study in specific historical contexts the extent to which borders are being defined in national terms as demarcations based on ethnicity, language, and culture, and to what extent they are understood in broader supranational/transnational terms. It would, however, be one-dimensional to suggest that the alternative to cosmopolitanism is the re-enforcement of national perspectives. As a starting point it is vital that the discussion of today’s Europeanness takes into consideration the simultaneity of different visions and understandings of what Europe signifies (Malmborg and Stråth 2002). The challenge, rather, is to recognize the many ways in which national and European elements co-exist in the construction of borders within and between different political cultures and how these images continue to shape opinions and attitudes on borders in different European countries.

This study approaches EU policies of cross-border co-operation from the perspective of identity politics and conceptual change. The analysis concentrates on the rhetoric concerning cross-border regions, cross-border regionalization and cross-border region-building, and in particular how conceptual changes in EU language of CBC correspond to shifts in conceptualizing borders and border regions within the Finnish and Russian discussion. The rhetoric of cross-border regionalization is studied through three conceptual histories that summarize studies on 1) EU programs of CBC as expressions of identity politics of European integration, 2) territorial institutionalization of the Finnish Russian border as part of the Finnish nation-building and state-making process, and 3) the institutional and discursive restoration of the Karelian Republic in the context of post-Soviet reconstitution of Russian political space.1

We will outline the historical patterns of conceptualizing supra-national, national, and regional territoriality in the case of Karelia, the historical region situated on the Finnish-Russian border. The aim is to portray the identity political frontlines behind the overlapping definitions of territoriality in the European, Finnish, and Russian discussion. A particular emphasis is on the definitions of political space in the perceptions of Finnish and Russian regional actors. The current sea change in EU-Russia relations and the consequences of Russia’s more security-oriented geopolitical strategy are studied on the levels of civil society and domestic political discussion. Based on the results of the three case studies, the conclusions aim to contribute to the larger discussion of how the conceptualizations of identity and territoriality in EU documents meet, challenge and clash with understandings of territoriality and identity in the border regions.

**EU Programs of CBC and Identity Politics of European Integration**

From Technical Aid and Regional Cohesion to European Neighborhood and Partnership

Russia was included in the cross-border co-operation programs of the EU after Finland’s membership in the Union in 1995. The roots of programs of CBC applied in co-operation with Russia lie in the technical aid program for ex-Soviet states TACIS and the regional development program INTERREG, which was originally calibrated for promoting integration and cohesion on the internal boundaries of the EU.

The TACIS program was launched in 1991 to provide grant-financed technical assistance to 13 countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The basic regulation of the program was based on the understanding that co-operation is a reciprocal process,
encouraging a move from “demand-driven” to “dialogue-driven” programming. Initially, TACIS was not targeted to be a particular cross-border co-operation program, and its tasks were set more according to needs defined by the national and bilateral frames. Upon Finnish membership TACIS funds began, however, to be allocated as a counterpart to European Union-oriented CBC programs, and in this sense it can be seen as a constitutive element in the formulation of European Union CBC policies with Russia (http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/ceeca/tacis/).

Even earlier, the EU had developed several funding instruments in order support regional level CBC in its border regions. The INTERREG Community Initiative was adopted in 1990 and was intended to prepare border areas for a Community without internal frontiers. The emphasis has changed during the years, and INTERREG become the most important financial instrument even on the external borders of the EU. The first INTERREG period lasted from 1990 until the beginning of 1994 with clear emphasis on integration and cohesion along the internal borders. The INTERREG II period that lasted until the end of 1999 and the latest INTERREG III period that lasted from 2000 to the end of 2006 signaled a clear shift towards politics of pre-enlargement and promoting CBC on the external boundaries of the union. On the level of document rhetoric, even Russia and Russian border regions were included in this project of promoting integration and overcoming old dividing lines within Europe (http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/interreg3/abc/abc_en.htm).

In terms of external relations, the legal basis for the relationships between the EU and Russia were defined in the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement in 1997 (PCA 1997). In 2004 the PCA was extended and a Protocol to the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement was signed to extend the agreement to the ten new member states. It did not include any changes in basic guidelines but included new members as parties to the agreement. In 1999 the European Union set forth its Common Strategy on Russia. In this document the EU stated two strategic aims for co-operation. The first is a stable, open, and pluralistic democracy in Russia, governed by the rule of law and underpinning a prosperous market economy, benefiting alike the populations of both Russia and the European Union. The second is to maintain European stability, promote global security and respond to the common challenges of the continent through intensified co-operation with Russia (EC, COM 1999/414/CSP). As the recent attempt to renew the agreements between the European Union and the Russian federation has been unsuccessful, the PCA and the EU Common Strategy on Russia set the basic guidelines and strategies of the EU in its co-operation with the Russian Federation.

At the St. Petersburg Summit in May 2003, the EU and Russia confirmed their commitment to further strengthening and developing their co-operation. This was later confirmed in the Communication on EU-Russia relations in 2004 (CEC, COM 2004/373). Moreover, Russia and the EU decided to further develop their strategic partnership through the creation of four common spaces (i.e. common economic space; common space of freedom, security and justice; common space of co-operation in the field of external security; and common space of research education and culture) within the framework of the existing PCA (CEC, COM 2004/373, 4, 6; CEC, COM 2004/106, 1). On a practical level, relations between the EU and Russia still have not developed as expected during recent years. The conditionality of promoting European values present in EU documents has collided with new Russian political discourse emphasizing sovereignty and Russia’s own way of building “sovereign democracy.”
A similar setting can be recognized even in the formulation of the new policy frame for cross-border co-operation. The new basic principles of EU policies for cross-border co-operation were introduced in 2003 in the *Wider Europe —Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours* document. More pronounced than before, the new policy framework includes even those neighboring countries which do not currently have the prospect of EU membership. The document defines the main goals of EU politics in regard to this “new neighbourhood.” First, the Union declares that it wants to avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe and rather promote stability and prosperity within and beyond its new borders. Second, the EU aims to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighborhood—a “ring of friends”—with whom it enjoys close, peaceful, and co-operative relations. In addition, Russia and the countries comprising the western NIS and the southern Mediterranean are offered the prospect of a stake in the EU’s internal market and further integration and liberalization to promote the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital (four freedoms) (CEC, CO 2003/104, 4, 12).

The most important tool for accomplishing the goals set in the Wider Europe document is the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). It will replace existing geographical and thematic programs covering the countries concerned, and places special emphasis on cross-border co-operation (CEC, COM 2004/628, 2). According to the Commission, the development of the ENPI is a two-phased process. During the first period (2004-2006), the key objective is to build on existing progress made in coordinating the various instruments while fulfilling existing commitments and obligations regarding the current programming period up to the end of 2006 (CEC, COM; 2003/393, 8). The first (transitional) period focuses on improving co-operation between various financing instruments concerned with the existing legislative and financial framework on the external borders of the EU. From the beginning of 2007, the ENPI will replace the current TACIS and MEDA programs and thus evolve into a cross-border co-operation program covering both sides of the external boundaries of the EU.

The latest round of enlargement has profoundly changed the nature of CBC over the external borders of the EU. Following enlargement the pre-integration aim no longer exists on most of the eastern external borders. Instead of lowering fences, the goal is rather to establish new co-operation forms across a (more) stable eastern border, which with time, would meet the Schengen regulations (CEC, COM 2004/373, 20). In regard to border regions, the new policy formulations include contradictory elements of building a strictly controlled border and of promoting co-operation and cross-border regionalization.

Euregio Karelia and the Idea of European Cross-Border Region-Building

Only recently has the idea of cross-border regionalization been introduced to Finnish academic and political discussions. In connection to deepening European integration and especially the launching of new European Union programs of cross-border co-operation, the borderland of Karelia has been defined as an example of a new type of European cross-border region. This type of straight-forward linking of historical experience and present-day cross-border region-building was promoted by e.g. the joint program for cross-border co-operation that was published by the Finnish and Russian authorities involved in the establishment of Euregio Karelia (*Euregio Karelia. Our Common Border* 2000).

Euregio Karelia was founded in 2000 in order to facilitate CBC and better coordinate its financing on the Finnish-Russian border. At that point it was the first Euregio to be
established on the land-border between the Russian Federation and the EU. With the new twists in EU Russia relations, Euregio Karelia has become part of a manifold identity politics, the construction and reconstruction of European, national and regional identities.

From its beginning, the key figures behind the Euregio Karelia initiative promoted the new institutional structure as a new European model. The idea was that as the EU enlarged eastwards, joint administrative structures with Russian regional authorities would gain broader European significance. (Cronberg 2000; Cronberg and Shlyamin 1999, 26). This argument was, however, not limited to establishing a new kind of border regime, but rather it was introduced in terms of a new kind of cross-border region-building. In the planning phase of Euregio Karelia, Tarja Cronberg, head of the Regional Council of Finnish North Karelia, anticipated that, “Common decision-making procedures and common funds [will] create a foundation for establishing new border region identities” (Cronberg and Shlyamin 1999, 25-26).

In an important respect, the aims of the initiators were not limited to organizing a regional border regime but touched on key questions of European and national identity politics. In their article “Euroregion Karelia—A Model for Cooperation at the EU External Borders,” Tarja Cronberg and Valeri Shlyamin, the Minister for External Relations of the Karelian Republic, initially set the goals of the project in fairly concrete terms. The coordination of INTERREG and TACIS programs on the regional level was presented as the core of the new administrative model. Yet even at this stage, easing border-crossings and increasing economic, social, and cultural co-operation were discussed in connection with questions of security and attitudes toward the border:

The benefits of Euregio Karelia for the EU would comprise a more intensive and effective use of funds, which now flow to both sides of the border and which are not coordinated. The benefit for Russia would be increased co-operation across the border, which later would also imply more economic activities...From the Finnish side, the benefits would comprise changing attitudes towards the border and removing the
historical burden. The Karelian question in Finland is on the agenda and a number of people work for actual physical changes in the border. A cooperative zone would remove the historical burden or at least provide a different prospective. (Cronberg and Shlyamin 1999, 28-29)

For the initiators of the Euregio model, re-fashioning mental borders was obviously a major aim behind the initiative—at least on the level of declarations. In this respect, the obstacles have probably proven to be larger than expected. In the case of the Republic of Karelia, the consolidation of the Russian nation-state has since strongly affected the political climate, and from the perspective of Russian nationalism, cross-border region-building can easily be seen as a source of discord or even a threat (Prozorov 2006). This has led to the paradox that while in Finland the concept of Euregio Karelia was promoted as an alternative to nostalgic post-war Karelianism (and marginal militant Karelia activism as well), in the Russian discussion it has sometimes been connected precisely to ideas of revanche in regard to the ceded areas.

As the results of a recent study carried out under the framework of the Exlinea project indicate, attitudes towards cross-border co-operation are, however, for the most part very positive. This positive engagement has, however, not been followed by strong patterns of common identification, neither in the sense of common cross-border identity nor in terms of broader European identification. Instead, the common ground for mutual understanding and solidarity seems to lie closer to the level of everyday practices, in lessening the obstacles to co-operation and in the sense of the ability to affect the conditions of cross-border interaction through national and regional political channels (Liikanen et al. 2007).

European Union policy documents concerning cross-border co-operation have been a major source of inspiration for the discussion over new forms of cross-border regionalization. At the same time, they link rather directly cross-border region-building with the spreading of a supra-national European identity. Coupling cross-border regionalization with Europeanization reflects the political goals of the EU but tends to bypass the interconnections, clashes, and ruptures that have historically existed between different understandings of the following territorial scales: Europe, the nation and the region. This tendency is most obvious when discussing regionalization on the external borders of the EU (Scott 2005).

When the EU is encouraging cross-border regionalization on its external borders by promoting common European identification built on shared European values, there is easily a gap or even a clash of perceptions among the regional actors involved in cross-border co-operation. From both the Russian and the Finnish perspective, the “Europeanness” of cross-border co-operation programs often tends to bypass the fact that these regions have for centuries been part of overlapping national myths and clashing histories of civilizations.

The Construction of Karelia as Part of Finnish Nation-Building

Historical Construction of the Finnish-Russian Border

The history of the present Finnish-Russian border goes back to the consolidation of the Swedish and Russian Empires in the European North during the early second millennium. For over six centuries the bulk of the territory of present-day Finland
belonged to the Swedish Empire, and during that time the border with Russia (initially Novgorod and Kievan Rus) was frequently redefined through perpetual wars and peace treaties.

The first state structures in the area were not tools of expanding territorial states but more like outposts built to control, protect, and tax the trade routes connecting the Baltic Sea with Byzantium. Novgorod and Sweden tried to secure their domination over water routes in the eastern reaches of the Gulf of Finland by establishing castles near the mouths of the Neva (Landscrona) and Volkhov (Staraja Ladoga) rivers and on the shores of Lake Ladoga (Kexholm and Nöteborg) and the Gulf of Finland (Wiborg, Vyborg). From these strongholds, they gradually broadened their influence on neighboring settlements, introducing the inhabitants to the cornerstones of European state-making and nation-building: Christianity, forced conscription and taxation.

The so-called Treaty of Nöteborg in 1323 defined the first border between the two emerging empires (see Figure 2). The nature of the treaty between the Princes Jurij Danilovitsch and Magnus Eriksson was, however, quite far from present-day understanding. At the time, the status of the act between the two Princes was not meant to be understood as a delineation of areas under two sovereign mechanisms of rule and administration. The character of the border was only to a limited degree presented as a line between two territorial states, and even less did it mark an ethnic, national border (Korpela 2002; cf. Kirkinen 1970).

In the 16th century the consolidation of the Swedish state as a centralized administrative and war-making apparatus was followed by military success marked by the Treaty of Teusina in 1595. The treaty introduced the basic principles of a territorial state to the area: it defined the territories under the rule of the Swedish kings and Muscovite tsars. The eastern border of Sweden was drawn roughly along the lines where Finnish (Lutheran after the Reformation) settlements had spread. During the 17th century the border was pushed eastwards, and in the Treaty of Stolbova in 1617 Sweden annexed large areas around the Gulf of Finland and on the shores of Lake Ladoga, including a major share of Karelian settlements. The logic of the territorial

Figure 2. The Territorial Shape of Finland Since 1323 (Jukarainen 2002, 84)
state was reinforced by settlement policies bringing the Finnish population to the newly conquered areas especially in the South along the Karelian Isthmus (Katajala 2006).

During the 18th century, the rise of the Russian Empire was marked through a series of wars and treaties which pushed the border westward through areas settled by Karelian and Finnish populations. In 1721 Sweden lost the previously conquered areas at the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland. During the war, Russian troops had already destroyed the Swedish garrison town of Nyen, and the future capital of the Russian empire, St. Petersburg, was founded on the delta of the Neva River. The decline of Sweden as a great power in the European North culminated during the Napoleonic wars, when the territory of Finland was added to the Russian Empire by the Treaty of Fredrikshamn in 1809.

As part of the Swedish Empire, Finland did not form an administrative unit of its own. Within the framework of the Russian Empire the situation changed, and Finland gained the status of a Grand Duchy with its own religious organizations, laws and administrative structures. A customs border was established towards Russia, but this border was neither military nor ethnic. In the south the border line left a Finnish population with Lutheran religion on the Russian side (around St. Petersburg), and on the shores of Lake Ladoga there was a Karelian population practicing the Orthodox religion on the Finnish side. In economic terms the growing metropolis of St. Petersburg had important effects on the Finnish side of the border with its constant demand for goods and labor from eastern Finland (Katajala 1999).

The 19th century was a period of active nation-building in Finland, and gradually the border was defined in terms of an autonomous nation-state. Towards the end of the century, Finnish national consolidation conflicted with Russian attempts to unify the legal and administrative system of the empire. Social and political mobilization within the framework of the Grand Duchy enforced the nature of the border as a political, social and cultural dividing line at the beginning of the 20th century (Alapuro 1988).

In connection to the First World War and the Russian Revolution in 1917, Finland became an independent nation-state. After a Bolshevik-backed abortive revolution in Finland in 1918, peace between the Republic of Finland and Soviet Russia was made in Tartu in 1920, and a heavily guarded, hostile military border was established between the two countries. In the newly independent Finland, demands existed to redefine the border in ethnic terms by uniting the Finns and the Karelians within one state. During the interwar period, these desires enjoyed strong support among the intellectual and military elite but were not adopted as part of the official state politics (Ahti 1987).

On the eastern side of the border the consolidation of Soviet power created a new kind of ideological empire with a mission concerning the whole world. In Russian Karelia, an ethnically defined state structure, the Karelian Worker’s Commune (later the Karelian Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic), was founded in 1920 with the dual mission of silencing Finnish demands for Karelian autonomy and to act as a model and runway for revolution in the west. Starting with the period of Stalinist terror, Soviet Karelia lost both its revolutionary mission and—in practice—its autonomy. During the decades following the Second World War, most of the Karelian (and Finnish) population on the Soviet side was gradually assimilated into the Russian speaking majority (Kangaspuro 1998).

The historical heritage of Karelia embraces several overlapping conceptions of the area. For example, it is considered as a regional community with its own ethnic, linguistic, and religious peculiarities and secondly, as a borderland divided by rivaling
states and overlapping nationalizing claims. Lastly, it represents a meeting point and dividing line between Eastern and Western churches—and for some—Eastern and Western civilizations (Oksa 1999). During the 20th century, these overlapping images of Karelia were further complicated by market-based regionalization, by Finnish nation-building and nation-state formation and by the new understanding of the East-West division in terms of a conflict between socialist and capitalist countries.

Post Cold War Europeanization of the Border Regime and Visions of Cross-Border Region-Building

As part of the Second World War, two wars were fought between Finland and the Soviet Union. The so-called Winter War was started by the Soviet Union in 1939 with the proclaimed aim of securing the safety of Leningrad. The actual war maneuvers, however, targeted occupation and the establishment of a communist regime in Finland. In the so-called Continuation War of 1941-1944, Finland allied with Germany in order to regain the areas lost in the Winter War. The current border was drawn in September 1944 as part of the truce agreement between the Soviet and Finnish governments. Unlike most other allies of Germany, Finland was not occupied after the war. Instead, an Allied Control Commission was stationed in Helsinki to oversee the implementation of the truce, and a military base was rented to Soviet troops near the capital. The Soviet-led Control Commission remained in Helsinki until the 1947 Treaty of Paris, which formalized the terms of peace between Finland and the Soviet Union.

As a result of the two wars, Finland lost large areas on the Karelian Isthmus in the south, on the western and northern shores of Lake Ladoga and in the Petsamo area in the far north. More than 420,000 people (one-tenth of the population of Finland) left the ceded areas and were settled in other parts of the country (Laine 2002). The historical area of Karelia was, in practice, left almost totally on the Soviet side of the border. During the Cold War period, the fate of the ceded areas, the Karelian question, formed the most sensitive issue of Finnish-Soviet relations. Officially it was a taboo subject for Finnish foreign policy and even domestic political discussions, but Finnish leadership did make unsuccessful attempts during several decades to open negotiations on the issue.

In April 1948 Finland and the Soviet Union concluded a Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance which served as the key document for governing post-war relations between the two countries. Until the end of Soviet power, it defined the basic line of Finland’s international status to the Soviet Union and to Western countries as well. Significantly, it lacked the paragraphs on military co-operation typical to the Soviet satellite countries of Eastern Europe. This profoundly affected the nature of the border, which remained heavily guarded between two armies not subject to a common operative command (Nevakivi 1994).

During the years of the Cold War, the eastern border of Finland marked a dividing line between competing communist and the capitalist systems, and in terms of international relations a “Finlandized” grey zone between them. Both sides of the border were thoroughly militarized. Border crossings were possible only through a few crossing points, which were subject to tight visa regulations. In spite of the official rhetoric of friendship and co-operation, from a regional and local perspective, the border was a closed one. Trade connections and other forms of interaction across the border were administered by bilateral agreements between the two states (Harle and Moisio 2000; Paasi 1996).
In political terms, the international status of Finland slowly strengthened during the period of the Cold War, which gradually changed the nature of the border. In 1955 Finland was admitted as a member of the United Nations by the U.N. General Assembly, and Finland joined the Nordic Council. During the same year Soviet troops withdrew from the base rented to them on the southern coast. In 1960 Finland became an associated member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Finland further reinforced its role between East and West by joining the OECD in 1969 and especially by signing co-operation agreements with both the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) formed by Socialist countries in 1973.

During the 1970s and 1980s economic growth and the politics of building a Nordic-type welfare-state created political stability, and strengthened the Finnish claim for neutral status in international relations. Finland continued its integration into European institutions, e.g., by joining the European Council in 1989 and by repudiating in 1990 the restrictions which the Paris peace treaty had set on the Finnish armed forces. This was balanced by bilateral co-operation with the Soviet Union, and during the last years of Soviet power, Soviet diplomacy adapted to this development by verifying the neutral status of Finland (Väyrynen 1993). Finally, the collapse of the Soviet system led to a profound redefinition of the relations between the two countries, where Finnish membership in the European Union has become the new constitutive element.

Since the collapse of the Soviet system, the border is still strictly guarded, but the forms of CBC have changed and new scales of interaction have emerged. On the one hand, co-operation across the Finnish-Russian border has become part of a broader dynamic of international politics and EU-Russia relations. On the other hand, new regional and local actors have taken an active role in cross border co-operation. Regional administrative units, enterprises, and organizations of civil society cooperate directly across the border (Eskelinen, Liikanen and Oksa 1999).

Immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in late 1991, Finland and Russia signed a neighborhood agreement to replace the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. During the 1990s, the border-crossing facilities on the Finnish-Russian border improved significantly, and several new border crossing points have been established. The two countries concluded several intergovernmental agreements during the 1990s (e.g. agreements on cultural, educational and scientific co-operation). Bilateral co-operation and financing was largely replaced by project-type co-operation organized by Finnish and Russian authorities, and by non-governmental organizations.

Finland applied for EU membership in 1992 and joined the Union at the beginning of 1995. After EU membership Finland’s Russian policy has been carried out on two levels, through a bilateral relationship and through participation in the formulation of EU policies towards Russia. The EU has assumed the position of the dominant sponsor of cross-border initiatives and promoter of the development of its border regions; Russia has remained a rather passive actor (Liikanen and Virtanen 2006).

In parallel with cross-border co-operation programs, INTERREG, TACIS, and ENPI, the EU has elaborated its policies towards Russia as part of the Northern Dimension (ND) policy presented in a Communication of the Commission in 1998 (CEC, COM 1998/0589). In the Action Plan the Council of Europe presented in 2000, the ND was defined as seeking to improve co-ordination and consistency of the EU’s approach to its northern European external relations and cross-border policies (Heininen 2002). Recent developments seem to indicate that the EU is to some degree willing to switch.
from unilateral to bi- and multilateral mechanisms of cross-border governance (Joenniemi and Lehti 2003).

In 1995 the eastern border of Finland became the external border of the European Union, and until 2004 it remained the only land border between the EU and the Russian Federation. CBC with Russia has since been re-conceptualized in terms of European integration and EU politics. Since then, new institutional architectures have been applied in regional co-operation with Russia, and new methods of combining supranational, national, and regional scales of co-operation have been developed (Joenniemi 2003).

In Finnish public discussion, questions concerning Karelia have seldom been conceptualized in terms of regionalization or cross-border region-building. During the post-war period, the area was tightly divided by the Iron Curtain, and issues related to Karelia were associated with the major taboos of Finnish foreign politics (Eskelinen, Liikanen, and Oksa 1999). Opening the Karelian question, discussing areas ceded to the Soviet Union after the Second World War or the position of the Finno-Ugric minorities in Soviet Karelia were all considered detrimental to securing Finland’s international status in a Cold War climate. Karelia was chiefly kept on the political agenda by a few politically marginalized individuals who actively demanded the return of the areas that “belonged to Finland.” Major political parties avoided the subject, and public discussion adjusted to Cold War realities by perceiving Karelia mainly in nostalgic terms as the “lost land.” Notably, the official silence, the activist claims, and the public nostalgic longings were to a large degree all based on a similar understanding of the history in terms of national and ethnic divides. Only gradually has this heritage given way to new perspectives common to discourses on European integration and cross-border regionalization that transcend the national divides.

The adaptation of European Union policies of cross-border regionalization has, however, not proceeded as a one-way commitment to Europeanization. The results of the study of the Finnish-Russian border carried out within the framework of the Exlinea project indicate that attitudes towards cross-border co-operation are for the most part very positive, but this positive engagement has not been followed by strong patterns of common identification, neither in the sense of common cross-border identity nor in terms of broader European identification (Liikanen et al. 2007).

Russian Karelia in the Context of the Reconstitution of Russian Political Space

Civil Society and Political Space in Late- and Post-Soviet Russian Karelia

Until the mid-1950s Russian Karelia held the status of a union republic, formally similar to Ukraine or Belorussia. Still, during the entire Soviet period it never formed an ethnically defined political space where the titular nationality, the Karelians, would have formed the ruling majority. In the early phase during the 1920s, the Karelians still were the majority in comparison to the Russian population, but at that time it was the Finnish Reds, who fled to Soviet Russia after the abortive revolution of 1918, which formed the elite of Soviet Karelia. In the 1930s, Finns efforts to achieve special status were ruthlessly crushed by Stalin. Russian migrants and forced labor were brought into the area, and after the war Russian became the dominant language of the republic. During the late Soviet period, the share of the Karelian and Finnish population was no more than 10 and 2 percent respectively. The Karelians were rapidly being assimilated...
into the Russian-speaking majority, and in terms the social and cultural traditions, the republic was more Soviet than anything else (Laine 2002). The new forms of civic organization that emerged with the politics of perestroika during the late Soviet period, however, opened a totally new horizon for cultural and political identification.

With regard to social institutions, public life in the Karelian Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic was completely channeled through official Soviet institutions when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985. We may of course surmise that below the official surface a “second society” or perhaps even a hidden “semi-public sphere” with its own norms and values existed (Hankiss 1988). In the public discussion of the period, however, we find no trace of this. News items centered on the undertakings of the state and party administration and, at the grass-roots level, the activities of regional and local soviets and party units. Among reform-minded Communists there was, however, a discussion about how to bring the party closer to the everyday life of citizens. In the case of Karelia, it is evident that the first initiatives for establishing organizations formally independent of state and party structures came from within party circles. On the other hand, we have to be cautious with this conclusion as the available official newspaper material provides poor preconditions for evaluating the degree to which emerging voluntary association was at the same time based on personal contacts and social networks, typical of Soviet society (Ledeneva 1998; Lonkila 1999).

Questions of nationality or ethnicity were not on the agenda at first stage of the perestroika period, but the new form of organization in itself advanced a kind of local identification and new localism by stressing local horizontal ties instead of vertical Soviet structures. The frame of action and the identification of the first voluntary associations were in this sense more local and pro-perestroika than Soviet. Local action was promoted, but at the same time authorities wanted to limit the new forms of civic culture to the local level. Even so, this localism could be seen as an alternative to the ideals of the uniform Soviet patriotism of the Brezhnev period, which tended to bypass both ethnic and local identification as expressed in the well-known song, “My address is not a house or a street, my address is the Soviet Union.”

During the late 1990s a clear shift occurred in the forms of voluntary association in Russian Karelia, and we can speak of a new kind of politicization that took place in 1989-1990. The intensifying struggle for hegemony at the top of the Communist Party and inside the Soviet system in general fuelled new kinds of regional level political mobilization in the union republics and autonomous areas during the last years of the 1980s. Despite the fact that the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Republic was mixed in its ethnic composition and weak in its economic and political status, even there an openly political challenge to the old power structures was manifested by new emerging social and political movements. Alternative cultural associations, trade unions, and ethnic organizations became the most significant new forms of organization. More important than the forms of organization, however, was the open politicization of voluntary associations.

New independent labor unions and ethnic organizations first anchored their protest in basic social relations and everyday cultural traditions. The movement of the Ingrian Finns was organized in February 1989 and was the first to openly contest the myth of the unity of the Soviet people (Neuvosto-Karjala February 22, 1989, June 21, 1989; Klementjév 1996, 142-145). By claiming recognition for the history and culture of the Ingrians, it presented a symbolic challenge to the power-holders in the name of the people.

The most momentous expression of the politicization of voluntary organization was, however, the founding of the multi-culturally based Popular Front of Karelia,
which took place in November 1988. During the following years the Front with its activities organized mainly in Russian language was the first organization to publicly present rival economic and political reform programs to the communist leadership of the republic. More important, it was the first organization to strive openly for mass mobilization in support of its programs.

As a political force, the Front won its greatest victories in the elections of 1989 to the USSR Congress of People’s Deputies, when it successfully challenged and defeated the candidates of the party apparatus in the capital city of the republic, Petrozavodsk, and a few other raions (Tsygankov 1998, 6-60). The Popular Front did not get much publicity in the press, but during the election campaign and again during the republican elections of 1990 it managed to function in the public sphere as an alternative to the official candidates. When the Soviet system collapsed it was, however, unable to institutionalize itself as a popular political movement. The Front split into rival parties and quarrelling national groupings. Neither the Front nor its successors were strong enough to destroy the old power structure. Individual members of the old elite remained in positions of power until the end of the 1990s (Tsygankov 1998, 53-7).

Populist anti-Soviet identification gained ground partly through such new ethnic organizations as the Inkerin Liitto (Ingrian Association) and the Karjalan Rahvahan Liitto (Karelian Union), but this could not generate a national political mobilization as witnessed in the Baltic republics. Even if the mobilization failed to establish and control an autonomous political space, a major change took place during this period. The frame of action shifted from the local level organizations to that of the republic. The power hierarchy and the opposition confronted one another in the Karelian frame, and the Karelian Soviet Republic became the main frame of action for Russian speaking voluntary organizations as well.

The leadership of the republic, however, remained much in the same hands as before. In public discussions labor unions and ethnic organizations could largely set the agenda during early 1990s. Demonstrations, strikes, and cultural manifestations were organized. The significance of the movements was, however, no longer a function of their ability to seize the public space but was dependent more on negotiations with the government than demonstrations against it. In the new situation both the trade unions and the mainstream ethnic organizations joined with the government to promote their own interests. At the end of 1992 the president of the republic and the leadership of the central trade union celebrated the anniversary of the October revolution side by side (Karjalan Sanomat November 7, 1992).

During this period the Ingrian and Karelian ethnic mobilization was confronted by a Russian counter-organization, and the radical claims of the Karjalan Liike evoked aggressive reactions in the Russian-language press (Karjalan Sanomat August 21, 1993). The government, however, chose to work in co-operation with the representatives of ethnic groupings that symbolized the distinctiveness of the republic. In July, 1993 the Ingrians were officially rehabilitated (Karjalan Sanomat July 6, 1993), and at the end of the year Viktor Stepanov, the Soviet time president of the republic, was nominated as one of the candidates of the ethnic organizations in the Russian Federation Duma elections; the Karelian radical, Anatolii Grigor’ev, became his leading spokesman (Karjalan Sanomat October 21, 1993).

During the early post-Soviet period, the Republic of Karelia served as an arena for negotiation over the scant resources at hand. It provided a frame for promoting the economic, social, and cultural demands of different interest groups. At the same time,
the Stepanov government managed to bind its old rivals to its side in the fight to defend
the autonomy and the resource base of the republic in relation to Moscow. It seems that
for almost all the political actors, governmental and non-governmental alike, the Karelian
Republic clearly formed the frame of action they wanted to defend against outside
interference.

From a Regional to a National Political Frame

During late 1980s, ethnic movements had played a crucial symbolic role by sig-
naling the popular nature of the protest against Soviet rule. Later, they provided an
important source of political identity credibility for the new power structure organized
in the frame of the Karelian Republic. After the mid-1990s the organizations of the
titular people, the Karelians, as well as those of the Finns and the Ingrians, started
losing their status. In 1997, the Karelian Congress announced that Karelian organiza-
tions were being discriminated against when governmental bodies were appointed
(Karjalan Sanomat March 26, 1997). At the same time, Ingrian organizations and the
entire Finnish-language culture suffered badly from the escalating migration to Fin-
land. The 7th Annual Congress of the Ingrian League reportedly was “reminiscent of a
gathering of pensioners” (Karjalan Sanomat February 26, 1997). The withering of
ethnic radicalism was symbolized by the fact that its best-known representative, Anatolii
Grigor’ev, acted at the same time as the head of the Karelian Congress and coordinator
of the local party unit of Our Home is Russia (Karjalan Sanomat March 21, 1998).

Ethnic organizations had previously allied themselves with the government, but
after the mid-1990s this alliance started to show signs of friction. The expectations of
protecting Finnish culture and revitalizing the Karelian language were thwarted and
many of the Fenno-Ugric organizations declared their support for rival candidates to
Stepanov, who—though a Russian speaker—was by origin an ethnic Karelian (Karjalan

The 1998 election campaign did not bring a great change in the use of nationalist
sentiments, but in practice the frame in which politics was conducted was clearly chang-
ing from the Karelian Republic to an all-Russian frame. The political parties as well as
civic organizations turned their attention more to a Russian perspective and planned
their activities as part of the Russian field of action. In this sense the relationship be-
tween civic culture and nationality shifted in a new direction. The fall of Stepanov can
be seen as both a symptom and a result of this tendency. In the new millennium, civic
culture and politics in the Karelian Republic started to be increasingly reorganized in
relation to the burgeoning civic culture of the Russian Federation.

Paradoxically, ethnic organizations found more support from the old power bloc built
around President Stepanov in the early post-Soviet years than among the elected represen-
tatives who gained more power after the fall of Stepanov in 1998. The ethnic organizations
then tried to primarily appeal to the members of government who were interested in safe-
guarding the status of the republic against federal reforms planned in Moscow. In a round
table discussion on the language question, Aleksandr Lukin formulated this point, “Russia
is moving towards a unitary state, on the principle: we do not need many regional
subjects, it is easier to rule if the country is uniform. On these grounds Karelia can be
incorporated into the Murmansk or Vologda region. For this reason, to deny the special
national status is pure political ignorance.” According to Lukin the question was, “Do we,
indeed, want to say no to the Karelian Republic?” (Karjalan Sanomat February 21, 2001).
Coming years witnessed strengthened policies of binding voluntary organizations to the administration, a tendency that had been typical of the entire post-Soviet period. In 1999 a plan was announced to incorporate civic organizations into the town administration of Petrozavodsk (Karjalan Sanomat September 15, 1999), and in the autumn of 2001 a civic forum “State, Civic Organizations, and their Opportunities for Cooperation” was held in Petrozavodsk under the guidance of President Katanandov (Karjalan Sanomat October 24, 2001). As the forum was taking place just prior to—and most likely as part of the preparations for—President Putin’s grand civic forum in Moscow, it can also be taken as a new sign of the shift in political framing from the republican to the federal level.

The tendency to link regional and federal-level activities in a new manner was clearest in politics. In spring 2000, the Karelian branch of Putin’s new Unity party was founded, and news media reported that it was expanding rapidly (Karjalan Sanomat 11 March 2000). Other new coalitions followed, and the Forces of the Right founded their Karelian branch in the summer of 2000 (Karjalan Sanomat 1 July 2000). The federation-wide political arena was also employed by the opposition, such as when four Karelian “pacifist organizations” issued a declaration against the war in the Caucasus in late 1999 (Karjalan Sanomat December 22, 1999). This federation-wide organizing concerned not only Moscow-based politicians and political parties but paradoxically even ethnic organizations (Karjalan Sanomat August 4, 1999).

The inclusive strategy of the new president, Sergey Katanandov, was also evident in other fields of social and political life. In terms of party politics, the most notable example was the merging of the rival party branches of Unity and Fatherland. The new umbrella organization, Reconciliation of Karelia, was supposed to prevent disintegration and instability. Katanandov declared his aim to be the building of a modern civil society, achieved through reconciliation and compromises between different population groups (Karjalan Sanomat January 23, 2002).

By 2000, even the ethnic and national movements that were trying to protect the autonomy of the Karelian Republic and its ethnic bases began make demands at the federal level. Paradoxically, the radical Karjalan Kongressi was the first to shift its field of action from the Karelian frame to the federal by starting to make claims and demands on the federal government (Karjalan Sanomat January 19, 2002). By 2005 Anatolii Grigor’ev had appealed to President Putin no less than five times in order to improve the status of small ethnic communities. His framing of the political field at the point is important; goals and legitimation of the goals had shifted completely to the federal level when he declared: “The nationality policy of the government is threatening to bring disharmony between peoples and shake the foundations of statehood. Russia has to be multinational and multilingual; it has to have many faces. Only in this way can it preserve its unity” (Karjalan Sanomat January 26, 2005).

In summary, it can be asked whether the Karelian civic organizations were, in fact, adopting the rhetoric of the federal government. The leadership of the republic promoted effectively this line of development by supporting the civic and ethnic organizations—but only when their claims were coordinated with the politics of the government itself and as part of building Russian national unity and social and political uniformity.

During the late Soviet period, voluntary association and identity politics developed in an antagonistic relationship with the Soviet state and Soviet identity. In Karelia civic culture matured from a locally defined sub-culture to an open counter-culture and
finally to a direct political challenge to Soviet rule and ideology. As in the larger union republics, the challenge in the name of the people was first channeled through ethnic organizations seeking to strengthen the autonomy of the republic in regard to the central state. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the identification expressed by voluntary associations followed the new framing of their field of action, which in most cases was the Karelian Republic. Relations with politics on the federal level were initially cautious, and up to the mid-1990s collective action was still conceptualized mainly in terms of a regional Karelian frame, but gradually issues of the national political agenda became more and more important. Since 1998, when the regime of the old Soviet-era president Stepanov fell, the field of action of voluntary associations has been more and more defined in a federal or Russian national frame. In regard to cross-border cooperation this shift has brought about a fundamental change of perspective. During the 1990s cross-border cooperation was discussed in the first place as a matter of regional cooperation between the two Karelias, Finnish and Russian. During the Putin period, the emphasis has clearly moved towards evaluating CBC as part of bigger geopolitical setting and the tightening of EU-Russia relations.

**Conclusions: Europeanization and Cross-Border Regionalization**

In broad terms, the European Union policy documents on cross-border co-operation tend to link rather directly cross-border region-building with the spreading of supra-national European identity. This tendency dates back to the history of INTERREG community initiative as an Interregional Co-operation Program. Targeted to promoting integration and cohesion on the internal boundaries of the EU, the first INTERREG programs adopted concepts of regionalization that had their origins in visions of market driven regional development that smoothly connected areas across old national barriers (the “Blue Banana” etc.). In the second phase preceding Eastern enlargement, this thinking was combined to pre-enlargement policies aimed at lowering the institutional and ideological barriers stemming from the communist past of the candidate countries. As a result, the rhetoric of Europeanization, i.e. common European values and building common Europe, was further emphasized in the program.

In the formulations of the New Neighbourhood policy frame, these elements, which to a high degree rely on ideas of economically propelled smooth cross-border regionalization and visions of cross-border region-building promoting Europeanization and European identity, are still very much present. They are, however, now coupled with totally different kinds of tasks pertaining to the EU’s external relations and in the last instance related to common security and immigration policies. It is not hard to see that especially in co-operation with Russia, finding balance between these elements will be one of the major challenges of elaborating EU policies of cross-border co-operation.

Expectations of market driven straight-forward regionalization and the coupling of cross-border regionalization with Europeanization is, in general, in line with the broader political goals of the EU. However, one can question if these expectations in fact serve as a sound starting point for understanding the multi-layered territorial conceptualizations of the regional actors.

From the point of view of Finnish regional actors, there is an obvious dilemma in the way that the EU tends to encourage cross-border regionalization by promoting common European identities based on shared European values. This can, eventually, contradict or even clash with the perceptions of regional actors involved in cross-bor-
der co-operation. From their perspective, the “Europeanness” of cross-border co-operation programs tends to contrast with the fact that these regions have for centuries been part of overlapping national myths and clashing histories of civilizations. The question remains: can there be lasting cross-border regionalization without recognition of and open dialogue with these regional territorial images rooted in the many European ways of conceptualizing Europe and its boundaries?

In regard to Russian preconditions for extending cross-border interaction and eventual cross-border regionalization, two themes concerning the politics and identification of voluntary associations in Russian Karelia seem important. Firstly, it seems that the strengthening of federal structures initiated by President Putin does not simply represent nation-building from above but is linked to a profound redefinition of political space on the regional level and even a shift in defining the sphere of action at the level of civil society. This might signal that the potential for co-operation across the border is not being simply slowed down by geopolitical concerns of the federal center. It might be that similar to the Finnish case even the Russian regional actors feel discontented with the goals and rhetoric of EU programs. They are pursuing policies of their own with a particular understanding of the role of the region and its relation to neighbors to the west. If the EU wants to promote co-operation and regionalization across the border, it has to be prepared to take seriously the standpoints of these regional actors.

Secondly, identifying with regional political structures typical in Karelian republic in the 1990s was obviously not just a result of ethnic, Karelian and Finnish minority mobilization. Rather, even the Russian speaking majority saw the frame of the Karelian republic as the best option in which the very limited resources could best be negotiated and battled over. This Karelian frame is still important, but it should not be mixed with ideas of ethnic identification. Similarly, cross-border co-operation and visions of cross-border region-building cannot be based primarily on common ethnic traditions; crossing the border requires readiness to face and discuss the overlapping conceptualizations and histories of the region.

All in all, the perceptions of local actors involved in cross-border co-operation in the Russian and Finnish border areas do not bear witness to the birth or revival of a strong regional cross-border identity. On the contrary, participation in cross-border co-operation seems to be motivated on both sides primarily by reasoning connected to intra-state centre-periphery relations, nation-state bound ideas of sovereignty and citizenship, and even to a variety of clashing conceptualizations of broader cultural divides. These are all present in the regional identification of the actors, and more intensive cross-border co-operation can hardly be seen as proof of new European cross-border regionalism. Rather, the new situation, in which traditional national perceptions and state-bound cross-border relations have been challenged by new supra-national and regional perspectives, should be taken as a starting point for a dialogue between the various conceptualizations of territoriality that stem from different histories, regional, national, and European. In this situation there is an obvious need to recognize the interconnections, conflicts, and ruptures between the different understandings of the territorial scales involved. Instead of promoting assumed “Europeanness,” there is the need for comparative study of the political language of cross-border region-building. We need to map and understand the many European ways of combining regional, national and supranational perspectives in order to overcome the clash of territorialities embedded in European Union policies of cross-border co-operation.
Endnotes

1 The first two case studies summarize results of the European Union framework program projects Exlinea (Contract number HPSE-CT-2002-00141) and Eudimension (Contract no: CIT5-CT-2005-028804), and are based on the analysis of EU documents and a state of art report on existing literature carried out by the Finnish research team. The third case study is based on the analysis of newspaper material carried out in the frame of the Academy of Finland project The Reconstitution of Northwest Russia as an economic, social and political space (contract number SA208150).

2 Euregio Karelia covers 700 km of land border between the EU and Russia; the region has a population of 1.4 million people. The overall area of the Euregio is 263 667 km², 180 500 km² belonging to the Karelian Republic and 83 000 km² to Finland, 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 (Euregio Karelia; Our Common Border 2001-2006).

References

Official Documentation


Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. 1997. Establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Russian Federation, of the other part. JOCE L 327.

Newspapers

Karjalan Sanomat 1992-2005
Neuvosto-Karjala 1984-1991
Books and Articles


Katayala, K. 2006. Early Modern people(s) in the Borderlands: Linguistic or Religious Definitions of ‘Us’ and ‘Other.’ In Borderland identities. Territory and Belonging in North, Central and East Europe, eds. Hurd, M. Eslöv: Gondolin.


