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De-Traditionalizing the Cross-Border Cooperation Practices: Interests, Values and "Culture" at the Finnish-Russian Boundary

Abstract

The paper discusses the expanding interrelations between culture and politics in the Finnish-Russian cross-border cooperation. In order to gain credibility in the international politics as well as among the local actors, a cultural partnership initiative with a prominent market rationale has been adopted as a way of emphasizing the joint practices of cooperation across the state borders. The cultural agenda, in which the cultural heritage of the ceded borderland is used selectively and where the emphasis is put on the institutional and artistic/ethnic notions of culture, looks for the shared values of cooperation, but leaves unnoticed the inconsistency between the ethnic and civic arguments inherent in the cooperation practices. However, culture as a value-intensive concept has also its benefits in the emerging value-based cooperation practices and for the development of true transnational forms of action. Cultural cooperation in terms of partnerships has potential for new individually based practices that also may lead to a more creative sense of citizenship.

Introduction

As a result of the Second World War Finland had to cede some ten percent of its territory to the Soviet Union, the area known today as Russian Karelia. The aim of this paper¹ is to look at the 21st century interrelations between culture and politics in the cross-border cooperation (CBC) practices crossing the Finnish-Russian border, which since 1995 has functioned as one of the European Union's external borders and still, long after the Soviet

¹ This paper is based on materials related to the Finnish-Russian Culture Forum (the years 2000-2005). These consist of programs of annual forums, speeches, project proposals, media bulletins, and regional events. Most of this material is available at http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html (18/04/2007). The interviews (7), made by the author, form the wider framework of analysis.

Union collapsed, is associated with mental barriers preventing cooperation². The European Union has promoted culture and tourism and the creation of jobs³, while it seeks to safeguard local heritages and identities, but at its external borders it has, so far, not had particular cultural policies⁴. Although the present funding instruments at the Finnish-Russian boundary (INTERREG, TACIS, Culture 2000⁵, Neighboring Area Cooperation) do not provide funding for solely cultural heritage or exchange projects, the "cultural heritage" has been involved in cross-border cooperation practices in a rather ambiguous way: on the program level, the whole CBC has been adapted culturally to the local conditions by using a notion of "common cultural heritage" as a way of implying about the shared values, but in practice the actors have interpreted these notions by using their own national frames of reference. For example, the cross-border program area, the Euregio Karelia area, is described as having a "common shared cultural heritage" across the border⁶, but the Finns interpret it in ethnic terms of "Karelianness" and the Finno-Ugric folk cultures. The Russians on the other hand see this "Karelia" primarily as a geographical designation, which has strategic importance for attracting tourists from Finland⁷. However, this "cultural heritage" has also inscribed a European presence with the cooperation practices when the area is designated as a "cultural gate" between Russia and Europe⁸.

² Paasi A., 2000, "The Finnish-Russian Border as a Shifting Discourse. Boundaries in the World of De- and Re-Territorialisation", in Ahponen, P., Jukarainen, P. (eds.), *Tearing Down the Curtain, Opening the Gates. Northern Boundaries in Change*, Jyväskylä: SoPhi.

³ European Commission, 2005, *Commission Communication of 28th April 2000 to the Member States laying down guidelines for a Community Initiative concerning trans-European cooperation intended to encourage harmonious and balanced development of the European territory*, on internet <http://www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/g24204.htm> (11/04/2007).

⁴ Such "culture" intensive project funds, as for example PHARE, have not been implemented here. TACIS funding for "culture" has been very limited. The Culture Forum itself (and also some NGOs that have put emphasis on supporting social development in Russia) has received funding from the Neighboring Area Co-operation program.

⁵ Russian participation as "third parties" has been non-existent.

⁶ Euregio Karelia, 2005, *Neighbourhood Programme, Euregio Karelia. Programme complement 2004-2006*.

⁷ In the present Karelian Republic (RUS) the titular minority, "the Karelians", makes up only 10 percent of population and the Karelian language has almost no economic importance.

In the Finnish-Russian case, the interest-based cooperation practices (for example in Euregio Karelia⁹) have been rather successful as they focus on the "European standards" of cooperation and use the cultural idiom of "shared values" in a simplistic way. A problem-oriented terminology applicable to the present world is used, namely that of "soft" security, creativity, economy, environment, and "institutional differences". These practices have also been criticized, not just for inefficiency, but for not addressing the problems of socio-cultural interaction and geopolitical history, that is, motivation¹⁰. However, recently this cooperation has been defined in terms of "partnerships" that are seen to be based on joint practices and involve issues concerning the everyday lives of people. It is seen that the EU as a value community should not determine its exact borders, but leave them to some extent undefined as it enables "soft" measures to propagate European values and safety¹¹. Thus the purely interest-based cooperation seems to describe the "earlier" phases of CBC practices (finding common practices in particular contexts), but more and more there is a need to meet the requirements of value-based cooperation (the question of situational relativism and universalism), as when, for example, human rights, freedom of speech, and minority rights rival the national ways of thinking¹².

In this paper the focus is on the border in terms of value-based practices, especially as these are manifested in recent discussions of "Finnish-Russian cultural cooperation". It is seen that new transnational practices based on an idea of "shared culture" are sketched, but at the same time more confrontational issues come up that originate from the "traditional" worldviews and everyday lives of people as well as from the internal dynamics of culture. It has been seen that the political aspect is often played down in the EU discourses on European

⁸ Regional Council of North Karelia, 2003, *Kulttuurista lisää voimaa ja työtä! Pohjois-Karjalan kulttuuristrategia 2003-2006*, Joensuu: Regional Council of North Karelia.

⁹ Kononen V., 2004, "Venäjän federaatio ja alueellinen yhteistyö", in Liikanen I., Virtanen P. (eds.), *Rajayhteistyö, EU ja Venäjä*, Joensuu: Karjalan tutkimuslaitos.

¹⁰ Jauhiainen J., 2002, "Territoriality and Topocracy of Cross-Border Networks", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 33, 2, pp.156-176.

¹¹ Raik K., 2006, "Turkki ja Ukraina koettelevat EU:n perustaa", *Turun Sanomat*, 18/03/2006, p.2.

¹² Berglund E., 2000, "From Iron Curtain to Timber-Belt", *Ethnologia Europaea. Journal of European Ethnology*, 30, 2, pp.23-33.

culture as culture is defined as the cultural sector, for example in terms of art or heritage¹³. However, even inside the EU, state borders still serve as symbolic markers of difference long after they lost their role as political and commercial boundaries¹⁴. At the EU external border the question of cultural values and symbols is even more crucial since the political and commercial boundaries remain. The question about who is to decide what the interests are (in terms of culture), seems to be particularly relevant as "cultures" are often seen as representing the core values of local and national communities with an alleged territorial dimension. I claim that an inconsistency between the ethnic and civic arguments in this cooperation has not been fully recognized. For example, the evaluation report of Finnish-Russian cultural cooperation¹⁵ did not pay any attention to the contents or definitions of this "culture". Thus the cultural tensions related to the different conceptions of "culture" used in the cooperation, that is, between control (collective definitions, hierarchies) and openness (individuality, creativity, everyday life¹⁶) need to be analysed.

The Rationale of Culture Forums

After the Second World War, in Finland the previous, rather anti-communist, notions of Russianness had to be replaced with folkloristic and "cultural" ingredients. During the Soviet period this very formal type of "cultural cooperation" was frequent, but in many cases ended with the Soviet Union. However, since the year 2000, the practices of cultural cooperation between Finland and Russia have been developed in the framework of annually organized

¹³ Shore C., 2000, *Building Europe. The Cultural Politics of European Integration*, London/New York: Routledge.

¹⁴ Bray Z., 2005, "New Frontiers in a Borderless Europe: The Case of Bidasoa-Txingudi", *Culture and Power at the Edges of the State. National Support and Subversion in European Border Regions*, in Wilson T. M., Donnan H. (eds.), Münster: Lit. Verlag.

¹⁵ Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005, *Suomalais-venäläisen kulttuurifoorumin arviointi. Itsearviointin analyysi 23/09/2004*, Helsinki: Finnish Ministry of Education.

¹⁶ The "culture of everyday life" is often neglected in the Finnish regional development policies. This has been described by Siivonen K., 2006, "Kulttuuritoiminnalla kulttuurisesti kestävään kehitykseen", in Siivonen K. (ed.), *Kulttuurista kestävyyttä*, Helsinki: Ethnos ry.

"Culture Forums"¹⁷. The declared purpose of these forums has been to rebuild the "cultural relations" and to find common interests, especially between the "small cultural actors"¹⁸. Since 2004, these forum practices have been seen (or wished) to follow a particular "cultural partnership principle". It is described as a committed cooperation and implies a need for a shared value basis of cooperation. For this purpose, the Soviet period is not seen as very useful and therefore a historical argument for cultural cooperation is found in the 19th century as the Karelian culture and the Finno-Ugrian minorities are informing about the shared values of cooperation (for example, the grand duchy of Finland is placed in the focus of historical reviews¹⁹). The cross-border area is considered a "unified cultural area in history as well as in the future"²⁰. The Finnish-Russian cultural relations are understood as problem free in a simplified way, which also makes it easier in the present to combine culture and economy in terms of "creativity":

Creative production is not born out of nothing, but requires networks of artists and cultural organizations, generators, idea hatcheries, education, economic investments, capital, and marketing. In order to utilize the mental capacity of people living in the Northern regions, and in order to strengthen the competitiveness of regional culture in the global markets, we need to strengthen cultural cooperation in the Northern region, the Northern cultural partnership²¹.

If a cultural gap is found, it is located between Russia and the European Union: ideally, the cultural partnerships are seen as a way of preventing possible negative side-effects of increased interdependence. The bilateral "artistic and cultural cooperation" is seen as enabling

¹⁷ Forums organized in Helsinki, Petrozavodsk, Lappeenranta, Novgorod, Turku, St. Petersburg, Vologda, and Kajaani.

¹⁸ Finnish speech in 2004, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html (11/04/2007).

¹⁹ Finnish speech in 2002, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid.*

²⁰ Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005, *Suomalais-venäläisen kulttuurifoorumin arviointi. Itsearviointin analyysi 23/09/2004, op. cit.*

²¹ Finnish speech in 2005, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html.

the development of multilateral cooperation "with the help of art and culture"²². For the purposes of increasing the regions' role in international politics, the issues of democracy and civil society are emphasized also in cultural cooperation²³ (the Finns are seen to build these "cultural bridge pillars"). In this respect, regional cultural characteristics are crucial: the notion of "Karelianness" (as well as the "kindred peoples" in Russia) is defined as "rooted borderlessness"²⁴ and the Karelian heritage is placed under the notion of "cooperation with kindred peoples"²⁵ (human rights, language) and "culture tourism" (economy). However, at the same time the Finnish relations with the Finno-Ugric peoples are defined as a "cornerstone of the Finnish national identity"²⁶.

Clearly, the most present and practical argument for cooperation is the economic one²⁷, even if it seems paradoxical when the actual project funding for "culture" is so limited. Cultural cooperation is placed in the framework of national economies as the property of specific minorities or regions. On the Finnish side, this market logic seems to be more self-evident and the Russians seem to emphasize more the need to protect "high culture" against "mass culture":

²² Finnish speech in 2005, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid*.

²³ On the Russian side, "culture" is seen as promoter of democracy in terms of *Russian* culture and the "indigenous Russian democratic values", not the minority cultures or traditions. This is described by Mandelstam Balzer M., Petro N.- N., Robertson L.-R., 2001, "Issues of Culture and Identity: 'Cultural Entrepreneurship' in Russia's Regions", in Ruble B.- A., Koehn J., Popson N.- E. (eds.), *Fragmented Space in the Russian Federation*, Washington/Baltimore/London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.

²⁴ Finnish speech in 2002, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html (18/04/2007).

²⁵ Since 1994, the Finnish State has implemented a Kindred Peoples Program (focus on minority languages). Thus the Culture Forums are, in principle, not focused on these minorities but looking for new ways of interaction

²⁶ Finnish speech in 2002, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html (18/04/2007).

²⁷ As defined already in the Culture Forum Declaration, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid*.

(i) Unfortunately, surrogate culture has started to replace real culture in the minds of the young people (a Russian official), (ii) "The high culture is in danger of dissolving into mass culture ... [we should] restore the hierarchy of higher values." (a Russian writer)²⁸

On the Finnish side, this distinction between "pop" and the arts is not emphasized²⁹, but, on the other hand, in Finland there is a tradition of appreciating "Russian culture" in terms of the arts. The concept of "cultural industry" has been controversial, as the link it establishes between economy and culture seems to be appreciated differently on each side of the border. This market logic relies on instrumental notions of culture. In terms of interaction it is seen that "culture export" cannot be a one-way traffic because it would "exhaust the resources"³⁰. It seems that business interests are not transcending ethnic or institutionally based conceptions of culture in "cultural cooperation". However, cultural cooperation seems to also transcend potential political conflicts by setting a cultural agenda that addresses the cultural values in a particular way. Those "participants" that are able to set this agenda might be seen as "cultural entrepreneurs" who are literally able to define the future practices³¹. The question is raised who are they: the officials, cultural institutions, or individuals?

De-Traditionalizing Cross-Border Practices?

As Ulrich Beck has proclaimed, the national outlook misunderstands the reality and future of Europe and what is needed is a kind of separation of state from nation³². Beck has

²⁸ Media Bulletin of the Culture Forum, 2003, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid*.

²⁹ Exceptions include some Finnish cultural actors who have propagated a stricter focus on the arts.

³⁰ Finnish speech in 2004, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html (18/04/2007).

³¹ Mandelstam Balzer M., Petro N.- N., Robertson L.- R., 2001, "Issues of Culture and Identity: 'Cultural Entrepreneurship' in Russia's Regions", in Ruble B.- A., Koehn J., Popson N.- E. (eds.), *Fragmented Space in the Russian Federation, op. cit.*

³² Beck U., 2006, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

characterized the still few "true transnational forms of action" using the concept "de-traditionalization"³³. It basically means that the importance of traditional constraints for individual opportunities diminishes and that different borders require constant legitimation. By "re-traditionalization", he has referred to a change in which the collective future consciousness takes over the position of tradition and memory in the past-oriented national imagination and policies. "Multiculturalism" has traditionally been a concept that informs about value diversity in the contemporary world, but it also limits individuals if this "culture" is understood too narrowly. The Finnish-Russian "cultural partnership" practices can be analysed against the idea of "true transnational forms of action" in order to highlight their possible cultural implications as a way of communicating the border³⁴. In this way, the "culture" of the practices should perhaps be defined as communication, that is, for example, how much the ethnic or national element is involved in the interaction³⁵. This concerns also the categories and notions of culture: to sustain "old" categories is to support a past-oriented and culturally unsustainable essentialism. There is a need to recognize the situational differences as well as the future challenges beyond national imagination.

One of the value related concepts in the present CBC practices is tradition. "Traditions" can be seen as a rhetorical way of arguing in favor of increased cooperation as it builds a historically justified picture of cooperation. By using the notion "reflexive traditionalization", Gisela Welz³⁶ has described how nowadays tradition is increasingly seen as a construction originating from the present needs of people, as a response to contemporary challenges, which by references to the past and by its rhetoric of historicity gains plausibility and legitimacy. Also "cultural" differences can be "traditionalized":

³³ Beck U., 2002, "The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19, 1-2, pp.17-44.

³⁴ In this respect, the asymmetries are highlighted, for example, as the web pages of the forum exist on national servers and their appearance as well as content differ considerably: www.kultforum.natm.ru and www.kultforum.org (18/04/2007).

³⁵ Barth F., 1994, *Manifestasjon og prosess*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

³⁶ Welz G., 2000, "Multiple Modernities and Reflexive Traditionalisation", *Ethnologia Europaea. Journal of European Ethnology*, 30, 1, pp.5-13.

The Finnish-Russian Culture Forum activities represent the thousand-year old continuum of interactions between our nations and cultures³⁷.

In the Finnish-Russian case, the time period of the Soviet Union is considered only as a break in a "tradition of cooperation", which not only neglects the cultural implications of the Soviet time, but also seeks to argue for increased CBC by referring to time periods that still in the present provide Finns with opportunities for national sentimentality and sustaining prejudices. These references to the past interactions include mainly those that deal only with economic cooperation and do not recognize the national bias. For example, the "Culture Train" project had to face a situation where one original project idea in the end resulted in "at least a hundred" different ideas: some Russians saw it as related to their local celebrations, some Finns saw it as celebrating the old commercial routes crossing the Karelian lands. The project had an official goal of supporting the development of passenger services across the border by organizing a train filled with "culture" that moved across the borderland in 2003 (Belomorsk-Kostamus-Oulu-Petrozavodsk). The project continued later as "general cultural exchange" (until 2006), but the railway is still only in the use of industry. Interestingly, this project resulted in criticism in the form of a comic strip³⁸ that caused unease among the organizers not wanting to put "sensitive issues" on the table. Others saw this comic as a way of dealing with the "undercurrent emotions always related to this cooperation"³⁹. This dispute showed the problems involved in combining culture (here: artistic freedom of speech) and the CBC practices: the diverse ways of seeing the role of "culture" and also the "tradition of cooperation" have consequences for the cooperation practices. Thus, in its narrow use, as arguing for interest-based practices, this emphasis of an "economical tradition" may work, but in the case of value-based CBC, these notions become more biased as the cooperation practices are still very much in contradiction with the "common sense" at the local level (as a

³⁷ Finnish speech in 2002, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html (18/04/2007).

³⁸ Ranta V., 2003, "Kulttuurijuna-sarjakuvareportaasi", *Cultural magazine Kaltio*, Oulu, on internet <http://www.kaltio.fi> (11/04/2007).

³⁹ Vilkuna J., 2003, "Kulttuurijuna Sorokka(Belomorsk)-Oulu-Petroskoi", *Cultural magazine Kaltio*, Oulu, on internet <http://www.kaltio.fi> (11/04/2007).

result of the Soviet period)⁴⁰. In fact, in terms of practices, the forums are seen as a "necessary bureaucracy" for the cultural relations between Finland and Russia⁴¹ and as a way of creating a "culture of cooperation"⁴². The contradiction between a presented "tradition" and the local practices has to be passed discursively: thus the definitions of culture (also "beyond trade") come to the focus, even if also in a rather simplified way:

This stock exchange [the Culture Forum] is very special: if you and me both have one euro coin in our hands, and we exchange them, we both still have only one euro. But as we exchange thoughts, we both have at least two thoughts, and possibly a third one in the making⁴³.

In the "cultural partnerships" this takes place by using a vocabulary of "open" and "diverse" interaction and networking, which seems to require a "wider perspective on culture" (with artistic connotations). This initiative has raised Finnish skepticism as to what extent these "practices" actually relate to the local actors. Despite the "management trainings" at the Forum and the rhetoric of direct contacts, the actual project implementation is seen difficult due to the "hierarchical Russian practices". Therefore, only 14% of the Finnish Forum participants see that it has somehow improved "regional level cooperation" and only one third of the Finnish "partners" saw the Forum as supporting real project creation at all, or that it should be continued at all⁴⁴. Thus, "cultural partnership" can be seen as a sort of rhetorical development phase of the cultural cooperation practices, and also as Finnish or "European" as it is seldom mentioned by the Russians and seems not to connect very well with the local

⁴⁰ Tykkyläinen M., 2000, "Mental Borders as Barriers for Industrial Co-Operation", Ahponen P., Jukarainen P. (eds.), *Tearing Down the Curtain, Opening the Gates. Northern Boundaries in Change*, op. cit.

⁴¹ Speech by a Finland-Russia Society representative in 2003, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html (18/04/2007).

⁴² Speech by a Finnish minister in 2003, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid.*

⁴³ Finnish speech in 2004, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005, *Suomalais-venäläisen kulttuurifoorumin arviointi. Itsearviointin analyysi 23/09/2004*, op. cit.

actors. The whole partnership principle between EU and Russia has been difficult because it is based on the values and norms of EU: the partnership tends to take an unequal, hierarchical form⁴⁵.

The "cultural partnership" practices as a kind of "euro-regionalization" can be seen in terms of creating a space for the multicultural and multilingual instead of the national and thus "opening it up for agency and a multitude of practices"⁴⁶. However, the values may not be separable of cultural contents due to the national/ethnic framework of the ceded borderland and because this "cultural cooperation" is inclined to communicate the past or the present differences across the border and between collective, national cultures. On the other hand, in the process of cultural fragmentation, the relationship between culture and society as a whole is being reconsidered and the boundaries that sustain "high culture" are undermined⁴⁷. It seems that culture is absorbing economy. Cultural fragmentation may affect particularly the public cultural institutions, but the economic impact may not benefit them if this "cultural cooperation" is seen as a matter of "popular culture" or understood outside their institutional framework:

Cultural partnerships are jointly implemented culture projects, which manifest the artistic creativeness of the people in the region, enrich the lives of the people in the region, and give their northern contribution to humanity's cultural heritage⁴⁸.

In the borderlands the border as such may also increase the "exchange value" of diverse "cultural products"⁴⁹. In the Forum there is also an emphasis on developing economically

⁴⁵ Gromadzki G., Lopata R., Raik K., 2005, *Friends or Family? Finnish, Lithuanian and Polish Perspectives on the EU's Policy towards Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*, Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

⁴⁶ Frykman J., 2002, "Place for Something Else. Analysing a Cultural Imaginary", *Ethnologia Europaea. Journal of European Ethnology*, 32, 2, pp.47-68.

⁴⁷ Chaney D., 2002, *Cultural Change and Everyday Life*, New York: Palgrave.

⁴⁸ Finnish speech in 2005, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html (18/04/2007).

efficient practices for the institutions, especially in terms of Arts and Festival Management (events in 2000, 2003, and 2004). This kind of new "culture" might be looking for other channels for "interaction" as there is a general move towards individuality across the border⁵⁰. The idea of "cultural partnerships" has been based on some, in principle, "unbounded" and individually based notions of culture, but in practice it is still rooted in the policy makers' institutional and nationally based practices and may not connect with those cultural phenomena that are relevant to the local communities. This seems to whittle away the credibility of Culture Forums practices implemented.

Realities of the "Cultural Partnership"

As we look at the Culture Forum timeline for the years 2000-2005, it can be observed that, at first, the aim was to increase the "role of culture" in international cooperation and politics. It is not clear if the Finns or the Russians in 1999 made the first initiative for developing "direct cultural contacts across the border", but they were seen initially as a way of increasing the incomes of cultural institutions⁵¹. The official aim has been to establish "sustainable partnerships" by "networking, finding common interests and giving funding advice"⁵². In practice, feasible common interests have proved difficult to find. "Culture", as it "reflects the specific characteristics of the developments of the regions"⁵³ was seen crucial for the development of civil society and democracy. In terms of new practices, "modern" market-conditioned cultural cooperation was preferred. Cultural interaction was seen to have traditions dating back to the years 1809-1917 (when Finland was part of Russia and Karelia

⁴⁹ As for example some Russian artists seem to find interested audience only in Finland.

⁵⁰ Blom R., Melin H., 2005, "Muuttuvat identiteetit Karjalan tasavallassa", in Hirsiaho A., Korpela M., Rantalaiho L. (eds.), *Kohtaamisia rajoilla*, Tampere: Finnish Literature Society.

⁵¹ "Retrospective" speech in 2003, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html (18/04/2007).

⁵² Finnish speech in 2005, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid.*

⁵³ Culture Forum Declaration, 22/11/2000, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid.*

belonged to Finland). In 2001 it was emphasized that culture has to gain more economic importance in order to reach a higher status in the society (this was seen as a way of convincing those institutions that might fund the cultural cooperation projects). "Culture" was seen mostly in terms of something that can be observed only afterwards (as the result of the lives of the previous generations and their actions) and now also the Finno-Ugric heritage was mentioned. In 2002 both Russian and Finnish speakers took up the Finno-Ugric related projects as "best examples". These have included village tourism (in Karelia), folk culture festivals, theatre plays (based on the Finnish national epic Kalevala), ethnographic exhibitions and traditional crafts⁵⁴. In 2002, also the fortifications in the border area became examples of "common activities". "Cultural industry" was the slogan at the Forum, but in 2003 in St. Petersburg the focus was put on project feasibility. Russian speakers expressed worries about the young people (in Russia) who did not find their way to "real culture", that is, they did not consume "higher culture". Paradoxically, now there was a lack of Finnish partners "due to their lack of money". In 2004 a Finnish minister expressed her disappointment with the non-existent funding from the EU (especially as she saw that the economic importance of popular culture was growing all the time). At last, in 2004 a Russian speaker addressed cultural cooperation as means for combating prejudices. In 2005 the idea of Northern Cultural Partnerships was presented: it was seen to include such diverse phenomena as art experiences, minority languages, science, prejudices, and "open cultural areas". In terms of practices, "creativity" was emphasized:

Creative activities [for children]... diminish the role of language differences which also helps in crossing the boundaries and possible prejudices⁵⁵.

"Culture" was seen as "equally important" to economy and environment, but still usually in terms of creating a "surplus" for the communities (in terms of art). However, also people-to-people level cooperation and the importance of creating trust (a Russian view) in the Finnish-Russian relations were emphasized. Also, democratic aspects were associated

⁵⁴ Russian speech in 2002, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid*.

⁵⁵ Finnish speech in 2005, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid*.

with the cooperation (by the Russians), even if the competitiveness of culture was still emphasized (by the Finns). A willingness to develop the forum itself as a cultural event, or as a "brand" was also strong⁵⁶. It seems the Forum itself becomes its *raison d'etre*: it gained financial sponsors in 2006 as it had a special focus on the Russian "culture markets"⁵⁷.

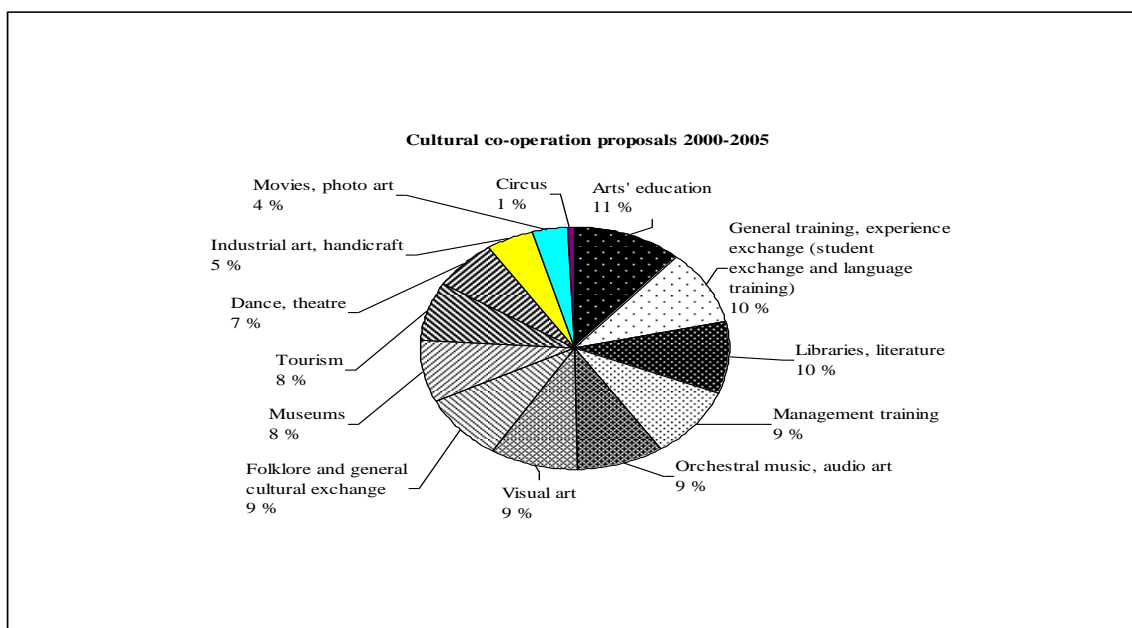


Figure 1: Categorization according to the Finnish Ministry of Education.⁵⁸ For the year 2005 the numbers are collected from the forum documents. To some extent, the actual numbers are not precise due to the fact that one project may be present in many forums (it happens that 1/3 of the negotiations are a continuation from the previous year). However, this shows the focus of the cooperation as presented according to "cultural sectors". A fact, not visible in this categorization, is that at least 1/3 of proposals deal with representing the past of the region, and that 1/3 concern the youth.

Culture forums started as a form of networking between state officials and have also had the aim of developing cooperation between cultural actors. The actual cooperation proposals/negotiations (2/3 are from the Russian side, by "cultural sectors": see figure 1), all

⁵⁶ In 2000 no events were organized, but in 2005 already 28 cultural events were included in the program. These culture events at the Forum have been seen as the most concrete result of the co-operation.

⁵⁷ During the Finnish EU presidency in 2006, the Forum itself was sponsored by the forest company UPM-Kymmene.

550 in the years 2000-2005, are publicly documented on the web site and tell about the cooperation actors' perceptions and expectations of the cooperation. The overwhelming majority of the proposals concern the arts or ethnic folk cultures. It reflects the picture one gets from other cultural partnership documents: "ethnic traditions", "high culture", and economic interests are seen compatible. Most of the proposals with an economic emphasis concerned cultural tourism into Russian Karelia (by the country of origin: RUS 26, FIN 26). In terms of communication the issues related to network and information society seem relevant in terms of an emphasis on education (20-30% of proposals), but not that much on "new technology" (6%). Also other proposals seem to put an emphasis on the present and future interaction. One third of the proposals are directed towards the youth (RUS 126, FIN 54) and aim to increase intercultural understanding, but usually do not involve "popular culture"⁵⁹. This reflects the situation where most cooperation is between educational institutions. When it then comes to the possibility of a dialogue between the cultural institutions across the border, it is interesting that the memory institutions, especially the Finnish ones, are less active (RUS 39, FIN 10), even if to some extent war history is now understood as "common". One project has had particularly symbolic importance in this respect:

(i)...both the Russian Federation and Finland are maintaining and looking after not just their own cultural heritage but also that of the other. Thus irrespective of who built parts of the fortresses, they have become common cultural heritage.⁶⁰

(ii) The swords have been turned into tourism products.⁶¹

(iii) [This] project shows the centuries-old cooperation.⁶²

⁵⁸ Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005, *Suomalais-venäläisen kulttuurifoorumin arviointi. Itsearvioinnin analyysi 23/09/2004, op. cit.*

⁵⁹ The exception to the rule is the Rockbridge-project: www.ilosaarirock.fi/rockbridge (11/04/2007).

⁶⁰ This is a museum director's formulation of the Castles and Fortifications project. This project has Russian language web pages also, but they are *still* very incomplete: <http://www.fort.fi> (11/04/2007). However, the *idea* of "common heritage" related to it has been actively used at the Forum for the purposes of tourism development and for constructing the commercial traditions.

⁶¹ Speech by a Finnish minister in 2004, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html (18/04/2007).

In 2005, the Second World War history was also presented at the Forum in a Finnish exhibition about the destinies of Russian war prisoners in a Finnish prison hospital (it has been described as the most humane war prison camp in history). On the other hand, the value-rich cultural heritage, religious heritage, is not present at all in the actual proposals, but the strategically useful Finno-Ugric folk cultures are (RUS 38, FIN 10). As a matter of fact, the so-called "Russian actors" in cultural cooperation are most often Finno-Ugric cultural institutions. In this respect, it is notable that the politically current idea of "multiculturalism" is seldom mentioned in the proposals, which is also the case for "democracy" and "globalization". However, the social *problems* are addressed, for example as the situation of the handicapped is improved in Russia with the help of culture (24% of "minority proposals" deal with the handicapped).

The Finnish and Russian national Culture Forum committees work independently (since 2003 committees with mixed-compositions) and gather the project proposals from "cultural actors" without any outspoken selection criteria. The forum participation cost (€300-3000, the Finnish partners cover it from their own pockets) does not seem to enable participation of civil society organizations (or individuals). In principle, this is a democratic process that also

... reminds of gold-digging: among the worthless sand grain the valuable nuggets of gold are selected and then melted into bars⁶³.

If a partner is "found", bilateral partner negotiations are then held in the forum, but "no-show" situations have been a problem⁶⁴. These contacts also seem to have been rather superficial: even the participants have had difficulties in naming concrete projects resulting from them and a success has required that the contacts were known already before the

⁶² Speech by a Finnish official in 2002, Culture Forum Archives, *ibid*.

⁶³ Speech by a Russian official in 2003, Culture Forum Archives, Helsinki: Finland-Russia Society, on internet http://www.kultforum.org/arkisto/kf_2000_2004.html.

⁶⁴ At the forum, there are usually some 30 interpreters supporting the bilateral negotiations.

negotiations. The Finnish small and regional actors have also presented their discontent as the forum does not seem to take into account the regional differences, but the Russians seem very pleased with this cooperation⁶⁵. The culture forum event itself has state funding, but the possible projects have to find it elsewhere. The scarce resources have resulted in "simplified culture exchanges", for example in the form of art exchange. Cultural actors clearly have attached ambitious goals for this cooperation, even if also curiosity seems to be a factor at play: it is even suggested that the Forum should take place "further in Russia, beyond the Ural Mountains..."⁶⁶.

Recognizing the Cultural Challenge

How has the idea of intensified cultural cooperation, that is a "cultural partnership", affected the Culture Forum cooperation practices? One answer seems to include those factors that oppose or promote the creation of transnational forms of action in terms of the different conceptions of culture used. These conceptualizations of culture seem to differ across the border: the Finns seem to point out culture in terms of market logic or institutional practices and the Russians seem to make statements in favor of "high culture". In practice, the projects that are defined as "common projects" are not really joint projects due to lack of common practices and funding. The official common language preferred is that of economical practices and interests, which seems to transcend the problems of cooperation⁶⁷, even if this focus on cultural institutions and national economy has led to a situation where the forum itself has been defined as "art" or as a "brand". At the Culture Forums "culture" is defined as instrumental: the idea of a "borderless culture" is discussed simply in terms of *crossing* the border. The national framework not recognized as, rather paradoxically, the national

⁶⁵ Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005, *Suomalais-venäläisen kulttuurifoorumin arviointi. Itsearviointin analyysi 23/09/2004, op. cit.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Meaning that "high culture" adopts the themes, idioms, and marketing of its more commercial peers, as described in: Chaney D., 2002, "Cosmopolitan Art and Cultural Citizenship", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19, 1-2, pp.157-174.

categories and differences (Finnish, Russian) are not visible: "culture" is defined in terms of art experiences, the creativity of the majority peoples or as the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities. Those definitions of cultural cooperation, which would take into account the collective memory of the Finns and would emphasize the subverting role of artistic or everyday culture are not present, or at least not adopted into the practices. By applying "methodological nationalism"⁶⁸, the possible new conceptualizations are restricted because the "cultural sphere of life" is described using inflexible and narrow definitions of culture, limiting it to the sphere of the arts or collective folk cultures, which results in an asymmetry (value-based un-equality, hierarchy) between the partners also in "cultural partnerships". In this way, "culture" is distanced also from the social development projects. The policy maker's institutional definitions of culture in terms of cultural services/products, or as "matching up" with the requirements of the funding institutions, seem to allow the partnership principle without having to deal with the issue of values and cultural differences, that is, issues related to identity formation: it is enough that "culture" is included in the program papers. By defining the Culture uncontroversial, it is "successfully" included into politics and economic discourse.

The Culture Forums as well as the cultural partnerships seem to face the difficulty of being initiated by the state officials and still the phenomena they strive to deal with belong more and more to the individuals and local communities, and may thus not be manageable by anyone. The vocabulary used by the officials at the forum is not present in the actual proposals. Local Finnish participants have expressed their disappointment with the forum (on the Russian side comments are positive). Thus the cultural entrepreneurs setting the "cultural agenda" for the cooperation are usually, but not only, the policy makers. The market economic aspect is not much present in the actual proposals and, in terms of practices, the difference between the policy makers and the cooperation actors seems to be significant. The examples presented in this paper (Culture Train, Castles and Fortifications) have had particular symbolic importance, but they have been based on nationally defined practices and their efficiency can be disputed if looked closer. However, there are increasing demands for a

⁶⁸ Beck U., 2006, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

more diversified cultural exchange (as seen from the participant comments as well as in some official speeches), which recognize that simply increasing the existing cooperation practices is not enough. These emphasize the role of the present as well as the future generations. Cultural diversity is seen as an opportunity as well as a challenge, that is: "problematic". The need to develop dynamic and open cultural areas is recognized and cultural interaction is seen as a practical way of transcending problems because it is an opportunity to learn shared practices by doing together (for example creative activities are seen to transcend language barriers), but not as limited to project administration practices. Thematically, the war history has also become seen as a "common" history and the ethnic prejudices as a cultural issue that might prevent cooperation. Some cultural actors do "traditionally" doubt the need of an intervention by the state, some recognize cultural cooperation as something "qualitatively new" – but do not seem to know how it differs from the other fields of cross-border cooperation (or the Soviet time "liturgies").

The more individualized and situational notions of culture are implied by the "cultural partnership principle": cooperation practices that are individually based and motivated, and which facilitate a more creative sense of citizenship. However, in practice "culture" is seldom seen as something active, constantly created by every individual, or as "learning shared practices", or at least it is not adopted into the practices. In the cross-border cultural partnerships, at least in the Finnish-Russian case, the "cultural challenge" of the border means that the practices as well as the contents have to be addressed. The kind of "de-traditionalization of practices", as proposed in this paper, attends the possibility of a common shared future, and a denial of schematic truths that could result in meaningful and qualitatively new cooperation. It also means an awareness of the presence of the past in the cooperation, and of its potential for post-national identity formation. The idea of cultural partnerships facilitates the citizens to decide for themselves what is to count as culture and how it is to help them decide what they are. This seems to represent a move towards an economization of culture, with *popular* culture becoming (with or without state guidance) the provider of new interactions across the border. In terms of "de-traditionalization", this market based use of culture still seems limited due to the national and ethnic frames of reference: the commercial gains from "higher art" or pop culture are still higher if they are based on notions of past oriented, nationally based identities. However, cooperation should be considered as

the opening up of new conceptual spaces, mediated by the cultural heritage of the region, but not defined in terms of state institutions and territories, or past memories. In this respect, the best *institutionally* derived "transnational forms of action" have been the people-to-people activities (most clearly youth and education). By doing together, they aim at shared understanding or mutual recognition of the differences (or simply to find out that there are none). These practices seem to produce a common future for the borderlands also in terms of cross-border solidarity.

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