

Border Karelia through rose-coloured glasses? Gazes upon a ceded territory

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Border Karelia is the former heartland of the Finnish-Karelian Orthodox culture. It has also been regarded, along with Viena Karelia, as a mythical place, the last reserve of the 'original Finnish' *Kalevala* culture. After the Continuation War ended in 1945, Finland was forced to cede Border Karelia to the Soviet Union. It was then populated with citizens from other parts of the Union, and became for 45 years inaccessible for Finns. In post-war Finland the ceded Karelia gained a new nostalgic aura, while the Soviet (Russian) attitude towards the territories was largely determined by political constructions and 'Soviet nationalism'. The present Border Karelia is a rather poor Russian territory, characterized by a multifaceted identity and heritage. Remnants of pre-war cultural landscapes, villages and buildings are still evident. They arouse concern and emotions amongst Finns and pre-war inhabitants touring the area, but there's currently also an increasing interest among the Russians in the history and pre-war reality of the territory. The article discusses the concept of built heritage in relation to these different identities, and the uses of the Karelian past. The main objective of the research is to find a means to unite present-day Finnish and Russian interests regarding the maintenance and use of the heritage.

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Introduction

The article focuses on the built landscape in Border Karelia, an area which Finland ceded to the Soviet Union in 1944. When the territory was opened for tourism in 1989, the collective representation of the ceded Karelia, which Finns had nurtured over 45 years without actually inhabiting the territory, could be up-dated.

In particular, I shall discuss the concept of built heritage (see ICOMOS 1976) in relation to different identities, primarily that of an architect and researcher, as well as a cultural tourist and an evacuated Karelian, but also, moreover, the present inhabitants of the area. I will also discuss the shift from the nationalistic uses of the Karelian past during the 19th century to its patriotic and pedagogical uses during the 1920s and 1930s, in order to create a wider historical per-

ception of the "gaze", a concept explored by John Urry in his book *The Tourist Gaze* (1990). The central question is, how can one unite present-day Finnish and Russian interests in determining and protecting the surviving Finnish built heritage and landscape in regard to cultural sustainability and tourism?

Apart from Urry's book, other background sources for this article have been historian David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985), which provides an insight into a particular mode of using history, namely, heritage; *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness* (1995) by geographer Anssi Paasi and *Transformation of Religious Landscapes* (1997) by geographer Petri J. Raivo, which provide bases for analysing the different approaches Finns have of Karelia; architect Martti I. Jaatinen's inventories in Border Karelia, published in his book *Karjalan kartat* (*Karelian maps*)

(1997), which have served as a starting point for my own inventories in the region made in 2001–2002; semiotician Henri Broms' *Paikan hengen semiotiikkaa* (*The semiotics of the spirit of place*) (1998); and French artist Sophie Calle's exhibition *The Detachment* (Helsinki, 2001) of photographs of the elimination of socialistic monuments in the former East Germany.

What is Border Karelia?

So-called Border Karelia is comprised of former Finnish parishes north of Lake Ladoga in present-day Russia: Soanlahti, Suistamo, Suojärvi, Impilahti, Salmi and the eastern parts of Korpiselkä and Ilomantsi. Suojärvi was the largest parish in ceded Karelia, with two major settlements: the ancient church village of Varpakylä, and the thriving industrial community of Suvilahti. Suistamo was famed for its living poem-singing tradition. Salmi and Impilahti, with the major town of Pitkäranta, were located in the lush and scenic Lake Ladoga region.

The name Border Karelia characterises the area in many ways: since the 14th century, several wars have been fought in these territories, first between Sweden and Russia, then between Finland and the Soviet Union. The first state border, dividing the Karelian ethnic area into two, the Finnish and Russian areas, was delineated in 1323 in the Treaty of Nöteborg, but has since then shifted six times. Thus, for centuries Border Karelia has been a cross-cultural territory, and as a consequence, the area contains Karelian, Finnish, Swedish and Russian heritage, historical landscapes and architecture.

Until 1944 Border Karelia was the heartland of the Finnish-Karelian Orthodox culture, where the majority of the population spoke the Karelian language and were members of the Orthodox Church. Karelian houses built of round logs, wooden village chapels (*tsasounas*) and spruce-growing cemeteries characteristic of Orthodox Karelian culture were common in Korpiselkä, Suojärvi, Suistamo and Salmi. However, the traditional agricultural landscape had started to change already in the 1930s. The growing timber industry absorbed thousands of mainly Lutheran workers from other parts of Finland and created new, often aesthetically displeasing settlements.

The Soviet Union launched an attack on Finland in 1939. In 1944, in the aftermath of the

Winter War (1939–1940) and the Continuation War (1941–1944), in accordance with the Treaty of Moscow, Stalin incorporated the Finnish territories of Border Karelia, Ladogan Karelia and the Karelian Isthmus into the Soviet Republic of Karelia. Approximately 407,000 Karelians and 13,000 Finns (Raninen-Siiskonen 1999, 360; in line with common practice, I shall refer to all the evacuated residents of ceded Karelia as “resettled Karelians”) from the ceded territories had to be resettled elsewhere in a Finland dispossessed of 10% of its pre-war territory. Stalin populated the ceded territories with citizens from other parts of the Soviet Union, but in spite of the arrival of new residents, the remaining Finnish heritage gradually declined. This was accelerated in the 1960s under Khrushchev's policy of liquidating “villages with no prospects” and building instead blocks of flats in the new residential “agrocentres”. Extensive agriculture came to a halt, and the cultural landscape has been becoming overrun with forests (Lintunen et al. 1998, 198).

Southern Karelia and Northern Karelia are still located within the present boundaries of Finland, yet in common speech “Karelia” very often refers to the ceded territories. In Finland the politically delicate issue of ceded Karelia was played down until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. Tourism to ceded Karelia was then initiated by the authorities after it had been out-of-bounds to foreigners for 45 years.

Non-place

My first trip through ceded Karelia in 1994 raised no great positive emotions. I saw the derelict neo-classical church of Suistamo and the handsome yet decaying pre-war functionalism in Sortavala, but they left no great impression. I was passing through on my way to the *real* Karelia, that is, to East Karelia. Ceded Karelia was no longer Karelia at all; it had become a non-place, erased from Finnish history and deprived of any Karelian identity.

Years later, after studying the traditional Karelian houses of East Karelia, I started to look more closely at the question of what the area between Finland's present eastern border and East Karelia actually is. Old photographs of Border Karelia demonstrate the popularity of the decorative timber dwelling complex, providing shelter for both people and their animals. These traditional dwell-

ings had been “discovered” by Finns in the 1890s, and had become a symbol of Karelianness and an icon of the utopian representation of a great Karelian past (Petrisalo 2001, 89). In fact, it was the predominant building type across the whole of northern Russia, and not particular to this area.

Consequently, I set off looking for traditional Karelian houses in Border Karelia. I found some, but mostly I found emptiness. This instigated another development, ultimately linked with historical facts and personal stories; the Border Karelian landscapes began to relate to me personally. For me, they were no longer non-places. The processes behind this development are intriguing, and I will touch upon them here.

Myth, fiction, projection

For a Finn, it seems difficult to remain neutral when dealing with the manifold complicity in the question of Karelia. Karelia, particularly Viena (White Sea Karelia) and Border Karelia, is for Finns a collective, mythical place, loaded with meaning. It is the mythical cradle of Finnish culture, connected with the national epic – the *Kalevala* – national independence, as well as the dream of a ‘Greater Finland’. Its relevance also touches upon the myths of nature versus urban life, nature versus culture, the countryside versus the city, and east versus west (Broms 1998, 29). The ceding of southeastern Karelia in 1944, which also entailed the closure of the region to foreigners, indubitably deepened this mythical dimension. The writer Olavi Paavolainen mourned that losing Karelia was the same as the loss of Olympus, the scene of Greek mythology, would be for Greece (Paavolainen 1940).

According to semiotician Henri Broms, myths are the well-spring of national culture (Broms 1998, 10). Thus, the argument goes, Finland needs the myth of Karelia to patch up the lost mythical and symbolic dimension in its national existence. Karelia is a screen upon which images are projected; images corresponding to relevant political and national aspirations.

Karelia also fulfils the idea of nostalgia – a longing for something that is presently non-existent in both time and place. According to cultural anthropologist Seppo Knuuttila, fantasies of a Golden Age, of a glorious past, as well as its disappearance, not only in time but also in space, are part of the history of human thought; fragments of ‘the

Golden Age’ may sometimes be found in God-forsaken peripheries – here, in Karelia (Knuuttila 1989). Nostalgia seems to gain a particular significance as a culture-moulding factor at times of radical social change. The insecurity caused by the ideological and political dissolution of communism in Eastern Europe, post-industrial rootlessness, globalisation and the crisis of values have fuelled nostalgia and national movements all across Europe. This is reflected on to individuals, both as a national romantic yearning for the past and as a desire for reform. Utopian thinking, like myths about better bygone times, acts as recompense when there seems no hope of actually changing one’s circumstances. In the 19th century, the national romantic writers admired exotic ‘original’ cultures from a safe distance, assigning utopian properties to them; and a journey sufficed to fulfil the utopia. Today also tourism offers a channel to release the utopian and mythical pressures of a community (Petrisalo 2001, 66–68). According to Broms, tourism is not only about escaping from the common places of life, but also about pure myth-searching (Broms 1998, 36–40).

Utopian ideas may also include powerful visions and lead to reform. The present-day ProKarelia movement has published a platform on the restitution of ceded Karelia to Finland (Reenpää et al. 2001). This view is also clearly advocated by Markus Lehtipuu, author of *Karjala – Suomalainen matkaopas* (2002).

“Gazes”

If Karelia is regarded as a screen to project desired images upon, there has nevertheless been a shift from national and, later, educational and patriotic images to commercial images of an imaginary Karelian past. The constructed images of Karelia initially emerged in connection with the creation of Finnish national culture, tradition and identity in the 19th century, when Finland had the autonomous status of Grand Duchy of Russia (1809–1917). Due to a lack of a glorious national history, the nationalist movement resorted to emphasising the national language, the lake-and-forest landscapes and the soil of the recently composed national epic, that is, the borderlands of Karelia (Häyrynen 2003). According to late 19th century Karelianism, Karelia, specifically Border Karelia and Viena, was the last reserve of the ‘original Finnish’ *Kalevala* culture. Particularly be-

tween 1890 and 1897, Finnish cultural life was imbued with Karelianism, a national romantic, ideological tendency. The artist elite roamed Border Karelia in search of national romantic inspiration; architects, for instance, looked to Karelia for a Finnish national building style. Architect Jac. Ahrenberg studied the vernacular architecture in Korpiselkä in 1880, architects Uno Ullberg, Alarik Tavaststjerna and Jalmari Kekkonen studied numerous villages in Suistamo in 1901. The book *Karjalaisia rakennuksia ja koristemuotoja (Karelian buildings and decorative motifs)* (1901) by architects Yrjö Blomstedt and Victor Sucksdorff, became a kind of architectural *Kalevala*. It is rarely mentioned, however, that in the nationalistic spirit of the 1890s, both the Finns and the Russians discovered the 'wellspring' of their cultures in one and the same peripheral geographical area, Karelia.

After winning independence in 1917, the new Finnish state encouraged tourism in Border Karelia, to promote nationalism, to spiritually unite the country and to raise the morale for the nation's defence (Raivo 1997, 118). The scenic Tolvajärvi area and Suojärvi, famous for its romantic lake landscapes and traditional Orthodox milieus, became significant tourist attractions in the 1920s. The traditional Karelian house complex was the predominant type of dwelling in the area, the most famous of which were the colossal Bombin house (1850s) in Kuikkaniemi and the Menshakov house in Kaipaa. For members of the national Finnish culture, the traditional agricultural milieus also symbolised a sense of community and the conservative values of traditional country life. On the other hand, the Orthodox religion was problematic, because it was considered a particularly Russian phenomenon. Therefore, even in the Border Karelian landscape the visible Orthodox elements had to remain within acceptable limits in regard to the prevailing national discourse. For example, for the dominant culture, the traditional onion cupolas of Orthodox churches and chapels represented Russian culture, and thus were considered alien elements unacceptable within the Finnish landscape, and hence were often removed (Raivo 1997, 129).

An even more nationalistic branch of post-Karelianism manifested a platform to integrate all East Karelian territories into a Greater Finland. The idea was revived during the Continuation War in 1941–1944, which Finland had instigated in an attempt to recover its lost territories. As a result

of its political and ideological connections with Nazi Germany, Finland also utilised the idea of *Lebensraum* as a motive to occupy East Karelia in order to create a 'Greater Finland' (Paasi 1995, 107–108). This launched a new wave of Karelianism, as well as motivating a more systematic recording of Orthodox Karelian heritage. Journalists, architects, students and photographers were commissioned in the early 1940s to record the chapels, villages and cultural traditions of both East and Border Karelia, a task which had already started in Border Karelia in the 1920s–1930s (Mattila 2001).

After the Second World War, a collective collection of acceptable images of a 'Golden Karelia' was developed and glorified. Post-war Karelianism eventually turned to a more abstract mixture of cultural and regional consciousness, and finally, in the politically more liberal climate of late 1970s and 1980s, it became commercialised (Raninen-Siiskonen 1999, 381). The discovery of the marketable values of the Karelian myth was first reflected in the practices of the tourist industry within Finland itself: a chain of tradition-based, pseudo-Karelian tourist attractions was built along the eastern border of Finland. Among others the Bomba congress centre, built in Nurmes in 1978, was an attempt to strengthen the Karelian identity and heritage in post-war Finland. A re-interpretation of the original Bombin house in Suojärvi, it "speaks the metalanguage of a mythological Karelia, but lacks authenticity, ignores historical chronology and the cultural context of time and place" (Petrisalo 2001, 91). This has had its equivalents in the housing industry, particularly in the sale of "Karelian-style" summer cottages. Later there emerged even suburban residential houses built of round timber logs and slightly modernised "Karelian" detailing (Böök 2000, 72). In short, the ways of relating to the Border Karelian heritage have varied ever since the 'invention' of that heritage, varying in accordance with different identities: John Urry's "tourist gaze" has its subordinate variants amongst different identities.

When ceded Karelia, East Karelia and Viena were opened for tourism in 1989, it became evident that Karelia had retained its fascination – albeit that it had been transformed. If national, patriotic and romantic motives animated the late 19th century artist elite and the journalists of the young independent Finland, today motives such as general enlightenment, education, entertainment, and group solidarity encourage resettled

Karelians, general tourists, culture-oriented tourists, and professionals. As John Urry (1990, 111) puts it, “there is no sense in the complexity by which different visitors can gaze upon the same set of objects and read them in a quite different way. Indeed, it is not at all clear just what understanding of history most people have.” The question is, are they not all looking for the remnants of a ‘lost time’, that is, remnants of unique times and places?

The researching gaze

In addition to the identity-based approaches to Border Karelia mentioned above, there may well be overlaps in these ‘identities’. A researcher is expected to have a less emotionally charged, rational attitude to the subject; yet, she or he might be an evacuated Karelian or the descendant of one. I myself am neither. On the other hand, the identity of a researcher comes close to that of a cultural tourist – according to the ICOMOS definition, one of the objects of cultural tourism is “the discovery of significant monuments and sites” (ICOMOS 1976) – and despite the need to adapt a neutral standpoint, a romantic undercurrent may be evident. Personal motives may, of course, encourage the researcher.

My own main objective – as an architect – in researching Border Karelia has been to study the remnants of pre-war cultural landscapes, villages and buildings and to give suggestions regarding their maintenance and use. The first impression is that there are few actual buildings remaining to study, and one would have to find the material in archives: hundreds of nostalgia-evoking black-and-white photographs. Most of the existing settlements were simply razed during the Second World War. During the Soviet era, a period of determined centralisation, the scattered dwellings, typical of the Finnish lifestyle, which had survived, succumbed to negligence or destruction. The post-war layer in the cultural landscape is comprised of five-storey *khrushchevskas* built of greyish low-quality brick, standardised wooden houses, unpainted hovels, weatherboard fences, ruined *kolkhozes*, army bases and urban factories built of brick or concrete, and kitchen gardens. However, I would not necessarily classify these as normative Russian features. The old Russian villages in Archangel Karelia are as well-kept as any Finnish village. Being descendants of several successive generations in the region, their inhabitants

feel attached to their villages and responsible for them.

The lack of proper materials and aesthetic principles in planning has resulted in the terminally unpleasant, chaotic milieu seen prevailing from Karelia to Vladivostok. The most extreme examples of failed planning are the two major centres of Border Karelia: the 18th century industrial town of Pitkäranta (Impilahti) on the shore of Lake Ladoga and Suvilahti (present-day Suojärvi), which had been more or less completely destroyed in the Second World War. Against this background, Finnish houses can usually be distinguished by their “erect carriage” and more harmonious proportions. The wooden houses can be characterised by the weatherboarding, vaguely classicistic window sashes and a ventilated stone foundation – except for traditional Karelian houses, which have bare timber walls and no stone foundation.

However, the Orthodox Karelian milieu, with traditional Karelian houses and *tsasounas*, have almost totally disappeared. Spirido Makkonen’s *Karelian house* (from the 1880s) from Moiseinvaaara, Suojärvi, is on display in the Seurasaari open-air museum in Helsinki, where it was provisionally moved in 1939 – just in time before the outbreak of the Winter War. Physically intact, but removed from its original, historical context, it has lost a fundamental quality and become a pure museum exhibit.

Although no whole settlement milieu survive, there are individual buildings and groups of buildings, which are nevertheless important from the perspective of cultural history. The architecturally most remarkable Karelian house in Border Karelia, the former Mertas’ house (Fig. 1) from early 20th century, stands alone in a totally transformed context in Leppäniemi, Suojärvi. It has been declared a historical monument by the local government, being, however, still in its original, residential use. The quiet rural village of Hautavaara in Suojärvi has preserved a relatively significant portion of its pre-war layout: a number of Finnish houses, unpretentious Karelian houses and a run-down wooden school building. Miinala in Salmi is a languishing, idyllic riverside village with a number of Finnish and Karelian timber houses, whereas Orusjärvi is a secluded, partly inhabited village with a church (1905) in a mysterious revival-style and fine “Karelian” panoramas over tree-covered hills. The most fascinating milieu to have survived, however, is Kirkkonkylä in Impilahti,



Fig. 1. The most handsome Karelian house in Border Karelia, the former Mertas' house (early 20th century) stands alone in a totally transformed context in Leppäniemi, Suojärvi. However, it is still in its original, residential use. The house has been declared a historical monument by the local government. (Photo Netta Böök, 2001).



Fig. 2. The handsome residence of apothecary Walldén is a striking rarity: the white-stuccoed 1920s classicistic bourgeois house in Pitkäranta now houses a museum of local history. However, the museum has not always been familiar with the history of the former local apothecary. (Photo Netta Böök, 2001).

situated in a charming sloping landscape. It was never a combat zone and thus passed through the wartime relatively undamaged. When driving along the old village street, which curves in line with the lakeshore, one immediately associates the settlement with what it basically is: a Finnish church village from the 1930s–1940s – albeit now deprived of its church (Lintunen et al. 1998, 198).

The pre-war population of Border Karelia consisted mainly of common people, and the area remained one of the poorest and least developed regions in Finland. There were few manor houses in the region – the Hosainoff manor house in Mii-nala, and the Dobroumoff villa in Impilahti, both built from wood in the 19th century in a modi-

fied neorenaissance style. One might also mention the handsome residence of apothecary Walldén (Fig. 2) as a striking rarity: the white-stuccoed 1920s classicistic bourgeois house in Pitkäranta now houses a museum of local history.

Border Karelia was generally left without any prominent 20th century architecture. For example, no buildings erected in Border Karelia between 1903 and 1944 were published in *Arkkitehti* (*The Finnish Architectural Review*). Architects received commissions from the region only in the 1930s, when they introduced the international functionalist style into the major settlements. Functionalism here primarily refers to the International-Style white-stuccoed, predominantly geo-



Fig. 3. The architecturally most remarkable building from the Finnish era in Border Karelia is the communal house and fire station in the former Suvilahti (present-day Suojärvi) now accommodating a kindergarten and a youth club. The building complex, built in a mature functionalistic style, with white stuccoed exterior walls, incorporating a semicircular tower, etc., was designed by architect Erkki Koiso-Kanttila, who was involved with the post-Winter War reconstruction, and completed during the Continuation War (1943). (Photo Netta Böök, 2001).

ometrical architecture, with freed interior plans and façade compositions and flat roofs, which was taken up throughout the Nordic countries from the late 1920s onwards. This style was connected with economic growth and industrialisation, and was mainly utilised in the urban context and in public building.

The most outstanding modern building from the Finnish era is the communal house and fire station in the former Suvilahti, present-day Suojärvi (Fig. 3). It now accommodates a kindergarten and a youth club. The building complex, built in a mature functionalistic style, with white stuccoed exterior walls, incorporating a semicircular tower, etc., was designed by architect Erkki Koiso-

Kanttila, who was involved with the post-Winter War reconstruction, and completed during the Continuation War (1943). Although nowadays in poor condition, it still makes an impression as a truly “architectural” element in the chaotic townscape. The Orthodox congregational house in Suistamo is an individual interpretation of Functionalism by architect Juhani Viiste (1939). It now functions as a low-key guesthouse.

The number of Finnish houses in Border Karelia is gradually decreasing – for instance, in Manssila, Salmi, in 1996 the number of Finnish buildings was 16; the present number is seven (Koslonen 2001) – and no systematic inventory of what remains of the Finnish built heritage has yet been carried out. Therefore, even buildings of initially diminishing value attract one’s attention. Nevertheless, one should put the destruction and abandonment of Finnish buildings in this ceded region in relation to what has happened to the built heritage and cultural landscapes in Finland itself during the past six decades. In Finland the heritage is threatened with destruction more by the changing social and economic conditions than by decay. As a matter of fact, the traditional milieu of Border Karelia was already diminishing in the 1930s. In 1939 the Finnish journalist Olof Enczell (1939, 180) described the growing industrial settlement of Suvilahti as the “Finnish Klondyke”, and that “I have never seen a community of such ugliness and parvenu spirit. The broad village street was lined with modern houses, rivalling in lack of taste. I saw no trace of the past Karelian culture.”

The romantic gaze

Since the 1940s cultural tourism has increased throughout the world. The tourist industry makes use of ethnic groups, their traditions and their heritage. The Orthodox Karelian culture has become one of the most appealing attractions for the Finnish tourist industry. For the members of the predominant Finnish culture, it includes familiar yet exotic elements. It is also still vaguely associated with the Karelia of the *Kalevala*. Hence, the cultural tourist travels to Border Karelia in search of what Broms terms the “codes” of Karelianness (Broms 1998, 38). Broms, basing his deliberations on the theories of semiotician Rebecca Kaufmann, suggests that tourists may seek phenomena representative of the *fantastic code*, connected with the fact-based fantasies or visions they link with

Border Karelia, or of the *anthropologic code*, referring to real or imaginary Karelian elements, such as Karelian houses, poem-singers and “ancestors”. Finnish place names also convey the former presence of Finns; ruins and wartime battlefields, for instance Kollaa in Suistamo, speak of times past.

Paradoxically, the traditional Karelian culture relevant to the culture-oriented tourist cannot be found in post-Soviet Border Karelia. The non-material heritage of the area was evacuated westwards in 1944, and the surviving material heritage is meagre. The boundaries of the “authentic *Kalevala* heritage” have shifted eastwards and northwards, to Olonets and Viena; tourist agencies advertise these regions with an emphasis on blue lakes, roaring rapids, wuthering heights, epic poetry, traditional houses, authentic villagers and rituals; in a word, Karelia as a unique museum of popular culture. A new object for Finnish patriotic heritage-making and tourism are the sites connected with the Second World War, attracting Finns of all ages (Raivo 2000, 139–150). Yet even in the line of regular tourism, Border Karelia is seriously underdeveloped, offering only low-class lodgings and practically no entertainment or arts-related activities.

However, the former Finnish towns of Vyborg (in Finnish Viipuri) on the Karelian Isthmus and Sortavala in Ladogan Karelia, as well as the monastic islands of Valaam (Valamo), accommodate growing numbers of mainly Finnish tourists, which obviously contributes to the regional guidelines of development. Even the notorious Finnish “vodka tourists”, who since the 1960s provided dramatic headlines for newspapers, appear to have reoriented from Leningrad (St. Petersburg) to these presently more affordable resorts.

At their best, the circumstances in Border Karelia might be experienced as “something new and different”, compared to the abundance surrounding people in Finland. As Urry (1990, 134) remarks, “Central to tourist objects is some notion of departure, particularly that there are distinct contrasts between what people routinely see and experience and what is extraordinary.” The poverty, decay and low quality of housing and the general backwardness offer a “reversed exoticism”, a counter-world that reveals the true nature of our own quotidian life. The ascetic milieu may subconsciously evoke feelings of safety, as if the bygone times had returned. It also reminds Finns of their fortunate fate, serving as a sombre

reminder of what we apparently escaped, when Finland managed to preserve its independence (Åström 1993, 165–173).

Karelia can also provide for the needs of the adventure-seeking tourist. From the 1990s onwards, the nostalgia, misery and dangers a tourist in ceded Karelia is exposed to have been primary topics in the media. There is always a shade of excitement and ultimately even danger in the air. However, travels in Karelia differ from organised adventure and survival holidays in one fundamental detail: not even the organisers of the former can foresee the surprises that might come, and beyond the visible reality, there is no other, more comforting reality (Böök 1999, 110).

The pilgrim's gaze

The resettled Karelians, all getting on in age, were the primary group to visit ceded Karelia when the border was re-opened in 1989. Geographer Anssi Paasi explains that people usually want to visit their past history and the physical locality with which it is connected. In Border Karelia the refugees try to find something they can associate to their personal history (Paasi 1995, 289), as if they were looking for a lost piece in a puzzle. Particularly the oldest evacuated generation in a sense lost their identity along with their homelands, because their identity was rooted in being physically in the place itself.

A striking feature is that, almost without exception, in reminiscing about their ceded native localities, the resettled Karelians describe them as places of inimitable beauty. In their collective narrative, the Karelian cultural landscape is also “complete”: the meaning of the social reality in Karelia has faded over the passing decades, whereas the landscapes, buildings and nature have remained as important sources of identification and as principal objects of nostalgia (Paasi 1995, 298). The collective and individual memory have suppressed all negative features of the pre-war life, as if looking at it through rose-coloured glasses. According to Tarja Raninen-Siiskonen, this suppression may have been a result of the abrupt loss of the native home-land, and of the age of the narrator, but also of the glorified “public narratives” about Karelia. Furthermore, the everyday life in Karelia may have been less complicated and economically more stable than in the new place of residence in Finland (Raninen-Siiskonen 1999, 82–85). Paasi remarks that the resettled

Karelians often refer to the ceded territories using religious and mythical terms, metaphors like 'holy land' or 'promised land', and the journey to Karelia is described as a "pilgrimage". Interestingly, the nationally-spirited cultural elite of the 1890s used the same terminology (Paasi 1995, 295). It is in part upon these personal experiences, stories, reminiscences and utopias that the collective post-war representations of a "Golden Karelia" were constructed (Paasi 1995, 59).

The actual journey shatters these utopian images, cherished over 45 years of exile. They bear hardly any resemblance to the present-day reality in Border Karelia. The evacuees repeatedly compare the emptiness and destruction of the present built heritage with recollections of a romanticised and selectively recalled childhood. Absence emphasises the significance of the irretrievably lost elements. The surviving elements, familiar from the pre-war era, can have been modified beyond recognition. The remaining buildings often house functions different from those of the Finnish era: their identity is not what it used to be. The most durable elements of the pre-war era are above all the natural landscapes, resisting time and erosion. The whale-like chains of forested hills north of Lake Ladoga, the romantic lake views around Varpajärvi, the lush, undulating terrain of Suistamo, the fantastic lake and ridge landscapes in Tolvajärvi, and the imposing rock walls and firths of Impilahti can still make the nostalgic reminiscences of a "Golden Karelia" comprehensible.

Most irrevocable, however, is time. The six decades have not always relieved the emotions of bitterness, anger and nostalgia. Some of the evacuated Karelians do not even want to visit the place, and prefer not to face the disheartening reality. Although Lowenthal (1985, 7–8) cites the old man's dream "to travel back forty years to a time when it was summer all year round", it is maybe less painful merely to yearn for the past, "collecting its relics and celebrating its virtues – no matter if those days were in fact wretched".

The number of organised busloads of Karelians visiting the land of their best adult years or childhood is decreasing as these generations are passing away. The younger generations may still regard these localities as a second "homeland", and thus find an extension to their identity. Nowadays, with extensive migration, people often have several "homelands", even beyond national borders. In this particular case, their roots are moving even

further back, to a more and more romanticised time (Kotitie 2002). Nonetheless, the built environment is susceptible to gradual destruction, in terms of both substance and meaning. The landscapes of Border Karelia are likely to gradually lose significance for Finns – or, at least, their interpretation keeps changing (see Lowenthal 1985, 240).

The Russian gaze

A fourth approach is that of the Russians who have inhabited Border Karelia since 1944. Initially, the resettlers were mostly males from the Ukraine and central Russia (Verigin 2002, 34); later, people were recruited from various parts of the Soviet Union, where massive migrations of labour were customary. Their attitude towards the ceded territories has, to a large extent, been determined by political constructions and 'Soviet nationalism' (see Paasi 1995, 51–52), to say nothing of purely personal reasons.

Firstly, in the Sovietisation process, the symbols and monuments with a clear symbolic evocation of Finnish power lost their right to existence as such. They had to be damaged, neglected, degraded or reshaped to enhance the new power. Thus, the abolition of the visible signs of Finnish rule and culture produced both material and spiritual emptiness. Subsequently, they were replaced with monuments and symbols enhancing the communist power and ideology (these characteristic elements of the landscape and townscape from the Soviet era are also now receding – again, producing emptiness). Throughout the Soviet Union, sacral buildings were most endangered, and as a rule their interiors were torn down. The fate of the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas in Suistamo serves as a typical case. The wooden neoclassical church (1844), designed by the German-born architect Carl Ludwig Engel (1778–1840) – whose main commission in Finland was to design the buildings surrounding the Senate Square, the centre of power of the new Grand Duchy in Helsinki – became host to a soviet workers' canteen. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Finnish Suistamo Society changed it back to an Orthodox Church. The Society provided the tools, materials and workforce; nonetheless, the present private owner of the church cashed in on the permission to perform the work (Lehtipuu 2002, 419). The reconsecration can be seen as a merely symbolic act. For the current locals it will probably remain

a canteen transformed into a church, and basically not only a product of an alien culture, but also a building void of sacral meaning. Then again, without adaptive reuse to then present-day purposes, many sacral buildings in the Soviet Union would have succumbed to rapid decay or total destruction. However, Finns are not always warmly received, if they intend to buy or refurbish a minor building, such as an individual house, in the territory; the building in question may suddenly be destroyed in an arson attack.

Secondly, the pioneering generation in a new homeland seldom adapts to it, but usually nostalgically looks back to its own native locality. This applies to both the evacuated Karelians and the resettled Russians. Anchored to the present, they lack not only memories, but also the connection with the mystical and mythical dimension, the symbolic qualities of the new "homeland" (Lowenthal 1985, 48). This is certainly true in the case of ceded Karelia, where the social content of the milieu became void after the evacuation of its former inhabitants. Furthermore, many of the Soviet resettlers dreamt of returning to their own native localities, which obviously hindered attachment to the new place of residence. Broms writes of "human magma", violently removed from its homeland to a foreign land, and has serious doubts of these people ever restoring Alvar Aalto's library in Vyborg or having any special relationship to the Monrepos Park outside Vyborg (Broms 1998, 81). Both of these are presently being restored in co-operation between Russians and Finns – as long as the financing keeps coming via Finland.

A strong commitment to an ethnic, political or religious ideology may lead to an inability to see objective historical facts. Since the 19th century, both Russian and Finnish historians have often regarded their own "national" or ethnic heritage as principally superior to that of the other, and have attempted to appropriate the Karelian culture for their own purposes. A community's attitude to the past is a reflection of the impression it wishes to give of the present (Petrisalo 2001, 107): the Soviet attitude towards the ceded territories was ignorant and chauvinist, while the neo-Karelian movement chauvinistically declared East Karelia a self-evident part of Finland. Paasi remarks, that it appears to be typical of nation-states, that they create a continuity for their existence through stories, which also provide a common past which does not diverge historically or

symbolically from the regions or nation-state of the present (Paasi 1995, 55). Accordingly, the Finnish media took advantage of the occasion of the opening of the territory to tourism to evaluate maliciously the consequences of the ceding of the area to the Soviet Union. The indirect message is that under Finnish rule the results would have been different, that is, better. The media continues mainly in the same spirit, discussing mostly negative features in the post-Soviet reality. On the other hand, Moscow apparently does not assign Border Karelia – nor any part of ceded Karelia – adequate resources to prepare or maintain its infrastructure (Paasi 1995, 282–295).

The political situation has now changed, and at least some Russian archives, which hold information on the ceded Finnish territories, have been opened. An issue not yet openly discussed in either Finland or Russia is the emotions and experiences of the Russians who, voluntarily or less voluntarily, settled ceded Karelia after 1944. Yet, there is a growing tendency amongst the more educated inhabitants of ceded Karelia to obtain a wider view of the past, and thus a more adequate picture of the present. Serious research and the conservation of sites and buildings dating from the Finnish era has got under way. However, the interests of the Russian researchers, conservationists and common people diverge from Finns. Most of the remaining Finnish buildings in Border Karelia are of minor architectural value, often in a miserable condition and, lacking particular significance to the locals, threatened by eradication. Its architectural sights from the Finnish era, listed in the structure plan for tourism in Karelia (International... 2000), are limited to the district of Suojärvi, with two or three Finnish buildings, and to the remains of the church of St. Nicholas in Salmi (1814–1825), which was ruined during the Continuation War. The heritage industry plays on an unsubstantiated rumour that it was designed by Carl Ludwig Engel (Kölhi 1995, 33). The church of St. Nicholas in Suistamo is mentioned, and Tolvajärvi is described as a sight of natural beauty. The list also includes two battlefields connected with war history.

The global gaze

Border Karelia has been totally deprived of all heritage of international significance. Its heritage consists of minimal fragments of Fenno-Karelian buildings and landscapes, mixed with a pan-So-

viet “heritage”. Nonetheless, its landscapes, buildings, prehistoric fortifications, discarded railroads and meadows are fixed points for the mind and memory. They are a means of preserving history, and act as a collective memory. According to the ICOMOS *Charter on Cultural Tourism*, the particular heritage and collective memory of each locality or community is irreplaceable. It also forms a solid basis for development and cultural diversity at a time of increasing globalisation (ICOMOS 1976).

UNESCO’s first declaration on culture and heritage, from 1972, stressed the significance of cultural assets as the source of a national identity (UNESCO 1972). UNESCO’s recommendations imply that a cultural or ethnic community has the right to rule over its heritage, and that “spoils of war” should be restored to the country of origin. If this principle of “cultural ownership” is applied to geographical areas, ceded Karelia should be returned to Finland. Ethnologist Katriina Petrisalo remarks that this seemingly simple principle becomes delicate when we look at any given area or culture in its historical framework. Sites and cultures are not stable, closed units, rejecting or successfully fighting off all alien influence introduced by, for instance, colonialism, not to mention the complete change of population, as in the case of ceded Karelia (Petrisalo 2001, 131–133).

According to these charters, tourism may function as a medium that helps provide a personal experience and understanding of both the present and the past of other cultures. Conservation vitally contributes to the value of a site as an object for cultural tourism, which should also provide the means and motivation for host communities to maintain the heritage. According to UNESCO’s declaration, governments should support the identification, scientific research, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of [Finnish] heritage in the ceded territory, and work out appropriate methods to maintain its most significant parts (UNESCO 1972).

The relatively well-preserved pre-war town of Sortavala in Ladogan Karelia has recognised the value of the Finnish heritage, both as a tourist attraction and as a cultural resource, and is investing in its maintenance. The International Blue Highway Association has evaluated seven places along the so-called “Blue Highway”, which goes from Träna in Norway through Sweden and Finland to Petrozavodsk in Russia, as potentially attractive tourist sights, among which remnants and

monuments from the Second World War make up the predominating category (International... 2000). However, in order to be marketed as interesting destinations, the sights and their surroundings are in need of urgent repair, restoration and general tidying up. According to a Finnish study, also Impilahti has tourism potential, provided that the risk of uncontrolled development is prevented through sustainable land use planning and management of the cultural and natural heritage (Siirala 2000).

Collecting the pieces

The identity and heritage of the present Border Karelia is multifaceted. Both its physical and mental realities have drastically changed since 1944. Its overall appearance has been devastated. The future of the few remnants of Finnish settlements does not seem very hopeful. In the prevailing circumstances, their repair seems utopian as long as the general standard of the Border Karelian settlements and standard of dwellings cannot be improved.

It is most important to strive towards a more united attitude to both history and the present by bringing together the different ways of relating to the Border Karelian landscape and heritage; to make Border Karelia a place with a more coherent past, present and future. Crucial in this process are history, memory and relics. *History* links us with past generations. *Memory* is crucial for our self-continuity and sense of identity, linking us with our earlier selves (Lowenthal 1985, 196–197). If we restore the memory, we might restore the environment. According to Lowenthal (1985, 263), “We need a stable past to validate tradition, to confirm our own identity, and to make sense of the present”, as “Relics mean only what history and memory convey.” This holds true just as well for Finns as for Russians living in Border Karelia, and buildings – *relics* – have their singular potential. As Lowenthal (1985, 389) puts it: “They are the chief catalyst of collective historical identity because they seem intrinsic to their surroundings and outlast most other relics. Relics saved enhance our sense of history and lengthens life’s reach by linking us with events and people prior to ourselves.” He adds, citing from William Morris’ *Restoration* from 1877: “... the visible evidence that the monument – like the nation – has weathered centuries of storm and crisis and

come through battered but unbowed" (Lowenthal 1985, 156).

Tourism in the present Border Karelia is a very special kind of tourism. The different, identity-based motives for going there feed the tourist industry, but the problem is, where can sufficiently attractive elements or contents be found for the "tourist package"? Normally, highbrow culture, traditions, history and the local everyday life attract tourists, but they always entail a historical dimension, which has been discontinued in Border Karelia (Löytynoja 1998, 63–64). Yet, for Finns ceded Karelia is a more or less emotional territory, where any Finn can, if she or he so wishes, find something to associate with: the tomb of a rune singer, a battlefield, grandmother's house, or traces of a Finnish inheritance.

Finnish-Russian co-operation, in the form of dealing with the black spots of history, is gradually developing. I find this a necessary basis for finding mutually satisfactory and motivating guidelines in the field of heritage. This process can also start on an individual level; personal acquaintances with Russians living in Border Karelia are a positive, long-term way of intercultural communication. It also decreases the "otherness" of the "alien nation" inhabiting the area. Nonetheless, I presume that we have to accept that the Finnish and Russian interpretations of history and heritage will never quite perfectly overlap.

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