

7. SPATIAL IDENTITIES OF A BORDER TOWN

Lived experience and the narratives representing it are crucial elements for understanding the construction of a local sense of place in Soviet Sortavala. For first-generation Sortavalans after the war, this often meant overcoming their unfamiliarity with the new environment and a certain alienation. As Pekka Hakamies has argued, everyday experiences linked to the territory of the North Ladoga region were initially to some extent exceptional, because the historical, geographical, social and cultural context of formerly Finnish Karelia was alien to the Russian settlers (Hakamies 2005: 14). However, familiarity became more common in time, as Sortavala gradually changed from a Finnish town into a recognisably Soviet space (Izotov 2013: 172).

During the Soviet period, Sortavala's Finnish legacy was mostly obscured in official documents and public discourses, and the local media ignored it with the rare exception of local Finnish architecture. But it was much more difficult to inhibit Sortavalans' curiosity about the town's Finnish past. It has been argued here that the memory of this past was a major element in the construction of a local identity although it was based on the creation of myths which were documented in the oral history surveys (Mel'nikova 2005). Local discursive contexts illustrate how residents of Sortavala perceived their place of living. Based on the assumption that territorial identities of Soviet citizens owe a lot to official Soviet discourses, this section aims to investigate how feelings of locality relate to the local political elite's attempts of shaping a Soviet identity.

When the first Soviet migrants arrived in the North Ladoga region, most of them were confronted with an unfamiliar natural and cultural environment. Generally, their former homelands strongly contrasted with this cold Northern space, which looked so inhospitable. Some of the new inhabitants felt they were 'uninvited guests.' They had no emotional ties to the North Ladoga region or to the wider Karelia. This may explain why the newcomers had no will nor desire to keep houses and the infrastructure in as good a shape as they had been in Finnish times (see Mel'nikova 2005: 351 and 377). Those settling in Sortavala in the late 1940s and 1950s hardly accepted the territory as their own, as a home, although a sense of home seems to be vital for any form of human identity.

Local patriotism and attachment to the area should have come more naturally to those born there later. However, official discourses at all times promoted a sense of place that referred to the wider framework of Soviet patriotism and nationalism and seldom to local peculiarities. The narratives identified in local media publications and official documents illustrate the priority of belonging to the Soviet nation, of an All-Union identity, rather than providing local residents with symbols that would have encouraged feelings of locality. Poems, songs and literature composed by local professional and amateur artists are mostly dedicated to Moscow, the Kremlin and the Motherland rather than to Sortavala (for examples, see *KZ*, 1 January, 28 September and 14 December 1955). Similarly, local social activities, such as participation in the 'Relay Race of the Friendship of the Pioneers of the USSR,' clearly relate to the Soviet project of creating a national identity.

Many biographical narratives of Soratavalans reflect local and regional cultural and spatial imagery: the beautiful natural and cultural environment, the brilliant ar-

chitecture, a good place to live, nice recreational activities. Media narratives evoke 'the North' and 'Karelia,' which have played a crucial role in producing images of the region (Oksa 1999: 285). In the context of Northwest Russia, a notion of Northernness seems almost as essential a characteristic as Russianness. But the emphasis on the region's natural beauty in local discourses tends to obscure the region's cultural and ethnic past. References to the Kalevala epic in the official discourses of Karelianness rather appear as something imposed by the political elite.

7-1. The Human-made Environment and the Construction of Locality

The construction of Sortavala's spatial identity has been a complex process full of contradictions. The narratives studied here are evidence of the ambiguous attitude the Soviet authorities adopted towards the Finnish heritage and cultural landscape. Admiration for the region and its unique character can be found next to statements that call for the transformation of the human-made environment in accordance with Soviet views, concepts and traditions of spatial and socio-economic development.

Contemporary cultural and human geography sometimes refers to urban space as a text that can be read and interpreted. In this sense, post-war Sortavala has stimulated the spatial imagination of its residents, creating an imaginary landscape marked by semi-erased scribbles in Finnish on walls, eclectic architectural designs that could be interpreted as palimpsests (Cupers 2005; Mitin 2005), old Finnish coins and other trouvailles. Overall, the aesthetic attractiveness of the local urban and rural landscapes has given rise to a positive attitude towards the previous inhabitants, and this spatial imagery has complicated the process of adapting the local space to the demands and needs of the Soviet system, promoted by the political elite.

One of the main issues in this respect was the question, posed early on in August 1946, whether the historical town centre of Sortavala should be protected. At the time, the town executive committee appealed to the regional authorities to assign an urban architect for this task in relation with a new construction project of seventeen residential buildings. A resolution was passed that prohibited any construction work in the central part of the town without the expertise of and prior approval by the KFSSR's architectural authority (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/72, l. 5). Similar actions in favour of protecting the historical town centre followed. In March 1947, the local authorities cancelled plans for a residential building designed to house the district energy department's management, because they were 'in contradiction with a previously approved project' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 3/123, l. 4). The decision was, however, superseded later, in the early 1960s, when a building for this purpose and several khrushchevkas (*khrushchevki*), cheap and basic residential blocks, were erected in Karelskaia Street, in the very centre of town. This meant that the town centre was then being shaped in line with Soviet norms of urbanisation, i.e. aesthetic and social Sovietisation.

The local newspaper also reported on various attempts made by the local authorities to improve the town's infrastructure and embellish it, by focussing on neglected neighbourhoods. In an article on 'Sortavala in the near future' published in 1969, R. Heiskonen, the town's chief architect, claimed that 'the appearance of the town' (*oblik goroda*) would change: 'the town will grow, new public services will make the town

more comfortable for residents and new public gardens will be planted' (KZ, 1 January 1969). The aim was to make better use of the urban space along the shores of the Lep-päjarvi inlet. It was announced that storage facilities, sheds and garages would be torn down in the town centre and new ones erected in a future industrial zone in the western part of the town, in the area between Pushkin Street and Sovkhoznoe Chaussee. In 1970, a gasoline station and a factory, located on the road service land lot No. 178 (*dorozhno-ekspluatatsionnyi uchastok* № 178), were relocated to sites outside the centre (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 60/1205, l. 7). Most of the plans were, however, never carried out; the ugly storage facilities on the inlet shores would only be destroyed in the 1990s.

Although local officials understood the necessity of protecting the town's architectural heritage and even recommended that local architects undertake studies of the Finnish urban legacy, Sortavala's historical centre, overall, suffered from Soviet town planning. Efforts to develop a master plan that would aesthetically reconcile the protection of the Finnish heritage with the need for new buildings and infrastructure go back to the late 1940s, when the town's chief architect was given the task to elaborate such a plan, but were only intensified over two decades later. In the early 1970s, the development of a master plan for Sortavala was handed to Karelgrazhdanproekt from Petrozavodsk, an institute for town planning attached to the regional Ministry for Housing and Communal Services. But, over several years, the local authorities repeatedly complained to the regional government that the institute had not yet completed the master plan and asked the KASSR's Council of Ministers to use its influence so that work would be sped up. In the end, the master plan never saw the light of the day. Meanwhile, the local authorities undertook the construction of huge housing estates outside the town centre. In 1970, for instance, work started in the so-called Micro-District No. 1, a residential area of 26.5 hectares planned for 8,600 people, with 77,030 square metres of floor area (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 60/1205, l. 7).

The early efforts on protecting the Finnish urban heritage, entrusted to the town's chief architect, had focussed on gathering material on Sortavala's history and on undertaking various cultural, historical and architectural studies (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 5/197, l. 43–44). In this context, it was recommended that local residents should be taught about the town's past. In 1951, the local authorities thus planned to organise excursions for residents that would make them familiar with the local history and architecture within the framework of the general cultural and educational work (*kul'turno-prosvetitel'naia rabota*). The town council called on the responsible officials 'to put an end to the underestimation of these sightseeing tours and to ensure the mass participation of residents in tours of the town and excursions to the surrounding areas' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 11/375, l. 45). However, none of the official documents related to the town's past ever mentions the social and cultural life of the town during the 1920s and 1930s or refers to issues undesirable from a political or ideological point of view.

Activities linked to the town's cultural legacy were mostly organised through the local branch of the All-Union Society for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments (VOOPIK), which did not encourage local interest in the period of Finnish independence. Emphasis was put on the town's and region's entire history.

A working plan of the local School of Soviet Activists⁴⁰ (*shkola Sovetskogo aktiva*) adopted in January 1974 thus included a chapter on ‘Sortavala’s Historical Monuments’ (*Pamiatniki istorii g. Sortavala*) and the Councils’ Task to Protect Them (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 81/1369, l. 41–50). Toivo Hakkarainen, the head of the local VOOPIK branch, was reported to be responsible for the planned activities.

Despite the Society’s efforts, monuments of the town remained in a poor state or even disappeared, as articles from the local newspaper show. In the late 1960s, local history enthusiasts (*kraevedy*) publicly expressed their concerns about the issue. One of them wrote: ‘Knowledge about historical monuments should create a feeling of love for the Motherland, its native people, their history and culture. However, because ordinary members of our society lack initiative, we have lost a number of local monuments, such as the *Kurnaia izba* [a typical eighteenth-century wooden farmhouse with a primitive heating system already put up in the Town Gardens (*Vakkosalmenpuisto*) in Finnish times; A. I.], a monument of the island of Riekkalansaari and other valuable monuments’ (*KZ*, 18 January 1969).

In Soviet times, studies of local history were being undertaken at schools as part of the curriculum—*kraevedenie* (see Ristolainen 2010: 113–114) was sometimes taught as a separate subject in secondary schools—and hobby groups (*kruzhki*) at schools studied regional history (*kraevedcheskii kruzhok*). As already noted above (see Section 6-1), these leisure activities mainly focussed on the heroic past of the Great Patriotic War and on setting up small exhibitions on regional history (*kraevedcheskii ugolok*) (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 66/1250, l. 23).

There were a few exceptions. In the early 1960s, during the period of the Thaw, official documents voiced, for example, concerns about the poor state of a local Finnish graveyard. As a result, the deputies of the town council voted in favour of a decision to undertake ‘repair work on the stone fence wall surrounding the old graveyard and to return to position fallen-down gravestones’ (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 34/892, l. 13). Interestingly, the Finnish origin of the graveyard was not mentioned explicitly, although it must have been known to all participants of the meeting. But the decision was never implemented, not even in post-Soviet times. Even more, the cemetery suffered repeatedly from barbaric acts committed by locals and its present state is one of decay and neglect. According to local memories, gravestones were sometimes used to build porches for private houses, a destiny that recalls that of a cemetery in Kaliningrad (Kostiashov et al. 2002). Perhaps this desacralisation can be explained by the alienation that the post-war settlers felt in relation to their cultural environment: the beautiful huge gravestones might not have corresponded to their idea of a graveyard. However, a similar situation

40 In the Soviet context, *aktiv* meant ‘the most advanced, proactive and experienced group of people in any party, comsomol, and trade union organisation or industrial establishment.’ Important part of their activities was meetings where relevant issues of work have been discussed and where ‘an experience of the leaders was added with an experience of masses.’ Important role also played schools of *aktiv* worked on the regular basis, as well as intermittent courses provided the activists with necessary knowledge for their activity (Zavelev 1969).

in Lahdenpohja, described by Marina Hakkarainen (2005: 52–53), shows that newcomers there continued to use old Finnish cemeteries, trying ‘not to disturb Finnish graves’ and not letting ‘Finnish gravestones fall down.’ In Sortavala, a new graveyard for Russian settlers was established right next to the former Finnish cemetery.

7-2. Local Attitudes towards the Finnish Heritage

Gorbachev’s perestroika resulted in several public debates on the Finnish cultural and historical legacy. The passage quoted below reflects widespread opinions not only among experts but also ordinary citizens. In 1986, an engineer of Remstroi a state establishment responsible for repairing buildings, wrote in her article ‘We do not care for what we have owned’:

Every year we are losing old wooden houses built before the Second World War. These buildings always seem attractive because of their originality and beauty. But after thorough renovation, these houses have been turned into ‘boxes’ that resemble each other. What is happening in Sortavala is a sort of barbarism (*KZ*, 24 June 1986).

The rural architectural heritage was treated with even more indifference and often led to destruction. Indeed, it was regularly the object of deep incomprehension. The Soviet writer Marietta Shaginian, who travelled in the North Ladoga area in 1948, thus described her impressions of the rural landscape:

I have seen people living in isolated cottages near the forest. What a lonely life! Who lives in these houses? I have imagined our *kolkhozniks* forced to live in such a building and environment. In capitalist agricultural economies, people preferred to settle at a distance of several kilometres from each other. The next important task of the Karelian Republic is to move all these isolated houses to our familiar villages. The *kolkhozniks* who have been resettled on these plots so far from each other have morally suffered from these wide spaces (*prostorov*) and even natural beauty has offered no consolation to them. A teacher living in such an isolated home is suffering, too. Our Soviet farmers are used to a communal way of life, necessary for their personal development. They need a lecture hall, a club, where they can watch films and plays. They need lectures, canteens, nursery schools, social meetings and everything else that makes life in a rural area resemble that in urban areas, that erases any difference between town and village. During meetings, the *kolkhozniks* in the western part of the Karelo-Finnish Republic say: ‘It is necessary to bring farmsteads (*khutor*)⁴¹ closer to each other. We are Soviet citizens and not used to live in a (bear’s) den.’ This word is not my invention but was used by local *kolkhozniks* to describe the old small farmers’ estates with every ‘comfort and convenience’ (*Karelia*, 23 September 2004).

The isolated farmsteads of North Ladoga were clearly an unfamiliar feature for those who had grown up in Russian or Belorussian villages, part of an alien rural landscape that represented the Other. It is interesting to note the writer’s adherence to the political and ideological postulates of the official Stalinist discourse, which can be found sometimes even in such intimate documents as personal diaries. Not less important is the

41 In the Russian tradition, *khutor* [farmstead] is opposed to *derevnia* [village] (see also Laine 2005: 37).

emphasis on the necessary transformation of the rural world, a transformation achieved on a large scale later on, in the early 1960s, during the implementation of Khrushchev's policy of agrotowns (*ukrupnenie derevni*). However, as Hakamies has argued, already the first settlers in the second half of the 1940s 'had to create their own places based on what they found and on early life in their new environment' (Hakamies 2005: 93).

Other sources confirm this perception of the local landscape by the newcomers. *Granitsa i liudi* [Border and People], a book published in 2005, presents the results of a survey carried out in 2000 and 2003 by Finnish and Russian scholars in the neighbouring district of Lahdenpohja, with a similar historical background and at times merged with the district of Sortavala (Mel'nikova 2005). The books offer rich evidence of the alienation felt by early Soviet migrants when confronted with Finnish settlement practices. The strangeness extended to the natural environment, with its Northern coldness and its landscape dominated by rocks—many settlers had grown up in flat farm country (Mel'nikova 2005: 148). Parallels with Kaliningrad have already been alluded to, but in Sortavala, the war had only resulted in minimal destruction. The early migrants of North Ladoga therefore arrived in a rural area whose residential and economic infrastructure had largely remained intact. Subsequent transformations of the environment can thus not be simply attributed to post-war reconstruction efforts. It must, however, be stressed that the predominant farming institutions of Soviet agriculture were *kolkhozes* and, later, *sovkhozes*, which required concentrated settlements that resemble the traditional Russian village.

More results of this international research project, a joint-venture of the European University of St Petersburg and the Karelian Institute (University of Joensuu) financed by the Finnish Academy of Sciences, have been published in *Moving in the USSR: Western Anomalies and Northern Wilderness* (Hakamies 2005). They show that the spatial restructuring of the cultural landscape in post-war times led to homogenisation when the population increasingly became concentrated in larger settlements:

The chain of major, historically successive social events and processes are tightly connected with the restructuring of the cultural landscape: the first impressions of the well-ordered cultural landscape, bringing together of the houses from distant farmsteads and enlargement of fields, the construction of multi-storied houses, the ruination of suburban farms and the disappearance of an idyllic and picturesque view (Hakkarainen 2005: 46).

Hakkarainen and other contributors of this book have analysed the interrelations between the cultural landscape and the local sense of place by taking a closer look at the memoirs published by exploring early Soviet migrants' memories. Of particular interest is the way in which they link the newcomers' sense of place to narrative traditions of the Russian peasantry. Their methodological approach, based on cultural anthropology, offers a valuable complement to the one adopted here, which draws on cultural and historical geography.

7-3. Perceptions of Place

As a community of migrants, Sortavala in the late 1940s and 1950s provides us with numerous personal life stories that illustrate how newcomers perceived the place

they have found themselves in by chance. The cultural environment, and first of all the urban landscape, in the North Ladoga region was alien to the first generation of these Soviet migrants. The natural environment with its hills and rocks also created this spatial alienation of the migrant community with the surrounding territory. For former residents of the southern regions of the USSR, this landscape could even have been frightening. Being unfamiliar and different, this place, as Marina Hakkarainen documented, was at the same ‘wonderful’ and ‘nice’ (Hakkarainen 2005: 47). The difference between Finnish and Russian traditions was especially visible in rural areas. The Finnish types of settlements, broadly characterized by individual houses located far away from each other, stood in sharp contrast to both Russian traditional villages and the Soviet type of agrarian economy—*sovkhoses* and *kolkhozes*. Therefore, the settlement structure was restructured as the Soviet settlers moved to rural centres. All these contradictions in perception of the place finally resulted in a process of restructuring and adaptation of the environment to the needs of the new residents. It led to the production of a new social and cultural locality in the border area. The findings of this study are in line with the personal and autobiographical narratives collected in the former Finnish territories (in particular in the municipality of Lahdenpohja) by Finnish and Russian scholars (see Hakamies 2005). An informant’s statement attests to a continuing sentiment of alienation:

We still do not feel that this is our place. Can you imagine? We have lived here for so many years but anyway, this is not our place. Since this is not our homeland, this is an alien place. We do not accept it as ours. Perhaps those born here feel it differently. How could all this be ours? This land is not ours, this house is not ours. Everything is a remnant of the Finns (Mel’nikova 2005: 351).

This passage can be contrasted with another, an official document from Sortavala, dating from 1948, which proclaimed that Sortavala has already become ‘a hometown’ for the community of migrants who settled there:

The support of the working people (*trudishchiesia*) for the way in which the town (Party) cares for their hometown is growing. For instance, residents from Fanernaia Street, during the meeting, have made a pledge (*obiazatel’stvo*) to help working on the improvement of the town (*raboty po blagoustroistvu goroda*) (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 5/197, l. 56).

It could be argued that Sortavalans felt estranged from their environment because of the neglected state of many parts of the town; official documents and newspaper articles regularly speak of the residents’ willingness to improve the situation. One might suggest that this indifference to an ordered environment is part of the Russian tradition and contrasts with Western attitudes and explain the relations between humans and space in post-war Sortavala as characteristic of the socialist version of the traditional Russian communal way of life. However, the studied material reveals a more complex relationship, with various cultural, historical, mental and other factors at work. One of these, and perhaps not the least important, is the Soviet system of total control over society and the consequent absence of an even limited local autonomy in decision-making. The absence of significant private property may also have had its impact on the construction of a local identity.

Official documents offer multiple evidence for the carelessness of local residents and even acts of vandalism. Since the late 1940s, the local authorities regularly expressed concerns about the state of the town's parks and gardens and passed numerous decisions in this respect. In 1947, the town executive committee adopted, for example, a resolution 'On the Protection of Plantations in the Town of Sortavala,' which prohibited the cutting down of trees and bushes on municipal territory as well as causing damage to them (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 3/100, l. 11). Similarly, despite endless calls by the authorities to take care of streets and yards, the state of these public spaces deteriorated year after year. Another document, referring to the work of the combine 'Landscaping' (*kombinat «Blagoustroistvo»*), from 1964, illustrates how the Soviet official machinery worked. It typically started with an optimistic statement: 'Those who remember the town in the first post-war years see the changes that have happened in formerly neglected areas. New buildings, gardens and flowerbeds have appeared there.' This is followed by the usual obligatory criticism of the situation: 'Nobody takes care of plants. Old trees are dying in the arboretum. Many organisations in town do not realise how valuable planted trees are. The construction enterprises destroy trees when they are raising new buildings. Three old oak trees have been destroyed, because one of the organisations in town poured hot dross from a boiler-room on the trees' roots' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 44/1004, l. 54 and 56). The next passage complains that the new gardens, created a short time ago near the pier and the boarding school, show bad taste in the selection of plants and bad planning. Finally come the recommendations: 'To make our town look nice, we will have to get the executive committee's council for architecture to work on this. We will also have to establish an all-town's council for services and amenities' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 44/1004, l. 61). This new council was to be composed of representatives from all local organisations and institutions as well as of local activists.

With its commitment to collectivism and public—in fact, state—property, the Soviet political elite set the stage for these failures to successfully manage the urban environment. In Soviet Sortavala, the sanitary state of the town was the responsibility of the permanent commission for services and amenities, which, in the 1960s, tried to involve enterprises and various organisations in maintaining the urban landscape. In August 1965, the commission reported on the neglected state of courtyards, noting that many of them were full of rubbish, lumber and firewood and that the state of cesspools was unsatisfactory as well (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 44/1004, l. 68–69). During the 1960s and 1970s, the local newspaper published numerous letters sent in by readers commenting on the dilapidated state of the town. One of them perfectly illustrates the ironic attitude ordinary citizens adopted towards the official rhetoric of the Brezhnev era: 'I have seen the photograph in your newspaper that bears the caption "Elisenvaara is growing and improving" [*rastet i khorosheet*—a widespread cliché of Soviet *novoiiaz*; A. I.]. I have some doubts about (the term) "improving." I have lived in the settlement for twenty-one years and nothing has changed in Elisenvaara or in its image during this period. It is time for thinking seriously about improving conditions in the settlement. It is necessary to arrange for the planting of trees and for other amenities' (*KZ*, 23 January 1969).

Neither did the situation improve during Gorbachev's perestroika. In the late 1980, the paper published contributions from its readers under the title 'What kind of masters are we?' One of the local residents wrote: 'The clean parts of the town have been shrinking like shagreen over the last twenty years. Mud and chaos attract the looks of strollers' (KZ, 29 May 1986). In response to these criticisms, the chairman of the town executive committee admitted that the local authorities had finally given up on their efforts to clean up Sortavala and suggested that the citizens do maintenance work on a voluntary basis (KZ, 13 May 1986). At the same time, the journalist A. Kotova noted that 'talking does not make the town clean. A year ago, a group of activists prepared "Rules for Municipal Sanitation and the Provision of Services in Sortavala" (*Pravila sanitarnogo sodержaniia i blagoustroistva g. Sortavala*). In these Rules, the activists specified duties for tenants, communal services, enterprises and organisations. But the Rules ended up in the hands of indifferent employees of housing committees' (KZ, 24 April 1986).

Today, more than two decades after the official ending of the Soviet system, the problem is no less acute and public debates on this issue, now taking place in online forums, are no less intense than forty years ago. This suggests that the contemporary Russian model of local government owes a great deal of its inefficiency to its authoritarian predecessor. There is still no true local self-government, and municipalities neither have the skills nor the will to bring about changes.

Similar problems were observed for the provision of other municipal services. In March 1968, a town official responsible for outdoor activities and sports noted in a report presented at one of the town council's sessions that 'we live in a town surrounded by water and forests; in fact, this is a Northern resort. But in summer time, we have no suitable place for swimming. The town beach, recently created on the shores of Lake Ladoga under the name of Solnechnaia is not convenient for the residents' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 50/1087, l. 61). Indeed, the 'Sunny Beach' was located at too great a distance from town and the water there was quite cold, because the site formed part of an open bay.

It can be argued that the weak attachment to a local identity was in part the result of official narratives that predominantly emphasised wider patriotic sentiments, expressed as devotion to the socialist Motherland. The political elite never abandoned their educational efforts to instil 'love' for the Soviet Union. An important part of these efforts was the teaching of patriotic history at schools. In this context, local history mostly meant regional history in the form of *kraevedenie*, a curriculum that combined regional history and geography.⁴² In January 1969, young local amateur historians (*kraevedy*) from all schools in Sortavala thus participated in a conference, where they presented their work on the region's history and the material collected during field trips in the North Ladoga area. Some students reported on their search (*poiskovaia rabota*) for traces of the Second World War, others presented a so-called literary montage [a sort

42 Some authors have emphasised the close links between *kraevedenie* and identity-building (e.g. Johnson 2006: 3–5 and Ristolainen 2008: 34).

of show usually based on poems by local authors; A. I.] called 'We Love You, Karelia' (*KZ*, 4 February 1969).

The issue of Finnish topographical names (see also Section 6-3) was revived in public debates during the perestroika period, with local historians and journalists raising the question of the town's street names. Vladimir Sudakov suggested renaming streets that did not reflect local cultural and historical traditions and establishing protected historical neighbourhoods in Sortavala. Proposals were made to give back the Soviet Cosmonauts' Street its former Finnish name of Vuorio, to rename Komsomolskaia Street after Nicholas Roerich, a former resident, and Suvorova Street after Maiju Lassila, another former resident (*KZ*, 11 December 1986). The proposals found a wide echo among the local residents. Many readers agreed that a Soviet street name such as Komsomolskaia contradicted the architectural and historical traditions of the old town centre. Others expressed regrets about the old wooden buildings that had been lost. These biographical narratives depict Sortavala as 'different and peculiar when compared to other cities' (*KZ*, 18 December 1986). In the late Soviet period, local efforts of creating a sense of place thus explored previously almost never mentioned Finnish cultural and historical subjects.

Officials from the local VOPIK branch participated in the debate, too. N. Mineeva, the chief secretary, wrote about two local historical buildings conceived by Finnish architects in the 1930s to house the former lyceum and a girls' school, underlining the necessity to protect them:

Architects' and workers' hands have created these architectural monuments. These buildings, so to say, 'are our testamentary legacy.' And we should keep them in a good condition for the coming generations. This is a citizen's duty for everyone of us. (*KZ*, 13 March 1986)

Plans for repairing old Finnish buildings were partly implemented in the 1990s. But the neighbourhood of the Zaria cinema, chosen for protection as a cultural heritage, continues to be in a sorry state. None of the other areas have benefitted from a protected heritage status. Nor were streets ever renamed. Public debates on these issues in the second half of the 1980s therefore never produced any results. At the same time, they show that local citizens increasingly became interested in the period of independent Finland and in the monuments created during those times. It can thus be assumed that the Finnish past and Finnish culture played a certain role in the emergence of a local sense of place.

7-4. Tourism in Soviet Times

Starting in the 1960s, leisure activities and tourism became a major aspect of local life. There was, for example, a boom of motorboats in the 1960s and early 1970s. A growing number of citizens acquired boats for trips on Lake Ladoga, to go fishing, pick berries and mushrooms or simply spending their leisure time on and near the lake. In 1962, the local authorities decided to organise sightseeing tours by ship, motor launch and bus to islands and other sites of interest in the town's neighbourhood (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 34/892, l. 35). Many of these trips were part of the 'work with children' or young people, such as those organised by seventeen activists of the Housing Com-

mittee No. 2's club Youth (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 67/1260, l. 8 and 9). Such events were not motivated by purely political and ideological reasons. As everyday practices, they contributed to the creation of a local identity and a sense of place.

Although Sortavala was located in a closed border area, tourists came there from everywhere in the Soviet Union, but particularly from the metropolitan area of Leningrad. One of the main local attractions was—and still is—the archipelago of Valaam in the northern part of Lake Ladoga, where the former Orthodox monastery of the same name was located and which was administered by Sortavala's town council. A state historical museum was founded in Soviet times.⁴³ Since 1967, Sortavala could also boast of a tourist base, Sortaval'skaia, on the island of Riekkalansaari, which could cater for 186 guests and received up to 300 tourists a day. In 1980, Sortavala and its surroundings were visited by 11,000 tourists (Sudakov 1999: 119). Tourism in Sortavala was the responsibility of the Karelia's regional trade unions committee at Petrozavodsk. The committee also organised package tours for tourists that included trips within North Ladoga and guided tours of Sortavala, during which visitors were informed about Sortavala's history and cultural legacy.

Moreover, Sortavala was famous in the Soviet Union for its House of Composers, a tourist resort on the shore of Lake Ladoga's Kirjavalhti inlet, which consisted of a complex of buildings known in Finnish times as *Jääskeläisen huvila* [Jääskeläisen's summerhouse]. As similar recreational facilities owned by organisations and large establishments, it belonged to the Union of Soviet Composers. However, many representatives of other creative professions—artists, writers, poets etc.—spent their summer holidays there: the ballerina Maia Plisetskaia visited the place together with her husband, the composer Rodion Shchedrin and Bella Akhmadulina composed a cycle of poems dedicated to Sortavala and North Ladoga during her stay. It was in the 1960s that Alexander Naumovich Kolker, during his visit to the shores of the Kirjavalhti, composed the music for the song 'Karelia,' which later became one of the biggest Soviet hits that is still well-known in contemporary Russia. The song, set to the words of a poem by Kim Ryzhkov '*Karelia will come in dreams*,' can be seen as an expression of the Russian view of Karelia, which emphasises the beauty of a natural landscape untouched by civilisation.

There can be no doubt that Sortavala's attractiveness to Soviet tourists, with its own brand of cultural heritage and natural beauty, contributed to local pride and that tourism played a significant part in the town's identity.

7-5. Environmentalist Discourses

Concerns about the state of the natural environment often shape local spatial identities. In early Soviet times, environmental issues were rather discussed in official documents than in public debates and seemed not to play a crucial role in everyday practices. One of the first official records on the subject goes back to March 1946. The document raised concerns about the water quality of Lake Helmijarvi, the town's

43 In the early post-Soviet years, all buildings of the monastery were returned to the Russian Orthodox Church and the religious community was revived.

main water supply since the Finnish period.⁴⁴ The town executive committee passed a resolution On the Protection of the Zone of the Town's Water Supply which advocated measures to protect the lake's pure water against pollution (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/57, l. 26). In later years, however, the local media increasingly reported public concerns about environmental issues, a practice unheard of during the earlier decades of industrial modernisation. In 1960, the director of the Leskhoz, a local timber establishment, wrote an article under the headline 'To Protect Our Green Friend,' in which he reported numerous violations of forestry regulations by local enterprises, particular by Promkombinat, an industrial combine at Pitkäranta. But the regularly imposed fines did little to change these nefarious practices (KZ, 21 January 1960). In February 1962, a local meeting discussed the question of water purification in relation to the reservoirs on the outskirts of the town. Officials responsible for the water supply decided that plans to improve the municipal water supply and sewage system should include efforts to ameliorate the water quality of Lake Ladoga. At the same time, the discussion clarified that expectations of this sort were unrealistic in practical terms. No technical documents had been prepared for the project and it remained unclear when a local sewage collector would be built. In fact, the sewage system would only be modernised in the 1990s, with help from Finnish experts and financial support from the European Union.

The year 1960 also saw the foundation of a local branch of the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature (VOOP) at the state office tasked with organising public services and amenities (*kontora blagoustroistva*). Planned activities included public lectures and debates (KZ, 23 February 1960). Primary organisations of the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature were subsequently established in several settlements of the district, such as in Värtsilä, where the inaugural meeting in 1965 announced plans to create a 3-km-wide green belt around the settlement and a programme of planting green vegetation (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 55/1146, l. 92). Until March 1972, the Sortavala branch had the status of an inter-district organisation before becoming a simple town branch. At the time, the society counted thirteen primary organisations and six collectives with a total of 1200 individual members as well as thirty-eight voluntary inspectors (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 64/1231, l. 53).

Unlicensed fishing was another issue. A local newspaper debate reported the widespread practice of poaching and the 'predatory destruction of fish reserves.' As a result, the town executive committee decided to establish a 5-km-wide 'green belt' around Sortavala where fishing, including by amateurs, was not allowed (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 55/1146, l. 92), albeit with little effect. Other articles voiced concerns of local citizens about environmental damage, often revealing a soulful attitude towards nature. Under the headline 'The Islands Call for Help,' a reader complained about the 'barbaric' logging taking place on islands of Lake Ladoga, while others evoked similar preoccupations (KZ, 8 February 1969).

In the 1960s, a clean natural environment thus started to become a major issue in public debates on the local quality of life, with concerns increasing over time. In

44 The lake is situated on one of the rocky hills surrounding Sortavala and its waters are replenished by natural precipitation.

March 1978, delegates of the Tenth Conference organised by the Sortavala branch of the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature published an 'Appeal to the residents of the town of Sortavala, the surrounding settlements (*rabotchii poselok*) and the *sovkhoses*' in the local newspaper, which stated among other things:

We live in a nice region. But as a result of peoples' economic activity, the irrational use of natural resources and water pollution, we are faced with irreversible damage to nature. We appeal to the town's residents to take care of the natural resources (*KZ*, 18 March 1978).

The newspaper also reported on the action of a small group called The Station of Young Naturalists, which was not part of the official All-Russian Society but had been initiated by A. Antropenkova, a local activist, in 1976. Aimed at involving children in nature protection, the Station was initially composed of seventeen hobby groups (*kruzhki*) from local schools, which by 1986 had risen to forty. One of its activities, The Blue Patrol, designed to preserve the water quality of Lake Ladoga and other local lakes and rivers, started in 1980 (*KZ*, 6 December 1986). The child volunteers also cleaned up a small stream flowing through the town's Vakkosalmi Park, turning it in fact into a small river (*KZ*, 5 June 1986). This grassroots-level organisation shows that environmental issues were increasingly a preoccupation of the civil society which emerged during the perestroika years. In 1986, a reader of the local newspaper worryingly wrote about the Airanne Lake, close to the town's major park (Vakkolahdenpuisto) and part of the eco-system of water reservoirs connected with Lake Ladoga, arguing that the lake might be transformed into a marsh if the water level of Lake Ladoga were to drop further (*KZ*, 6 December 1986).

In the late 1980s, environmental issues appeared on the national political agenda, as electors' mandates prepared during the 1989 campaign for the Congress of People's Deputies show. Typical for these is a statement by R. P. Litvinova, a secretary of the primary party organisation at the local bakery combine:

'I believe that every resident of Sortavala is worried about the future of Lake Ladoga. I would like the candidates to elaborate already now, during this phase of the election campaign, their environmental programme. They should be aiming at fighting against the pollution of Lake Ladoga' (*KZ*, 9 February 1989).

The spatial imagery of local identity-building was created through everyday practices and discourses of place-making which referred to local peculiarities of the natural and human-made environment. Official documents and media publications suggest that it played a key role in the emergence of a local territorial identity. During the early decades of post-war Sortavala, this process was to a great extent shaped by a Soviet patriotic discourse that subordinated ideas of a 'small homeland' (*malaia rodina*) to the politically and ideologically motivated goal of protecting the Soviet Union as the big Motherland. Later years attest to the growing role of a slowly emerging local civil society, particularly during the perestroika years.

The discourses studied have shown how the Soviet migrants gradually adapted to the formerly Finnish urban and rural space. Numerous documents from the 1960s and 1970s offer evidence of sentiments of unfamiliarity and alienation. Indirect manifestations of the newcomers' placelessness can be found in the biographical fragments

contained in articles and letters published by the local newspaper. These fragments also inform about the motives and mechanisms at work in the transformations that the local urban and rural landscapes underwent during the Soviet period.

It has been argued that the Finnish architectural legacy of Sortavala occupied a central role in local identity-building. The continuing struggle of the local authorities and local citizens to halt the decay of the historical town centre and to promote a cleaner and more ordered urban environment can partly be explained by the admiration many residents had for this legacy, even though repeatedly proclaimed intentions to preserve local monuments had few practical consequences. Tourism may have had an even greater impact on local patriotism. Outdoor activities on Lake Ladoga and in the nearby countryside along with sightseeing trips, whether organised by institutional actors or not, contributed to the appropriation of the cultural and natural landscape by the Soviet newcomers. The area's great attractiveness for tourists living outside the region reinforced local pride.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Discursive representations of Sortavala in official documents and media publications allow for a better understanding of how Sortavala's location on the border has influenced the ways in which the local community has positioned itself. Throughout most of the Soviet period, official discourses attest of the pervasiveness of state socialism in all spheres of life, including forms of local identity, although reports on everyday practices and individual biographies permit glimpses of local identity-building that were not part of the official ideology.

The narratives examined in this book demonstrate how a diverse community of migrants has produced locality and created a sense of place. Initial feelings of unfamiliarity and alienation gave way to a certain local patriotism, as Sortavala slowly changed from a ceded Finnish town into a recognisable Soviet place. Similarly, the rural areas surrounding Sortavala underwent dramatic changes when the traditional Finnish habitat was replaced by settlement forms and agricultural practices typical of Russian traditions and Soviet collectivisation.

Official local discourses reproduced national ones that emphasised the construction of a new type of human being: Soviet man. This had clear repercussions on framing Sortavala's identity as a Soviet town. The chapter has illustrated the multiple methods and forms of communist socialisation through indoctrination of core socialist values. While some elements of the local Finno-Karelian tradition were incorporated into the narrative of Karelia's and, more particularly, Sortavala's Sovietness, this recognition implied clear limits as to which elements of the social, economic, cultural and architectural history of the town were acceptable. Overall, Soviet mass rituals, such as public celebrations with parades and demonstrations, sporting and other collective events, were predominant, since they were seen as manifestations of a united Soviet people and of its approval of party policies defined by the political elite.

Of particular importance for Sortavala's borderland identity were the discourses and practices linked to the defence of the socialist Motherland. Patriotic education