

# **Soviet Identity Politics and Local Identity in a Closed Border Town, 1944–1991**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This study will attempt to understand how local identity was constructed in the exceptional historical context of the closed Soviet border town Sortavala and to describe processes of place-making under the socio-economic conditions of the Soviet period. It will illustrate shifts in dominant Soviet discourses at various historical stages through narratives encountered in the local media and official documents. These narratives cover a wide spectrum of social life in Sortavala: political and ideological, social and economic, cultural and religious. Particular emphasis will be put on the construction of a local spatial identity in Soviet times.

Sortavala today is one of the administrative centres of the Republic of Karelia in Northwest Russia. It is located in approximately 60 km from the Finnish-Russian border in the North Ladoga region. Due to its geopolitical position the region has a dramatic history. In course of history it was a part of Swedish and Russian empires, and the Grand Duchy of Finland. As part of the Finnish independent state in the 1920s and 1930s the town experienced dynamic development. After the WWII the territory was annexed to the USSR and was settled by migrant community from different parts of the former Soviet Union. Finnish population moved totally to Finland. In the Soviet era the town was closed for both, internal and external visitors, and knowledge about neighbouring Finland and the Finnish everyday culture was limited. The main question for this study is what the border meant for the local community during the Soviet period (1944–1991). The empirical material for the analysis of the local identity construction is based on the local newspaper of Sortavala (*Krasnoe Znamia*) and on archive documents from The National Archive of Karelian Republic (NA RK f. R-2203, R-1051, R-757 and the other Funds).

The first section will discuss and analyse the political and ideological mechanisms of identity construction. Its starting point will be a study of the institutional agents and frameworks of identity construction with reference to structuration theory i.e. the role of social structures, actors and institutions in processes of territorialisation and de-territorialisation (Giddens 1984). According to Allan Pred, social structures saturated with

power produce place (Pred 1984). The focus will here be on the role of political institutions. This study also takes into account spatial theory in human geography, which emphasises links between place and people and the ways in which people create sense of place through production of images, signs and meanings. Essentialist interpretations (Tuan 1977, Cresswell 2009) emphasise emotional ties of human beings with territory. Anti-essentialist views postulate that a sense of place is the result of socio-economic mechanisms (Harvey 2000: 194). However, these two approaches do not have to be mutually exclusive. Obviously, they are closely interrelated in the study of specific contexts like post-WWII Sortavala. Essentialist vision of the significant role of a particular place for people's sense of place is especially important when we analyse the North Ladoga Karelia's migrant community of the 1940s and 1950s. Emotionally, this community was not rooted in the territory, and the contradictory and complicated process of the newcomers developing their place perceptions will be analysed in detail later in this study. This process demonstrates how people with diverse cultural identities create common senses of place and spatial identity. Place-making is a process in which people are involved. They constitute place, and this is a significant element in the identity formation (Massey 1994; Harvey 1996). At the same time, the role of social and economic factors enhances understanding of how the Soviet socio-economic system impacted local identity formation. Inspired by David Harvey's views on place as a product of social and economic mechanisms (Harvey 1993), territoriality and locality in Soviet Sortavala will be investigated in the context of political and economic conditions. This will be followed by an examination of various discursive fields of identity formation. After the annexation of the North Ladoga territory by the Soviet Union in 1944, the area was settled with culturally and ethnically diverse migrants, mainly from the Belorussian SSR, the Ukrainian SSR and the Vologodskaja Oblast. Soviet authorities created state and socio-economic institutions broadly in line with common practices and the legal framework of the Union. A key task for the political elite was then to socialise this population in the sense of transmitting core Soviet values. The studied sources—both archive documents and newspaper articles—illustrate ways and methods of this project and reveal the political and ideological instruments at work in shaping local identity. It is argued here that these took a peculiar character in the case of Sortavala whose status as a closed border zone provided a local context clearly distinct from that of other regions. The studied documents and media narratives highlight the role of Soviet border symbolism in this process.

Soviet identity concepts changed over time. Thus, Theodore Hopf, in his periodisation of Soviet history, has advanced that the years from 1947 to 1953 were marked by a strong us-versus-them dichotomy (Hopf 2002: 3) and that the predominant official discourse about what it meant to be a New Soviet Man (NSM) was not allowed to be questioned during that period. Then, 'Stalin's death buried the NSM' and inaugurated the Thaw period during which this dichotomy was significantly weakened in favour of a more neutral stance or was simply becoming irrelevant (Hopf 2002: 11–12).

Stalinist discourse had been characterised by ideological dogmatism, orthodoxy and intolerance towards difference. The Thaw period brought the institutionalisation of a new discourse of difference which established new boundaries for what was now

to be permissible or not. The changes brought about by the political liberalisation under Khrushchev had their limits and were often contradictory. The empirical material provides ample illustration of how these attempts to overcome shortcomings in the development of socialism changed communist education and identification. In Karelia the year 1956 represents a major turning point as the region's administrative status changed from that of a Soviet republic to an autonomous republic within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) (Vihavainen 1998: 38).



The institutionalisation of post-Stalinist discourses also meant new institutional agents for promoting them. Indeed, one of Khrushchev's favourite ideas was to gradually replace institutions of the state with public and voluntary structures. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the official discourse thus abounds with people's voluntary patrols, communist labour brigades, comrades' courts and so on (Kharkhordin 1999: 285). Later on, in the 1960s and 1970s, it became, for example, customary for newspaper readers to send letters to the editors, which offer excellent markers for the boundaries of difference in everyday discussions and in mass publications. Local newspapers thus represented a sense of place, a space where the authors of these letters expressed their feelings and emotions.

Another characteristic of the three decades that followed the de-institutionalisation of Stalinism in the early years of the Thaw (1960s) was the institutionalisation of both a new dominant discourse and rival discourses. Among the latter was a manifest

détente<sup>1</sup> (as a desirable future for Soviet society, a view emerging as an alternative beyond the boundaries of permissible difference in the 1970s and 1980s). After Khrushchev was removed from power in 1964 (see Smith and Ilic eds. 2011), anti-Stalinist rhetoric remained still present, but became more low-key in media narratives. While the boundaries of permissible difference were not narrowed, the media during this period focussed on the technocratic revolution, stressing science and technology, and on efforts to overcome the failures of the command economy.<sup>2</sup> In the 1970s, the media increasingly came to reflect signs of stagnation in the local context.

Another emerging subdominant discourse of the 1960s and 1970s was promoted by the writers of the ‘village prose’ movement, such as Valentin Rasputin, Vasili Belov and Viktor Astaf’ev, who emphasised an ethnic-national Russian identity in terms of the well-known debate on a specific Russian development, distinct from that observed in Western Europe. The attitude of the national political elite towards these narratives of ethnic Russian traditionalism was contradictory. As Hopf (2002: 18) has shown, this discourse was officially tolerated but also represented a challenge to the dominant discourse of internationalism that defined the relationship between the Soviet Union’s nationalities. In the context of the Karelian Republic, the sources emphasise the rhetoric of friendship between Soviet peoples.

Members of the intelligentsia were among the key social agents to produce alternative discourses on Soviet society, which were often reformist in nature. Scientists and artists had their own institutions in the form of unions, journals, publishing houses, theatres, educational and scientific institutions, and the more famous they were, the more freely they could express their views and opinions. However, in a peripheral region such as North Ladoga in Karelia, the local intelligentsia mostly reproduced the dominant discourse of socialist identity, except during the later years of Gorbachev’s perestroika, when reformist alternative discourses started to appear in local public debates.

The narratives studied in this study open the possibility to trace how an identity of the local community was constructed in official discourses and everyday practices in this border area. In particular, they show how the self-identification of an ethnically and socially diverse community was (re)shaped in accordance with the goals of the Soviet project of national identity that is the construction of a New Soviet Man. Their analysis also allows to describe how this community perceived its habitat and how local media created a new sense of place in Sortavala. The main focus will be on the changing spatial imagination of political agencies, above all the party apparatus, the military, industrial and, finally, cultural institutions and their role with regard to issues of ethnicity and language in the representations of Karelia.

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1 The general easing of the geo-political tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States which began in 1969.

2 During the Brezhnev period, official repression was aimed at those dissidents who organised public protests, a phenomenon limited to big cities and not at all typical of small towns such as Sortavala. Information about dissident activities was mainly disseminated through Russian-language broadcasting services from Western Europe (Voice of America, BBC, etc.).

## 1. TERRITORIALITY AND SPACES OF POWER

### *1-1. The Ideological Machinery: Communist Education and Its Agents*

All spheres of life in the Soviet Union were under the control of the party-state machinery (*apparat*), organised in a hierarchical system of power under the leadership of the CPSU on the territorial level. Which local actors then controlled and shaped the construction of Soviet spatial identity? Since the identity of New Soviet Man (NSM) was to be based on the communist ideology, it was the local party organisations who were responsible for disseminating the main narratives related to the education of the masses. Membership in the Communist Party was absolutely essential for any career beyond a certain level. As a consequence, the overall number of party members in the Soviet Union rose from 6.3 million (DeWitt 1961: 533) in 1947 to some 17 million in the early 1980s (Vert 1994: 462). In Karelia, there existed 1500 primary party organisations in 1949/50, with a total number of 17,200 members (one and a half times more than in 1940). Between January 1956 and January 1966, the Party accepted 18,000 new members, or candidates (Vavulinskaia 2001: 669 and 675). In 1979, there were 1245 primary communist organisations, 864 shop (*tsekhovykh*) cell and 735 party cells, accounting for over 39,000 members and candidates (*Leninskaia Pravda*, 19 January 1979). In 1985, the Karelian Communist Party counted more than 43,000 members. The number of party members was thus increasing until the very last years of the Party's history (Maksimov 1987: 256 and 258).

In Sortavala, the Party's town committee (*gorkom*) was established in July 1940 and continued its activities until 1991, except for the short period of war between August 1941 and June 1944. Its secretaries and bureau members were confirmed in 1944 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic (KFSSR). In early 1945, a meeting of the town's communists elected the plenum and the bureau. Due to administrative changes, the committee was later twice renamed into 'district committee' (*Sortavalskii raikom*), between November 1954 and December 1962 and, again, between January 1965 and December 1970.

The *gorkom* was organised into several departments: general services (*obshchii otdel*), administrative organs, propaganda and agitation, ideology, industry and transportation, military, and cadres. Archival documents clearly show the leading role of the *gorkom* in local affairs, whose members thus formed the local political elite (Kop'ev 2003: 48–51). As the local branch of the CPSU it was 'a leading force' of the society, whose main tasks included the 'selection and promotion of cadres who were able to carry out the Party's decisions, ideological and political work aimed at educating the masses in the communist worldview etc.' (see among others Fedoseev 1985; Kniazhev and Nikishov 1987).

In early 1948, 1335 persons held top-level positions in the state machinery and the so-called public organisations (trade unions etc.) of Soviet Karelia. The nomenklatura on the municipal and district level (*gorkom* and *raikom*) was composed of 7150 positions. During the 1950s and 1960s, personnel for the nomenklatura continued to be selected along the same principles. However, at the oblast level (*obkom*), the number of positions declined from 1700 in 1952 to only 480 in 1961 (Vavulinskaia 2001: 670).

In Sortavala, the local nomenklatura was established in 1944, right after the Soviets arrived in town. It included positions on the local party committee (*gorkom*), which numbered about seventy members: the directors of the most important local establishments, several ordinary workers, members of the intelligentsia and party members. Heads of departments held permanent positions. The bureau counted about ten people. Members of the leading bodies in the local party branch were elected at an annual party conference. *Krasnoe Znamia* [The Red Banner]; hereafter referred to as *KZ*), the local newspaper published in Soviet times, informed about these conferences, producing short accounts of communist leaders' reports on their work, discussions of the main report and final resolutions. Usually, a visiting speaker from the *obkom* of the Karelian Republic intervened at the conference (e.g. *KZ*, 28 November 1978 and 25 November 1980).

The local political elite also included members of state institutions. These were organised along similar hierarchical principles and their activities took place under the guidance of the CPSU. The main local body was the town council (*soviet*), represented by its executive committee in daily affairs. While the party was responsible for general leadership, the executive committee controlled all issues of socio-economic development. As far as Soviet identity construction is concerned, the local party branch was therefore in overall control and members of the state nomenklatura were tasked with relaying and implementing party directives. The documents issued by the council thus form a major source for the present investigation.

The earliest documents date back to autumn 1944, after Soviet troops arrived in town. It was then that the Soviet state bodies were established. The executive committee consisted of five members: the secretary of the town committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), or VKP(b); the head of the NKVD's municipal branch; the head of the NKGB's municipal and district branch; and the chair of the district's executive committee (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/2, l. 7).

In December 1947, elections for the local administrative bodies took place. In 1948, five permanent commissions were created: Budget, Education, Trade, Communal Services and Housing, Public Health. In 1949, seven commissions were added to help with reconstruction and the attribution of housing funds (Comsods). Moreover, the town council decided to create fourteen street committees (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. l. 36 and 38), which mostly dealt with applications and complaints made by residents (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. l. 39). In the official discourse, so-called electors' mandates were seen as evidence for the democratic nature of Soviet society. In practice, they were suggestions to improve the functioning of schools, hospitals, cultural and educational institutions, as well as of commercial and municipal establishments (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 7/249, l. 19 and 20). However, this form of participation was severely hampered by the bureaucratic system supposed to implement them, and efforts by ordinary local residents were thus generally doomed to fail.

The leading position of party members in the administrative bodies was a main characteristic of the communist system. In January 1950, for example, twenty-four of the thirty-seven members of Sortavala's town council were members of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 7/250). Similarly, in February 1951, ten out of eleven members of the executive committee were party members (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 9/372, l. 8).

The Soviet understanding of the difference between capitalist and socialist democracies is clearly manifest in local documents and newspaper narratives. Socialist democracy, proclaimed to be the democracy of the working people (*trudiashchiesia*), 'is fulfilled through the representation of people in the state-power bodies—soviets [i.e. councils; A. I.], as well as by participation of citizens in electoral meetings, working collectives, as members of trade unions and other public organisations' (Maksimov 1987: 264). It was also argued that wide participation of the masses in the management of the state would allow for the regular renewal of councils. In Soviet Karelia, one out of three citizens was participating in council activities according to official data from the first half of the 1980s (*ibid.*). There were fifteen raion councils, thirteen town councils, two *raion* councils in urban-type areas, 150 rural councils and 43 settlement councils. In 1987, the republic's local councils had over 7000 elected members. Their executive bodies took the form of permanent commissions (*postoiannye komissii*) whose titles and tasks corresponded to those of the main social and economic sectors. In other words, they were responsible for the executive management of whole sectors of the economy and of social welfare. In the late 1980s, the region thus counted over 1300 such commissions, composed of some 6000 local council members (Maksimov 1987: 267). Another feature of socialist democracy were the so-called public self-governing organisations (*obshchestvennye samodeiatel'nye organizatsii*),<sup>3</sup> of which there were more than ten thousand, including comrades' courts, voluntary people's patrols, groups of peoples' control, housing and street committees, parents' committees at schools and women's councils. In late 1987, more than 100,000 activists were reported to participate in their activities. Foremost among these organisations were the trade unions, tasked with 'socialist competition,' taking care of working people's needs, as well as improving labour discipline and productivity. In 1986, the trade unions of Soviet Karelia, whose organisation resembled that of the party and the councils, had over 425,000 members (Maksimov 1987: 268).

The coexistence of the nomenklatura's power and of propaganda proclaiming the democratic nature of Soviet society is an indication of the dual reality of the system which accounts for one of the major contradictions in Soviet man's identity: he or she was supposed to be a 'master of life' whose every step was under the control of the political elite. The publicly declared 'power of the people' became a utopian slogan under the conditions of total control by the ruling Communist Party. The Soviet system was vulnerable in terms of sharing real political power with the people, because this could lead to the loss of power and control over the society. Although all communist leaders were sensitive to this issue during certain periods, such as the Thaw and the perestroika, they tried to push reforms aimed at democratisation.

The attempts made by Gorbachev and other leaders of the perestroika to renew ideological views were, however, hampered by Soviet bureaucratic traditions. Indeed, these new approaches strongly contradicted earlier methods used by the Party, which

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3 Formally these organisations could be associated with NGOs, but is reluctant to keep this term here because of absent of civil society in the former USSR. These organisations appear to have been to a large extent controlled and influenced by the Communist Party or the state.

now appeared to be antiquated. One instance of the obsolescence of ideological propaganda is the destiny of wall newspapers produced in competition by factories and similar establishments with the aim of educating the masses. In January 1986, Sortavala's local newspaper commented with sadness that wall newspapers at the railway engine depot, which had been famous not only in town but throughout the entire republic, no longer interested people: 'Nobody wants to write, nobody wants to read' (KZ, 21 January 1986).

To sum up, in Soviet times, methods of communist socialisation (*vospitanie*) have been undergoing significant transformations. But their main goal has always been the construction of an ideological identity in accordance with tasks defined by the political elite. Ideological education, starting in early childhood, was meant to enable Soviet man to become a reliable part of the Soviet political and societal system. The media played a key role in this process by transmitting core communist values to the local community. These values were implanted in the local sense of place. The spatial imagination of Sortavalans in Soviet times combined these enforced representations of Soviet values with meanings produced in the pre-Soviet past.<sup>4</sup>

### ***1-2. Political Discourses in the Late Stalin and Early Post-Stalin Years***

The framework of political institutions related to identity construction, described in the preceding section, operated by reproducing a meta-narrative shaped by the central political elite. Soviet official discourse reflected the geopolitical imagination of this elite and its strategy for building communism: from World Revolution to Socialism in One Country. During the Cold War, the ambitions of a global superpower were expressed in a discourse of nation-building communism and of support for all pro-socialist, or pro-Soviet, and revolutionary forces in the world. In terms of internal identity, Marxist-Leninist ideas of constructing a new society with a new kind of human being had, since the times of the early Bolsheviks, prevailed in the official discourse. Soviet symbols and rituals, as well as, more generally, ideological propaganda, served as instruments to inculcate Soviet citizens with a new societal consciousness. In Sortavala, the new authorities from the very beginning began to popularise Soviet symbols and traditions, above all the celebration of the October Revolution's anniversary on 7 November. On 1 November 1944, the chairman of the town council and the head of the NKVD's town branch thus actively participated in passing a resolution in favour of 'preparing the celebration of the twenty-seventh anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution,' which included a recommendation to all directors of local establishments to hoist flags on buildings (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/2, l. 6). In the sense of geographical theories of place-making, these celebrations and similar public manifestations can therefore be seen as contributing to processes that produce locality.

Soviet public narratives as a form of identity construction also included a mythologised past. Soviet history since the October Revolution was perceived through the

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4 *Kraevedenie* lessons that were the key-instrument in this work had been taught already in the pre-revolutionary Russia in the beginning of XX century. But in the Soviet school it became an element of ideological socialisation (*vospitanie*) in process of teaching on/ or learning of locality.



lens of Stalin's writings. A personality cult had been established where Stalin figured, next to Lenin, as one of the sacred leaders of the Bolsheviks. In the 1950s, a bust of Lenin was thus erected on the grounds of Sortavala's military hospital.<sup>5</sup> It can be added that there is another statue of Lenin in the area—in Värtsilä in front of the VMZ metallurgic factory. Another important task of the ideological education of the masses was to stress the exemplary role of heroes from the Great Patriotic War. On 2 February 1945, the town's executive committee passed a resolution to establish a municipal commission to promote and protect the memory of these war heroes (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/5, l. 1). Historical memorialising was therefore a key element of public place-making in Soviet times.

The grand narratives of the centrally produced Soviet ideology were to be reproduced on the regional and local levels through communist organisations, notably the Komsomol,<sup>6</sup> schools and the mass media. Children, for example, received their first lessons of communist ideology in nursery schools. In March 1945, during a meeting of the executive body of Sortavala's town council, it was noted that this kind of work with children would have to be strengthened (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/8, l. 12). The spatio-temporal life experience of Sortavalans was thus profoundly shaped by the reproduction of social relations in Soviet society and, above all, by mechanisms designed for their ideological and political education.

The Pioneer organisation, for older children, was responsible for communist education in schools. A July 1945 meeting of the executive committee of the town council thus dealt with creating a House of Pioneers and a Komsomol Club in Sortavala (NA RK, f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/88, l. 32). Other forms of propaganda and political socialisation were targeted at the adult population. A widespread element of this was *Krasnyi ugolok* [Red Corner], a separate room in factories and other establishments, where posters, portraits of political leaders, self-made wall newspapers presenting political news and other objects were exhibited and equipment for lectures, amateur shows and film projections were stored. A report by the town's department for culture and public enlightenment addressed to the town authorities noted, for example, that Red Corners would 'have to become the centres of mass agitation work among workers' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/8, l. 16). Another report on the activities of this department stressed the task 'to use lectures for propaganda, as a tool for mobilising the masses in the struggle for the fulfilment and over-fulfilment of Stalin's Fourth Five-Year Plan.'

The Red Corners in factories should be centres of mass agitation work among workers (*agitatsionno-massovoi raboty sredi rabochikh*). Film shows during election campaigns should be one of the foremost methods of ideological education (f. R-2003, op. 1, d. 2/88, l. 16 and 18).

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5 In 2010, local communists moved the statue to the town centre.

6 The Komsomol (short for Vsesoiuznyi Leninskii Kommunisticheskii Soiuz Molodezhi), or All-Union Leninist Young Communist League was established in 1918, was the Soviet Union's youth organisation for 14-to-28-year-olds, created to help the older generation of communists with the construction of the new society and to prepare young people to become members of the CPSU.

Communist rhetoric and slogans occupied a central place in the socialisation (*vospitanie*) of the masses.<sup>7</sup> In the early years after the war, Sortavala represented a particular challenge in this regard. The narrative constitution of an identity in a highly diverse community of migrants called for differentiation of its various component groups and for control over newcomers. In the 1940s, Stalin's suspicious attitude towards Soviet citizens who had come under foreign influence (through captivity or occupation) thus led to the decision that children who had lived in occupied territories should be registered and educated separately (*provodit's nimi rabotu po vospitaniiu otdel'no*) (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/6, l. 8)—a perfect illustration of Stalinist fears of difference that might endanger identity construction.

Communist educational work (*vospitatel'naia rabota*) already started at pre-school age. In 1945, when there was only a single nursery school in Sortavala, the executive committee, in a resolution from 28 March 1945, evoked the task 'to enforce educational work with children and to enlist parents to control and participate in pre-school education' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/8, l. 12). The local political elite mainly expected nursery schools to help local residents identify with the Soviet people and adopt the values of communist society at a very early age.

For schoolchildren, the main institution of communist education and propaganda was the Pioneer organisation. As early as June 1945, a decision was taken to establish a network of Pioneer camps, where eighty Young Pioneers would spend their summer holidays (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/13, l. 2). In July, the executive committee passed a resolution that called for the creation of a House of Pioneers and a Komsomol Club in town: 'Taking into account the number of schools and FZO [schools for vocational training; A. I.] and consequently the necessity of organising the leisure time of young people, we decide to allocate for these purposes the building on the corner of Kirov Street and Ogorodnaia Street (former Prayer House).' And: 'A space for establishing the House of Pioneers is necessary for the ideological education of the students in town' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/16, l. 3 and d. 2/88, l. 32).

Despite these measures, the town's political elite criticised the political activities and the ideological work of those responsible as lacking efficiency. In a chapter dedicated to 'political and ideological work,' a report by the town council's Department for Communal Services noted: 'Political discussions, lectures, collective readings of newspapers do not take place; wall newspapers are not being published; there is no collective watching of films' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/88, l. 20). Similarly, it was reported that factory cadres did not show enough interest in this kind of work. This suggests that everyday practices related to the creation of NSM continued to suffer from the same handicaps in the 1940s as in the 1930s, a situation which recently published literature

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7 Whereas *obrazovanie* means formal education in the sense of becoming proficient in a discipline and refers to the knowledge transmitted by educational institutions, *vospitanie*, or socialisation, more generally, refers to upbringing (in the family, at school, in the army or a labour collective) in moral, political, ideological and cultural terms. The most radical division between the two can be found in the pedagogical works of Anton Makarenko (Frolov 2006: 12).

has seen ‘a sign of symbolic instability of the social order in Soviet Russia’ (Oushakine 2004: 406). Obviously, the massive transformation of social conditions, especially if the specific situation of Sortavala is taken into account, had still not produced a discursive basis on which the regime could build symbolically. This can probably be related to the shift that occurred in a number of classic Soviet writings on NSM (e.g. in Maxim Gorky’s journalistic texts) from the normative to the performative and the procedural. NSM was understood as an active man capable of producing enough objective evidence to be recognised as such (ibid.). The above quote precisely demonstrates the ways in which the elite forced local actors to behave.

Educational work was considered a key instrument in producing NSM within the Stalinist framework of building Socialism in One Country. In the official discourse of the time, there was no significant distinction between the activities of the so-called ‘institutions of culture and public enlightenment’ (Houses of Culture and clubs) on the one hand and ideological structures on the other. Archival documents from 1951/52 offer evidence of critical views, such as that of a chairman of the town’s permanent commission for culture and public enlightenment:

Can we be satisfied with the work on culture and public enlightenment? No, because wall newspapers as a weapon of visual agitation work and propaganda for the communist education of workers are not being used. Boards of honour, boards with indicators of labour achievements in factories, slogans and posters are missing or are left hanging for a long time. This practice just devalues the idea of visual agitation work. Propagating political knowledge is a duty for every factory leader, engineer, technician, trade union leader etc. (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 11/375, l. 25–28).

In the official discourse, mythologised Soviet man identified with a person living in the most just and freest society of the world. In February 1946, for instance, *KZ* informed readers about the forthcoming elections to the Supreme Soviet, describing them as ‘elections based on the most democratic constitution in the world.’ The paper noted that party organisations had allotted tasks to hundreds of agitators from the party, the Komsomol and the non-party intelligentsia, opened propaganda centres and organised mass and political activities. Agitators from the railway depot in particular were reported to have held 365 debates in which some five thousand electors participated. The working people of the town were said to have nominated Josef Stalin and several other members of the central and the Republic’s government as candidates for the Supreme Soviet (*KZ*, 5 January 1946).

One of the methods of shaping the Soviet political system consisted in promoting ‘good examples.’ Successful activities of local actors were meant to spread to other territories of the KASSR. After the XXI Congress of the CPSU (27 January – 5 February 1959) had adopted yet another programme for the full-scale construction of communism, the Karelian government, in December 1959, adopted a resolution on the work of permanent commissions in local councils and recommended to all local authorities to follow the experience of the councils of the Sortavala and Prionezhskii [Petrozavodsk; A. I.] districts, as the political and public activities developed there were held to be shining examples for other local councils. In Sortavala’s case, this referred to the following characteristics: 1. regularly convening council sessions; 2. establishing

working permanent commissions; and 3. exemplary working methods of deputies (f. R-2203, d. 25/727, l. 5–13).

Official documents show that in the Soviet bureaucratic system the deputies of the permanent commissions and their volunteer assistants were rather executors of orders than decision-making political actors. An official in charge reporting on activities during 1949 thus stated at a meeting of the executive committee that

Our analysis shows that the work of deputies has been unsatisfactory. No commission is dealing with issues whose implementation has been mandated by the electors in their plans. There is no body of voluntary activists. The organisation of work is chaotic and lacks planning. Meetings of the commissions take place irregularly. Not often enough and, to be honest, there is a lack of initiative.

The commissions have not raised any questions before the executive committee. Can it really be true that the activity of the organisations under their control do not suffer from any shortcomings? The commissions are indifferent to the results of their work. Their only activity consists in producing formal reports (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 7/249, l. 32–34).

The Khrushchev period brought a revival of early Bolshevik utopian ideas. As already noted, Khrushchev's basic understanding of communism as a developed society that could be built in the near future led to conceptual reformulations in Soviet identity politics. In particular this meant a revision of the until then dominant Stalinist discourse that had emphasised a rigorous us-versus-them dichotomy. In terms of international policy, the new discourse shifted the accent from Socialism in One Country to prospects of a global victory of communism. This spatial imagination based on the ideological views might explain the international policy of the USSR, in particular, active support for pro-communist regimes in the Third World. Newspaper articles from *KZ* show that the mass media, which had been institutional agents of Stalinism until the mid-1950s, became relays for the new dominant discourse. The intelligentsia, which was intensely involved in public activities, was being given the opportunity to more freely express their view. Although censorship still played a crucial role in a closed border town such as Sortavala, the local media began to reflect much more openly everyday practices. Local actors were able to publicly admit the existence of contradictions or shortcomings in socialist society, a process in which letters written by readers played a significant role.

### ***1-3. Public Narratives during the Thaw and the Era of Stagnation***

The Thaw brought a major socio-economic sea change to Soviet society, notably remarkable reforms of the territorial and administrative setup. The most visible changes on the local level concerned the rural areas around Sortavala, which benefitted from the so-called 'enlargement of rural settlements' policy (see below). Spatial changes in urban territories included the building of a growing number of cheaply built housing estates with five storeys, so-called *khrushchevkas*, which offered small flats to people who had until then be housed in communal flats or barracks. In Sortavala, a number of tower blocks were being erected right in the historical centre of the town. Along with new approaches to territorialisation and spatial planning came social and economic

improvements (Baron 2007). Salaries in particular were increased compared to Stalin's times. At the same time, the period saw several chaotic and little-discussed reforms that have led historians to speak of a contradictory period.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the institutions of Soviet identity production were enlarged and developed. One such institution was the so-called 'comrades' courts,' based on Soviet ideas about the educational role of labour collectives.<sup>8</sup> Those who defied discipline or deviated from the moral norms of socialist society were brought before a court composed of elected members from their labour collective to be fined or to be transferred to a regular court of justice.

Documents of the commission for socialist law and public order show that the town council controlled and discussed the activities of these courts, set up at local establishments. The commission also checked compliance with labour laws. According to a report conserved in the archives, the commission's activity was based on the Proposal Concerning Permanent Commissions adopted by the presidium of the KASSR's Supreme Soviet on 7 July 1960, and on the resolution On the Violation of Labour Laws in Factories, adopted on 24 December 1963 by the KASSR's Council of Ministers and the presidium of the trade unions' regional council. Its tasks included supervising the legal conformity of local organisations (both councils and economic establishments), monitoring compliance with labour laws on the councils' territory, assisting voluntary brigades and comrades' courts, and dealing with applications, complaints and letters with suggestions submitted by citizens (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 38/935, l. 73 and 75).

However, there is evidence that the work of these commissions was not as effective as expected. In May 1964, a deputy of the Sortavala town council, in a report on the activity of the permanent commission for socialist law and public order in Värtsilä, thus stated that the commission had only met once during the last 18 months, in early 1963, for its founding session, and that no other meeting had been convened to deal with other questions (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 41/967, l. 26).

The Brezhnev era, too, introduced new methods to promote NSM identity, articulated in the discourse on 'complex education.' Typical of the ideological education of young people in labour and educational collectives were the Lenin Lesson (*Leninskii urok*) and the Lenin Pass (*Leninskii zacet*), both going back to an initiative taken by leaders of Leningrad's large Komsomol organisations. Their goal was based on an individual approach to achieve a complex (ideological, scientific, aesthetic, physical, etc.) education. In Oleg Kharkhordin's words, 'the public ritual of the Lenin Pass included the institutionalised adoption of annual obligations for self-improvement. These obligations were to be written down on a standard print form, called "the composite personal plan" (*lichnyi kompleksnyi plan*), according to the three main dimensions of personal development: moral, labour and intellectual. Some versions of these plans

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8 Comrades' courts were seen as part of a Russian tradition where a peasant's commune was responsible for the personal worldviews, moral behaviour and economic activity of its members. A Soviet labour collective was similarly accountable for the behaviour of its members. With the arrival of the perestroika, these courts were no longer taken seriously and became a frequent target of criticism in the media and particular in satirical films.

included “military-patriotic” and “aesthetic” dimensions as well’ (Kharkhordin 1999: 246). Lenin Lessons were used to discuss certain texts of Lenin in the presence of long-standing party members or veterans of the Second World War (ibid.: 332).

In Sortavala, a territory on the edge of the socialist homeland, these socio-political rituals, aimed at socialising people through Soviet rites of passage, played a special role in producing locality. In February 1970, the chairman of Sortavala’s executive committee claimed in a report read during a meeting of the town council that

all the Komsomol organisations in town take part in the Lenin Pass. As a discussion at the *gorono* [municipal department for public enlightenment (*Gorodskoi otdel narodnogo obrazovaniia*); A. I.] held in December 1969 has shown, the ideological education of older students still does not refer to the Lenin theme as central for these purposes. The Lenin Pass is a report for school children about their main duty—studies. Students also report about participating in socially valuable activities of a Komsomol collective. The students report about their successes in learning Lenin’s theoretical legacy. This learning is related to both obligatory studies required by the school curriculum and additional work planned by a Komsomol group.

Class teachers (*klassnye rukovoditeli*) do not fully realise in their activity that bourgeois propaganda uses all kinds of ways and methods to provoke ideological instability among young people (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 58/1180, l. 19, 20, 40 and 41).

The chairman particularly criticised teachers of secondary schools for ‘weak scientific content and the low level of communist ideology.’ He suggested that in order to turn communist ideas into ‘a weapon of ideological struggle for schoolchildren,’ they should take these ideas more to their hearts, feel them deeply (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 58/1180, l. 35). In addition to official narratives and propaganda clichés, he also mentioned real challenges in the process of raising young children. He thus referred to trends of the late 1960s and early 1970s of increasing incomes, which not only had led to changes in living standards but also to transformations in the public’s mentality and outlook. ‘What we see is a kind of inflation of materialist values with a certain category of teenagers. Expenses for children are growing faster than parents’ incomes. The real income of workers and employees has increased two and a half times over the last twenty years. Meanwhile, expenses for an eighth-grade schoolboy have increased three to three and a half times and up to five times for a ninth- or tenth-grade schoolgirl?’ (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 58/1180, l. 36) His report also noted the formalism and boredom of activities organised by the Young Pioneers. Already in 1970, officials responsible for education mentioned that the ‘content and methods of activities of the Pioneer organisations as well as their events are monotonous. Therefore the Pioneers don’t care for them’ (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 58/1180, l. 42).

This insight did, however, not lead to changes in the methods of NSM identity-shaping. As a solution, the subsequent resolution recommended to organise study sessions to explain and propagate materials from the CPSU Congress. It was also suggested to arrange for regular conferences on Marxist-Leninist theory, to hold meetings about the political situation and to supply schools with visual agitation material. Schoolchildren should be encouraged to participate in public activities outside school. For these purposes it was recommended to set up two-stage reviews (*smotr*) for the

activities of Pioneer detachments and regiments (*druzhina*), aimed at fulfilling the mandates defined by the Congress (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 66/1250, l. 23).

In the late 1970s, yet another dominant discourse emphasised the need for ‘a complex approach to the development of the personality’ (*kompleksnyi podkhod k vospitaniiu*), which had been formulated by the XXV Congress of the CPSU in 1976. The core of this new concept consisted in advocating the combination of ideological-political education with labour and moral education of the masses as well as the elaboration of specific approaches for different social groups. It was intended to give labour collectives a greater role in the implementation of these new plans of shaping socialist identity. All these new theoretical visions reflected and supported a trend in the development of Marxist-Leninist theory during the second half of the 1970s towards a concept of ‘developed socialism.’ Soviet commentators interpreted this as a transition from the earlier goal of communist education to create a harmonious personality towards one more adapted to the conditions prevailing in a developed socialist society.

In the local context of Sortavala, *KZ* launched a section entitled ‘Lenin Lesson Continues.’ Local leaders used newspaper space to report on their activity, and articles tried to link Sortavala’s community to the theme of the ‘new unity of the people.’ Indeed, the media played a remarkable role in placing Sortavala into the framework of this new Soviet national identity, all under the leadership of the CPSU. The committee secretary of the primary Komsomol organisation at a local sewing factory thus wrote in June 1978 that in accordance with the decisions taken by the XVIII Congress of the VLKSM, a Lenin Lesson should be held under the banner ‘Always with the Party, Always with the People’ in every Komsomol organisation. Party headquarters set the agenda for Komsomol members: themes for speeches, presentations, papers and room designs. Participants of such events watched the film *The Story of a Communist* (*Povest’ o kommunizme*) and discussed Brezhnev’s memoirs *The Small Land* (*Malaia Zemlia*) and *The Revival* (*Vozrozhdenie*). A propagandist lecturer told his audience about Brezhnev’s efforts to ‘ensure world peace’ (*KZ*, 17 June 1978).

During the Brezhnev years, modernised Soviet society was still seen as the goal of communist propaganda, the main instrument of political education. In the narratives studied, any positive changes and achievements in Soviet society were attributed to the leadership of the Communist Party. Official speeches always started with expressions of gratefulness to the central government, as in the following speech by the local hospital’s medical director held during a session of the town council in 1969.

Comrades, deputies!

All efforts of our Party and of the Soviet government are aimed at transforming the life of the Soviet people in the sense of the founders of scientific communism as well as of our leader and teacher V. I. Lenin. Everything for Mankind, All in the Name of Mankind, this is the motto of our glorious Communist Party (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 54/1133, l. 2).

The quote shows that the main Soviet narratives of political agitation work were a corner stone of the entire system of the education of the masses. After the early years of the Thaw, characterised by the de-institutionalisation of Stalinism, the Brezhnev period

witnessed the institutionalisation of both a new dominant discourse and its competitors (Hopf 2002, 18). A crucial social factor during this period was the continuing role of the intelligentsia as an agent of the discourse of difference. Cinema, literature and theatre presented alternatives to the Stalinist model of Soviet identity which became known to the world outside the Soviet Union.

On the periphery, such as in Sortavala, the dominant discourse prevailed. Local media reproduced the grand narrative promoted by the political elite. The town's party committee, as the main political agency, continued to practice methods typical of NSM identity production in previous decades. In 1978, for instance, the committee regularly held 'conferences on methodology' for political agitators and educators. One of its members, responsible for political propaganda, gave a presentation on 'The rhetoric of political agitation in labour collectives and ways to improve it.' The KGB's local representative lectured on an 'Explanation of the foreign policy of the CPSU as one of the main directions of mass agitation work' during the same conference (KZ, 24 June 1978).

Theoretically, the terms of building a communist society were being revised in the Brezhnev years. In contrast to Khrushchev's promise of the final victory of communism within the present generation's lifetime, this goal was now to be achieved in a more distant future. Implicitly, this meant that the new type of human being associated with it also faced an uncertain future. The soviets were still seen as 'schools of Soviet democracy' and instruments through which NSM was to be educated. Sortavala's local media reflected this political rhetoric of democracy. In 1971, the town council adopted a resolution On the Work of the Executive Committee of the Town Council of the People's Deputies of Sortavala that called upon the executive committee of all local councils 'to safeguard the democratic principles in their work and to give greater importance to their sessions.' It was also recommended that the permanent commissions and the deputies should make greater efforts (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 62/1222, l. 57). Permanent commissions would have to create a community of social interaction, in the sense explained by David Harvey (Harvey 2000: 194). Public activities meant the involvement of local actors in producing a sense of place. However, the Soviet political system did not favour such efforts. The studied documents show contradictions between meanings, ideas, projects and practices.

Soviet political power and the state authorities were working within a framework of spatial hierarchy. Efforts to improve mechanisms of local economic management led the regional political elite to introduce administrative changes. According to David Harvey's (ibid.) argument about the social production of place, such processes of territorialisation are a result of socio-political action. In the early 1970s, Sortavala's administrative boundaries were extended and included henceforth two settlement (*poselok*) and four rural (*selo*) councils.<sup>9</sup> Official narratives of this changing political identity

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9 In fact, Sortavala experienced several administrative changes in its post-war history. In October 1959, Sortavala, until then directly attached to the regional government of the Republic, was merged with two neighbouring territories of North Ladoga, Lahdenpohja and Pitkäranta, and given the status of a district. This reorganisation was reversed in the early 1970s.



were couched in the phraseology of political rhetoric and legal regulations. The participation of ordinary citizens in the permanent commissions was seen as an approval of socialist democracy.

Another element of this narrative of Soviet political identity were the so-called 'mandates of electors.' The archival material consulted contains tens and even hundreds of such mandates, most of them attached to regular plans for local socio-economic development. In the official discourse, these mandates manifested the democratic nature of the Soviet political system. This rhetoric ignored the absolute power of the CPSU and interpreted the participation of the public and of public organisations in the management of society as one of the main achievements of socialism, thus contributing to shape local identity.

Everyday practices in Sortavala show that these mandates served as instruments to solve socio-economic issues on the local level. The local authorities appealed to the residents' management of socio-economic sectors to improve the low level of trade, the poor quality of public services, poor living conditions, problems encountered in the agricultural sector and other issues. The permanent commissions of the town council arranged meetings in the rural areas surrounding Sortavala to address such questions as the asphaltting of streets, improvements of housing or production shortages in agriculture. In 1972, for instance, a permanent commission reported 'serious shortcomings in cattle-rearing,' noting the poor conditions of cattle-yards and problems with cattle-feeding in the *sovkhos* The Bolshevik (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 67/1260, l. 57).

In the official Soviet discourse, Soviet man was proclaimed a master of life. In reality, involvement of the public in political affairs was largely rhetorical. Even the local nomenklatura had to work within the strictly defined limits imposed by decisions that the party hierarchy had taken. This was even more true of ordinary citizens who acted as volunteers or activists.

During the preparation of a new constitution in the late 1970s, the central power organised so-called 'public debates' of the project, a political manifestation of the identity shifts marked by the new dominant discourse of developed socialism (*razvitoi sotsializm*). While this public debate certainly did not have any impact on the constitutional project defined by the central political elite, it produced renewed interest in the foundations of the Soviet system, particularly through a new vision of the nationalities policy. The draft for the new constitution stated the existence of a new societal unity of the Soviet people, and its ideas were seen as an example for the elaboration of constitutions for the Soviet republics. In Soviet Karelia, the local media contributed to the debate mainly by reproducing the official rhetoric that emphasised the political role of the central Soviet power for development in the region. In an article titled 'We Believe in the Great Future,' an engineer technologist working at the printing house in Sortavala thus wrote:

It is with great interest and approval that the workers of Sortavala are looking at the project of a new constitution for the KASSR, convinced of the glorious path covered by our Karelia together with the entire Soviet people. We see how the work and daily lives of the people have changed. The cultural level of people has risen. An illiterate population on the peripheral area of former Tsarist Russia has been turned into the most avid readers of the world (KZ, 25 May 1978).

Here, Karelia is seen as an integral part of the USSR, its development depending on that of the entire Union. Official narratives often ignored political and economic self-development of the region. The public debate was reduced to a wholesome approval of the new constitution, never raising any real regional or local issues. The shaping of a regional identity was subordinated to the project of constructing a national identity, proof that All-Soviet socio-political processes dominated place-making in Sortavala.

#### ***1-4. Discursive Shifts in the Perestroika Rhetoric***

Gorbachev's reformist discourse was yet another attempt to improve the socialist project. But his new approach to building a Soviet national identity not only referred to Marxism-Leninism but also to universal human values. The policy of glasnost marked the beginning of the de-institutionalisation of NSM. The media received greater freedom to report on problems confronting the Soviet economy and, later on, press freedom extended to political matters. Lastly, the new discourse on Soviet identity was closely tied to Gorbachev's rethinking of foreign policy.

The democratisation characteristic of the perestroika resulted in the involvement of new actors in public life. It was held that the election campaign of spring 1989 for the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union (then the supreme legislative body) should ensure the participation of people from a 'wide democratic social basis.' As a consequence, a new rule stipulated, for example, that a third of the deputies should be elected as representatives of public organisations, such as the Communist Party, Komsomol and the trade unions. This was a radical departure from practices common in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The political rhetoric of the late 1980s also created new forms of 'newspeak.' Newspaper articles were full of new slogans such as the headline 'Perestroika is the Call of Our Time' (*velenie vremeni*). The following quote from a report shows how the secretaries of Sortavala's primary party organisations, during a seminar in June 1986, discussed the way perestroika should affect their organisations:

Acceleration (*uskorenie*) [of social and economic development; A. I.] and perestroika should guide our life and work today. We should direct labour collectives to implement the general policy the Party is pursuing (*general'naia liniia partii*). We should implement acceleration right now in a course of perestroika (*KZ*, 17 June 1986).

Gorbachev and the central elite had indeed called for changes in conducting the work of the Party and of other political organisations. However, the latter had neither the experience nor the will to make independent decisions. They faced uncertainty how to carry out their work on the local level, because until then they had always waited for orders from above.

Numerous examples from the local media illustrate the disorientation perestroika caused in the minds of local Komsomol leaders. One of them admitted how misled political actors were in their attempts to rethink political work. In an article, the first secretary of the town's Komsomol committee noted that the persons in charge of the committee's apparatus did not themselves understand how to break up entrenched views (*lomka ukorenivshikhsia vzgliadov*). At the same time, the author claimed, these tasks required the perfection of work style, forms and methods at the Komsomol (*KZ*,

20 March 1986). Obviously, during the late stages of perestroika, the institutional framework of NSM construction was gradually disappearing because its agents felt completely directionless.

Public narratives were transformed in accordance with the new dominant discourse. As a result, the Komsomol organisations tested new methods of Soviet identity construction. In an article titled 'Perestroika Should Not Be Faked' (*Perestroika, a ne podstroika nad nee*), the secretary of a Komsomol primary organisation at the local furniture and ski combine recognised socio-political certification (*obshchestvenno-politicheskaia ottestatsiia*) as one of these methods, that would allow for an 'effective way to increase the activity of Komsomol members and other young people.' According to the certification procedure, every participant had to carry out Lenin tasks that is specific public work and acceleration targeting the social and economic development of his or her establishment (*KZ*, 17 June 1986). The new narratives, rituals and social practices represented socialisation methods for young people in the local community at this stage of societal development, and it was through these forms of public activities that locality was being reproduced.

All the while, political discourse in the late Soviet period still focussed on improving the system by perfecting existing political institutions. In the late 1980s, the CPSU proclaimed a new course of increasing the political power of councils. The CPSU's Nineteenth Party Conference declared that 'the key direction of political reform is safeguarding the sovereignty of the soviets of people's deputies as a foundation for the socialist state and self-government in this country.'

In contrast to earlier Soviet practice, the narrative constitution of political identity during the late perestroika years brought not only formal but real democratisation to the electoral system, since it was now possible for the first time in Soviet history to choose between several candidates. Pre-election meetings in 1989, which were to nominate candidates for the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union, demonstrated that 'unanimity' was no longer on the agenda. *KZ* commented with enthusiasm on one such meeting taking place at the biggest local factory, SMLK:

There was no unanimous vote during the appointment of candidates. Three candidates have been proposed and discussed at the meeting: Aleksandr S. Dziublik, the director of SMLK; V. Zeziulin, a deputy director, and Vladimir S. Stepanov, the first secretary of the Party's regional committee (*obkom*).

This time, speeches concerning Stepanov were not only positive and laudatory. Many speakers adopted a critical attitude towards him, mentioning problems in the retail sector and shortages of consumer goods for the population. Some participants opposed his candidature. Thus, the long period of formal attitudes and indifference of the electors towards the constitution of state bodies has become a thing of the past. It has been replaced by a conscious approach and active participation in elections on this new basis (*KZ*, 24 January 1989).

Soviet political narratives were indeed dramatically reconfigured during the later years of the perestroika. In the late 1980s, old and new approaches, views and traditions coexisted at the micro-level of political life, too. During pre-election meetings in 1989, for example, the SMLK collective supported the candidature of Vladimir S.

Stepanov, whereas the collective of the *sovkhos* The Bolshevik discussed two candidates, Stepanov and Aleksandr E. Iudov, the leader of a local tenants brigade, and, after a 'democratic discussion,' nominated both men (*KZ*, 3 January 1989). In terms of spatial identity-construction, this meant that local interests and perspectives were now being taken into consideration in political discussions and practices.

Gorbachev and those members of the political elite who supported him wanted to use people's activism to inject enthusiasm into the traditional institutional framework: the Party, the Komsomol and other public organisations. But their plan failed in the end, because these institutions were not ready and there was no real will to change their forms of activity and their methods. A newspaper article titled 'Perestroika in the Komsomol: More Questions than Answers' illustrates this dramatic change in Soviet biographical narratives through the words of an ordinary Komsomol member:

I remember, as schoolchildren and students, we did not like apparatchiks. We could not say this loudly and openly at meetings, but we condemned them among ourselves. We condemned them for their haughtiness and moralism. In the course of perestroika, this haughty view is disappearing. The plenum of the VLKSM's town committee has claimed a new approach: now apparatchiks and ordinary Komsomol members are working together. However, these new norms are hardly implemented in practical work. Komsomol apparatchiks discredit themselves because of their inactivity and unprincipled behaviour (*KZ*, 4 January 1989).

The work of several secretaries of Sortavala's primary Komsomol organisations was criticised in similar terms. Over the last two years, one author noted, five members of the town's Komsomol committee had been expelled from the Party, four of them secretaries of a primary organisation. Therefore, the Komsomol was losing its authority and prestige.

The institutions responsible for NSM identity construction began to lose their importance. The overall number of Komsomol members in the country dropped from 42,000 to 36,000, and the trend continued. In Sortavala, Komsomol organisations lost four hundred members in the late 1980s. Fifteen members were expelled. The female author of the above quoted report attempted to answer the question why Komsomol organisations lost members and found that those who had been asked argued that nobody could give them a reason why they should become a member of the Komsomol (*ibid.*).

Many Komsomol members 'voted' in favour of a permission to 'freely leave' the Komsomol. Political institutions were thus losing their capacity to influence and even initiate people's activities. Their powers gradually shifted towards other political actors, most often informal networks.

In the late 1980s, the local political space experienced dramatic changes. Some local political activists began to believe that the system could be changed and started to criticise the local authorities for their incompetence to carry out their duties. Thus, Aleksandr Iudov, who had finally been elected deputy to the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union, critically pointed out that most electors' mandates (almost 90 per cent) had a 'local character,' that is addressed local needs. In his view, this meant that local councils, or soviets, were therefore unable to fulfil people's primary needs. This clearly represents a shift in the socio-political representation of locality and sense of place.

Political discourse during the later years of perestroika emphasised the importance of grassroots-level political life. In his article 'A Lesson of Democracy,' Aleksandr Iudov stated that as a people's deputy he would work towards the elaboration of a law on local self-government, in which local authorities would be allocated a real share of power. Electors in turn should obtain the right to control councils (*KZ*, 23 March 1989). This statement, made by a local political newcomer, shows a good understanding of what was still a key problem of political life in Russia, namely that local communities continued to lack real power. It also demonstrates that political discourse and media narratives of the late Soviet era were already attempting to shape local territorial identity in new ways.

The deterioration of the social and economic situation resulted in the public adopting a largely negative attitude towards state institutions. In the local context of Sortavala, this political trend reached its apogee in December 1990, when the town council met for its fourth annual session. In his report, V. E. Bogdanov, the chairman of the council, noted the town's grim situation: 'People are not sure whether the work of the local authorities has taken the right direction.' He pointed out that the situation in town depended on 'the tense and uncertain situation of the country as a whole,' explaining that communal services were heavily constrained because of lacking fuel supplies and that the local construction sector was facing increasing problems (*KZ*, 5 January 1991).

In the early 1990s, critical opinions of the political institutions, unheard of in previous decades, became common currency. Deputies were highly critical of the work done by the council's chairman and presidium. As a result of this debate, a decision was taken to abolish the executive committee—a truly historical event. For the first time, deputies openly expressed distrust of the council's leadership, similarly to what was happening on the national level in Moscow. In an interview about the IV Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union, Iudov noted that the Congress has raised the question of lack of confidence in the President of the Soviet Union and that he himself had supported a no-confidence vote, which had however failed to obtain a majority (*KZ*, 16 January 1991).

In practice, the heated debates in the town council ended in changes of the local political personnel. Valery A. Var'ia, a former administration head of the town council, replaced V. E. Dovbnia as chairman of the executive committee. But in a speech made after his election, he pointed out that a decision to abolish the committee would be unconstitutional in the KASSR.

The early 1990s also brought the most visible changes to public narratives. The very foundations of Soviet political rhetoric were being questioned in public debates. During the last months of the Soviet period, in late 1990 and early 1991, the media shifted the focus of their attention towards events in former Soviet national republics. In January 1991, *KZ* reported on the military operations in Lithuania, where Soviet tanks appeared in the streets of Vilnius and a landing force attacked the offices of the republic's radio and TV station and its TV tower, killing Lithuanian civilians in the process. At the centre of the public debate in Sortavala's local newspaper was an article written by one of its readers, 'The (Soviet) Empire Hits Back,' of a clearly anti-Soviet

and anti-Communist character, whose publication obviously was made possible with the support of the newspaper's editorial board. Follow-up articles written by other readers offer evidence, that the publication had found a broad echo within the local community. A group of local residents thus voiced their opinion that the military operations in Lithuania were a threat to 'democracy and freedom' and that 'the future of the country today depends on all of us' (*KZ*, 17 January 1991).

Other local residents, however, supported the central government's policy of 'defending Soviet power' and argued that this was the only way to maintain public order in the Lithuanian republic. So did the local party organisations, which strongly opposed the anti-Soviet views expressed in the pages of the local newspaper. A meeting of the party committee at the SMLK in January 1991 discussing the 'attitude of communists towards the events in Lithuania' thus was reported to have 'condemned the precipitate publication of articles such as the one written by Comrade Kemov,' the author of the initial article. The bureau of the town's party committee was reported to have organised a broader debate of the issue, in which representatives of Sortavala's sixty-five party organisations as well as several military officers, outraged by these anti-military publications, had participated and condemned these anti-Soviet and anti-Communist articles.

In contrast to this, numerous deputies of Sortavala's town council supported the right of the Lithuanian people to decide on its independence, clear evidence that Soviet official discourse was increasingly being overshadowed by new discourses, exemplified by the following reports of speeches made by two deputies.

Already three or four years ago, it was possible to take a decision on Lithuania's independence. At the time the central government could have done it in a bloodless manner. It is hard to believe what is happening now! There is no way to communicate with people through the army. The order to let the combined forces of the militia and the army patrol the streets rings in the last act of the perestroika show. The Army has been turned into an All-Union gendarme (*KZ*, 9 February 1991).

I think it is impossible to use the Army to solve civil issues. It is the right of the Republic of Lithuania and its people to decide whether they should be part of the USSR or not. Moscow should not concern itself with this issue. Only Vilnius, the Lithuanian parliament and the entire population of the republic may decide this (question). My attitude towards the events in Latvia is the same. I believe that Moscow, the Soviet Ministry of Defence and the entire central government, including the President, can be blamed for the bloody events in the Baltic republics (*KZ*, 9 February 1991).

A third deputy even went as far as declaring: 'I believe a dictatorship is coming.' In fact, he predicted only what was going to happen a few months later, in August 1991: 'We are only half a step away from seeing tanks appear in our streets. We are not far from savage reprisals against deputies and ordinary citizens. Our only hope are the people. It is necessary to struggle against a dictatorship' (*ibid.*).

An analysis of the rhetoric deployed in local newspaper articles shows that freedom of speech reached its apogee during the latest stage of the perestroika. On the local level, this period witnessed the most intense criticism of government when compared to both earlier decades and the post-Soviet years of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Parts of the population no longer identified themselves with the official Soviet worldview,

reproducing instead anti-Soviet views of the national press and other national media. Ideological rhetoric in the late 1980s had been contradictory: Soviet ‘newspeak’ was still obligatory, while glasnost led to reformulations of the official language. Thus, in 1986, the secretary of a primary party organisation at a secondary school in Värtsilä wrote an article titled ‘To Raise Patriots of the Homeland’ in which she explained:

Mass public and political events are one form of counter-propaganda. These events make it possible to raise Soviet patriotism among students. We have organised such events, for example a meeting under the banner ‘A Planet without Wars for the Children of the World!’ The event included a competition for producing political posters and the singing of political, military and patriotic songs. Several circles were formed, such as ‘Our Lenin’s Komsomol,’ ‘The Law of Komsomol Life’ and ‘An Introduction for Young People into Communist Morality.’ Communist teachers run these circles. We are looking for new ways to influence the souls of children (*KZ*, 15 March 1986).

Another article headlined ‘The Celebration of the Pioneer Organisation’ informed readers of the local newspaper that the town’s Young Pioneers were celebrating the anniversary of a Pioneer organisation named after Lenin. Students from every school reported the results of their work. According to the article, Pioneer detachments from Secondary School No. 1 had a rich experience of Pioneer self-administration. Pioneer activities took place outside school as well, such as participation in the Revolutionary March. The newspaper reminded readers that the Pioneer movement had received its directions at the XXVII Congress of the CPSU (*KZ*, 25 January 1986). This shows that Soviet rituals of representing locality were still common during the early years of perestroika.

Media narratives of the period contained frequent references to everyday life and the individual lives of people, as well as to family and gender values. Significant attention was also being paid to leisure time activities. Discussions about fashion, music and other interests of young people became quite typical for the period. Soviet identity was not seen as the only model of identity. Values perceived as Western made their appearance in the local newspaper, whereas subjects that were obligatory in earlier decades started to disappear. The *KZ* issue of 22 April 1986 made no mention of the anniversary of Lenin’s birthday, publishing instead an entire page discussing youth culture. Biographical narratives changed as well in these years, as can be seen from the following comment by a 15-year-old girl, reacting to a letter written by another girl:

Imagine a 17-year-old girl who does not like discos and prefers attending a hobby circle (*kruzhok*) instead! She doesn’t like this kind of music. But what does she really want? *Kalinka-Malinka*? [‘Cranberry-Raspberry,’ a reference to the popular nineteenth-century folksong ‘Kalinka’; A. I.] Another reader wrote that boys wearing filets in their hair are imitating Western punks... This is not true. This style has nothing to do with punks. I wear the same filet because it’s fashionable. If you do not believe me, just have a look at *The Fashion* magazine (*KZ*, 22 April 1986).

This is obviously a critique of clichés that could be found in traditional public narratives of Soviet identity. Young people were bored by dull formal Soviet norms and no longer identified with Soviet values. An interest in Western culture that had long been confined to a tiny social underground suddenly found its way into mainstream media. The subculture appeared in headlines: ‘We Are Waiting for Changes.’ Referring

to a hit by the rock band Kino, the article suggested that a club for young people be created in Sortavala (*KZ*, 5 June 1986). In an article titled 'Punks from Our Town,' the journalist Vladimir Mokienko criticised the Komsomol organisations for offering only formalism and boredom and attempted to win over youngsters to 'our' side:

The behaviour of those rock fans who dress and have hair styles like punks is provocative and aggressive. They are getting drunk and then pay a visit to Helylä and get into fights over there. They make money by selling tapes with rock music and fashionable clothes. They try to be different from the 'grey mass.' But these attempts are clumsy and misplaced. Their membership in the Komsomol is limited to paying their dues. The Komsomol organisations offer them only meetings with a boring agenda or *subbotnik* [voluntary community service on Saturdays; A. I.].

These teenagers have no interest in real business during leisure times. What about the following idea: we have to win them over to our side? We ought to find a business for them. Then they will not be punks anymore, they will be ordinary boys. (*KZ*, 17 May 1986)

Criticism of Western mass culture was an essential part of Soviet public narratives. However, Komsomol organisations had, for instance, been attempting to integrate the disco movement into their activities since the late 1970s. As Soviet pop music could not offer good dance music for clubs, disc-jockeys mainly played recordings of Western music. For Komsomol activists, disco-clubs were a means of involving young people in contemporary music culture and informing them about the latest trends in show business. Disc-jockeys were seen as working hand in hand with the Komsomol to take care of the moral and aesthetic education of the young. As Western pop music was at the same time completely absent from TV channels and magazines, this conveyed something of an informal character to discotheques run by the Komsomol, thus bringing a new impetus to the creation of locality and its meanings through expanding spatial imagination. These grassroots-level alternatives to official cultural initiatives can therefore be interpreted as forerunners of identifications prevalent during the perestroika years.

To sum up, the NSM promoted by CPSU ideologues was an archetypal personality with political, moral and other qualities that were thought to become dominant among all citizens of the USSR. For this to happen, all particular identities (ethnic, gender, social, territorial, etc.) would have to be reshaped to achieve this homogeneous Soviet identity. Communist education based on Marxist-Leninist ideology was to be the main tool employed. According to the official public narrative, stated for example in the first Soviet constitution, a society without antagonist class interests had already been built in the 1930s. Class struggle could only exist in capitalist countries. The state border therefore symbolised a fault line of the struggle that opposed two radically different worlds. As a border town, Sortavala was in the vanguard of this struggle, and its geographical position was one of the main socio-political facets that contributed to its sense of place during the post-war decades, until this spatial identity dramatically changed in the late perestroika years.

Politically, all Soviet citizens ought to have identified themselves with the Communist Party's policies. Articulating and reproducing the official discourses and nar-



ratives produced by the political elite at the highest level was obligatory during the entire Soviet period. At the same time, the educational and cultural development of the population increasingly came to be seen as contradictory with the shortcomings of the country's socio-economic system. Propaganda which stressed the achievements of socialism was confronted with dissatisfaction about the lack of consumer goods in the shops, the low quality of services etc. To many young people, the Western way of life looked more attractive. The more liberal the regime became, the more these contradictions in public narratives and social practices became apparent.

As shown above, the erosion of the Stalinist model of NSM began right after the tyrant's death. Nonetheless, the ambition of creating a new kind of human being was not abandoned. The more recent concept of developed socialism, prevalent in the late 1970s, characteristically produced a discourse that emphasised the new historical social unity of the Soviet people, whose creation was stated to be a new stage in constructing NSM. To implement this goal of creating a communist society, the CPSU defined three main fields of indispensable societal improvement: politics, economics and human personality. Changes of the latter were to be achieved through 'complex education,' a concept specific of the late 1960s and 1970s.

All these ideological mechanisms were only gradually disappearing in the late 1980s, at the height of perestroika. The political rhetoric of local actors in Sortavala echoed the situation in the rest of the Soviet Union. Many residents no longer identified themselves with the Party's policies, some of them even adopting an anti-Soviet stance. While the Communist Party continued to promote its discourse in the media, new forms of political representation were emerging. The formerly monolithic Soviet identity produced in official discourses became a sort of hybrid identity that included both old and new components.

## **2. PATRIOTIC EDUCATION, PARAMILITARY TRAINING AND PEOPLE'S PATROLS: DEFENDING THE SOCIALIST MOTHERLAND**

Military themes were a key element of Soviet identity politics and place-making in Sortavala. Military discourses and practices were, of course, present in many spheres of Soviet everyday life, but were even more obvious in a garrison town located near the Soviet state border, where people wearing the uniform of the Soviet Army or the Border Troops were a common feature of the urban landscape.<sup>10</sup> A division of the 6th Army was stationed in Sortavala<sup>11</sup> and only left in 2001 (*Ladoga*, 2 March 2001; Izotov

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10 A source of particular interest is the weblog run by former border guards that have served in the North Ladoga area during the Soviet post-war period (see: URL Odnoklassniki.ru web-page 'My iz Sortavala'/'We are from Sortavala'). Its users often publish photographs showing them in uniform.

11 The 6th Army (see e.g. Feskov et al. eds. 2004) was a part of Leningrad Military District (1960–1998). Headquarter of the Army located in Petrozavodsk before it was finally disbanded in a course of the Military reform in 1998 (Boiko, *Karelia* 4.04.2002). The 6th Army listed the 111th Motor Rifle Division, of which the 185th Motorised Rifle Regiment stationed in Sortavala, and several other military units stationed in Lahdenpohja.

2001: 97). Access to certain areas, especially near the border, was heavily restricted, and some areas are still closed to civilians today. The mission of the Border Troops was to prevent the unauthorised entry of foreigners and to keep Soviet citizens from leaving the country illegally.<sup>12</sup> Strips along the state border, defended with anti-vehicle obstacles, fences and barbed wire, clearly demarcated the border patrolled by the Border Troops (see Ezhukov 2008: 12).

Militarisation reinforced Sortavala's 'Sovietness' (Izotov 2008: 59–60; Izotov 2013: 172). Of particular importance in this respect was the military and patriotic education of the residents organised by various public organisations, foremost among them the DOSAAF, the Voluntary Society of Assistance to the Army, the Air Force and the Navy (see below for more information). But the subject was widely discussed in other contexts, as shown by the example of a local public organisation responsible for culture and education that debated the question in 1965 within the framework of mass political work with students and of political education with the teachers of the local musical schools (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 44/1006, l. 4).

Military subjects and border issues in particular were also widely present in the official discourse, often through the prism of local representations. Military rhetoric, generally accompanied by communist rhetoric and slogans, mostly made its appearance in speeches and newspaper articles by officials of the military commissariat (*voenkomat*, short for *voennye komissariaty*).<sup>13</sup> The ideological significance of military activities could look back on a long tradition starting in the post-revolutionary period and was of crucial importance during the Cold War. Military narratives were thus an integral part of Soviet identity politics and military or paramilitary practices a major feature of everyday life.

Shortly after the Second World War, every employed resident of Sortavala was thus compulsorily instructed in air-defence techniques, training being provided by the Osoaviakhim (1927–1948), a predecessor organisation of DOSAAF. Although nominally a public organisation, it was under strict state control. Archival evidence from Sortavala shows that the local authorities regularly judged this military training to be insufficient. In 1946, the town's executive committee, for example, expressed its dissatisfaction that the number of individuals trained by the Osoaviakhim had not reached the numbers initially planned for of 1500 persons (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/59, l. 9).

After 1948, DOSAAF became responsible for military education and training, the latter often in the form of paramilitary sports. Every local establishment had its own DOSAAF branch. The activities of DOSAAF primary organisations were being controlled in the same way as the work of other public organisations described above.

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12 Overall, the numbers of Border Troops varied between 100,000 and 250,000 in Soviet times. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many troop members left the country and numbers decreased by about one third (Ezhukov 2008; online source, p. 3).

13 Military commissariats (*voenkomat*), of which there were some 4000 nation-wide, existed at every administrative level (republic, oblast, *raion*, municipality) and were responsible for military affairs, such as conscription, veterans and pre-military training. At the age of seventeen, every male citizen had to report to a *voenkomat* for conscription.

In 1960, at the 4th Conference of the Society's local branch, it was stressed that defence work and sports activities of the masses had to be perfected. Investigation into the activities of the local branch of Värtsilä's metallurgic factory revealed that every shop there had its own group and that overall 900 employees participated in the organisation, 136 of them party members and 287 Komsomol members. In the manner typical of Soviet self-criticism, the head of the local branch admitted that not enough young people were involved in technical military training and that political agitation work among the members was lacking (*KZ*, 7 January 1960). Even after disaffection of the population grew during the Brezhnev era, especially in the 1970s, the Soviet identity of the homeland defender continued to be a prominent feature of media discourses and everyday practices in Sortavala, where paramilitary training by DOSAAF was still common for local residents.

In early 1978, *KZ* reported on a 'Week of the Letter,' during which the residents were encouraged to correspond with fellow townsmen accomplishing their military service (*KZ*, 31 January 1978). In February, the local DOSAAF branch organised a rifle-shooting competition dedicated to the 60th Anniversary of the Soviet Armed Forces during a 'Month of Mass Defensive Work,' in which nineteen teams were reported to have taken part (*KZ*, 23 February 1978). Among the main objectives of the event, which took place under the motto 'The Army—A Child of the People' (*Armiia—detishche naroda*), was the commemoration of the 'heroic traditions of the Armed Forces of the USSR.' The programme also included a Winter Olympics competition for pre-prescription youths (*«zimniaia spartakiada» doprizyvnoi molodezhi*), a youths relay race Sortavala–Värtsilä–Sortavala and a paramilitary sports event named 'The Ski-Track of Antikainen,' which consisted of a ski march between Sortavala and Värtsilä organised in memory of an historical raid the Reds had accomplished during the civil war in Karelia.<sup>14</sup>

In the field of education, the Soviet approach was characterised by the production of visual imagery and positive examples. In addition to compulsory classes in paramilitary training (*voennaia podgotovka*), educational efforts were targeted at raising patriotic sentiments among the children, often through popularised presentations of heroic battles fought during the Second World War. The aim was to turn every schoolboy into a defender of the homeland, a key figure in patriotic narratives and Soviet identity construction.

Material from the local media shows that it was the primary party organisations that were given this task. In 1966, for instance, teachers who were also party members suggested establishing a patriotic club called 'For the Motherland' at Sortavala's School No. 3, which was to write the history of the 'heroic ways' in which the 168th Motor Rifle Division had for forty-five days defended 'our Sortavala territory against the enemy.' This campaign also led to the renaming of Polevaia Street after A. L. Bondarev, the commander-in-chief of that division. Several years later, the bureau of the Komsomol district committee decided to name the Pioneer squad (*druzhina*) at the same school after Bondarev, a Hero of the Soviet Union:

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14 Toivo Antikainen, a Finnish social-democrat, took part in the civil war on the side of the Reds and later emigrated to the Soviet Union.

Hundreds of boys and girls are competing for the honour to call themselves *bondarevtsy*. They want to resemble the soldiers of the 168th Division. Older pupils are giving lectures on 'the heroic act of the division, which accomplished a 127-km-ski-raid in the enemy's rear during the Finnish campaign' (*KZ*, 28 January 1969).

Patriotic narratives were among the cornerstones of Soviet identity politics. Activities of this kind continued to be practiced at Sortavala's School No. 3 until the very end of the Soviet era. In 1986, at the beginning of perestroika, the educator responsible for organising leisure activities at the school, in an article wrote under the headline 'Our Debt to the Fatherland': 'The fundamental tasks of the pupils' military and patriotic education are preparation for the military service in the Armed Forces and the defence of the Motherland, as well as teaching them to love the Soviet Army.' The author emphasised that the system of military education at School No. 3 had been adapted to the respective age of pupils. As early as the first and second grade, they were being introduced to the feats of arms accomplished by the Heroes of the Civil War, while third- and fourth-grade pupils were being taught about the Great Patriotic War.

In fact, patriotic education already started in nursery schools. In an article titled 'To educate young patriots,' a preschool educator working at Nursery School No. 1 stressed that the methods employed were natural, since 'children always like military games,' and that family and nursery schools both had a share in this important task. With every year passing, she continued, children were becoming more aware of the idea that the Motherland and the Soviet Army were 'standing for peace and the people's happiness.' Among the activities mentioned were lectures and meetings with veterans of the Second World War, the latter with the intention to produce the image of a good and brave Soviet Army soldier who is ready to defend the homeland (*KZ*, 13 June 1978).

Young people were instructed within the framework of the Pioneer organisation. In the 1970s, schools of the KASSR organised an annual ski ride, 'The Ski-track of Antikainen' (see also above), which was particularly popular in the northern districts, where a museum for the 'legendary hero' Toivo Antikainen still exists today. In Sortavala, school children participated each year in a similar event. *KZ* highlighted the success of the Ladoga detachment from School No. 3 during one of these 'military sports competition' (*KZ*, 20 June 1978).

As Sortavala was located on the shore of Lake Ladoga, naval themes, such as basic knowledge about navigation, played a central part in paramilitary and patriotic education. In the late 1960, a Club of Young Sailors was established at the Station of Young Technicians under the leadership of the captain of a training ship, the *Border Guardian Kaimanov*. In summer, naval patrols on the lake were part of the training; in winter fifty schoolboys learned the basics of navigation on it (*KZ*, 15 June 1978).

In the 1970s, paramilitary training and military education also took place during summer internships at local enterprises. In summer 1978, a 'defence sport camp' named 'The Patriot' thus was organised on the grounds of a local construction company, PMK-3. According to a decision taken by the bureau of the Komsomol district committee and the town council's executive committee, the camp was to accommodate

fifty youngsters and offer a programme combining work with patriotic paramilitary training. The local branch of The Knowledge society (*obshchestvo «Znanie»*), another Soviet public organisation, was given the responsibility for lectures on patriotic and military themes during the summer camp (*KZ*, 24 May 1978).

The public commemoration of the military past was aimed at consolidating the local community and thus played a significant role in narratives intended to create a local identity. A typical phenomenon of the 1970s were clubs dedicated to the Great Patriotic War. Members of the club Raid (*Poisk*) undertook historical research on the war, trying to collect new information on military operations or to identify the names of soldiers who had participated in them (*KZ*, 28 October 1978). The same year, the local newspaper reported on the foundation of a new club, Courage (*Muzhestvo*), at the local House of Culture, whose declared goal was to promote patriotic education (*KZ*, 14 February 1978).

Paramilitary sports games, called The Eaglet (*Orlenok*), were another prominent feature of patriotic education for the young in the 1970s. Widely popular across the country, the games were introduced in Sortavala upon the initiative of the Komsomol town committee. They included a competition for producing the best hand-produced wall newspaper or 'battle sheet' (*boevoi listok*),<sup>15</sup> several sports competitions, such as ski rides to famous battle sites, and meetings with war veterans. Part of the programme was a film festival organised under the title 'Born in October,' where the 'best films' dedicated to the Soviet Army were shown (*KZ*, 23 March 1978). The author, who personally participated in these games along with his schoolmates, has to admit that contrary to many other activities organised by the Pioneers or the Komsomol, these games were interesting and exciting for teenagers. Soviet citizens born in the 1950s and 1960s were raised watching films about the Great Patriotic War, and spontaneous war games in backyards were highly popular among kids. Generally, children and young people were strongly influenced by these literary, cinematographic and other cultural productions promoted by the Soviet authorities.

For the young, paramilitary training only ended with conscription. In the 1960s and 1970s, it usually was organised at the work place. In 1968, for example, 117 employees under the age of eighteen participated in such training at the local Sewing Combine (*Shveinoe ob"edinenie*). The weekly programme included drill, studying the field manual (*ustav*) and firing practice, as well as technical instruction into the mechanics of a motorcycle. The instructors were often former soldiers (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 51/1093, l. 66).

Paramilitary activities, such as 'research work' (*poiskovaia rabota*) on the history of the Second World War, continued during the perestroika years. In 1986, for example, the local newspaper reported on research carried out by a detachment of

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15 Combat sheets, introduced by the Soviet armed forces after the Second World War, are handcrafted wallpapers that describe various aspects of soldiers' lives and military training and comment, positively or critically, on military life within a division. Subsequently, they were adopted by civilian collectives including at schools to preserve a record of the 'battles' fought during paramilitary training.

schoolchildren, called *The Flame*, in a border settlement near Värtsilä. The article, titled 'The Motherland Begins Here,' also informed readers that the students had created a room dedicated to 'military glory' at the school. The title can be interpreted as a reference to both the political frontier (i.e. the Finnish-Russian state border) and the symbolic boundary of Soviet identity. Meetings with war veterans were among the most popular activities. Students also paid an annual visit to an anonymous war grave located on the settlement's territory, taking care of it and supplying flowers (KZ, 22 February 1986).

In June 1986, Sortavala's Agricultural School (*Selkhoztekhnikum*) ended the sowing period with a military and patriotic celebration, which took place at the town stadium. The programme included competitions in athletic and primary military disciplines, as well as a performance by amateur artists (KZ, 26 June 1986). At a time when the transformation processes initiated by Gorbachev were at their very beginning, older social-political practices and forms of socialisation were still common. In spring 1986, the Pioneers' annual paramilitary sports games Zarnitsa [Summer Lightning], a variation on the previously mentioned 'Eaglet,' still took place along the same lines as in the 1970s. The local newspaper called the final parade of the event, which took place on Victory Day (9 May), 'A Combat Review of the Best Young Fighting Units of Town' (*boevoi smotr luchshikh iunarmeiskikh otriadov*). The programme included sports competitions and a test on traffic law (KZ, 14 May 1986).

Throughout the Soviet period, a military dimension was thus omnipresent in Sortavala everyday life, reinforced by the town's status as a garrison town. In the tense world of the Cold War with its frequent crises (such as the Cuba crisis), even a small locality like Sortavala was represented as being part of the battlefield, where everybody was meant to be a defender of the homeland. Essentially, Soviet man was considered a fighter, or warrior, an aspect notably present in newspaper rhetoric. But military metaphors extended well into other spheres of life, and the official discourse regularly depicted social life in general as a battle. Militarisation and peaceful life thus coexisted in the Soviet imagined community, impressing their stamp on the local identity.

### 3. THE ROLE OF CENSORSHIP IN SOVIET IDENTITY POLITICS

In totalitarian and authoritarian societies, the media are tightly controlled by the ruling political elite. It is therefore no wonder that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union paid great attention to them, and in particular to print publications, and early on established institutions of censorship. The workings of censorship were complex and permeated the entire political and social space. As Boris Kagarlitsky has pointed out, 'formally, the censor's functions are performed by "Glavlit," but they are also being carried out by editorial boards themselves' (Kagarlitsky 1989: 103). To these two, a third form of censorship must be added according to Kagarlitsky, which resulted from the state's declaration that art must be accessible to the masses. For this reason, it was the nomenklatura, or ruling elite that provided literature and other arts with aesthetic concepts that became general norms (ibid.: 105–109).

Censorship was part of the institutional framework promoting NSM. The documents produced by Glavlit KFSSR,<sup>16</sup> later Oblit KASSR, show how important censorship was in the Soviet period in general and during Stalin's regime in particular, because of the latter's sharply dichotomous conception of identity and its fear of difference, resulting in constant attempts to identify enemies inside and outside the Soviet Union. A frequent topic of Glavlit KFSSR's meetings were ideological publications that had to be pulped because of misprints. The same subject was again on the agenda in 1946, in a report on the activity of printing houses, with Sortavala's printing establishment being cited as one of the worst examples: 15,000 out of 20,000 copies of Stalin's *The Questions of Leninism* and 10,000 out of 15,000 copies of Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* had to be destroyed. *Gosizdat*, the State Publishing House responsible for all matters related to printing, explained the disaster by evoking technical problems and the loose labour discipline. The report's authors advocated that decisive measures be taken for Sortavala's publishing house; otherwise, further printing there would be impossible (f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2/5, l. 6 and 7).

The archival document 'Report on the work of the State Publishing House of the KFSSR in 1946' cites specific instances where the State Publishing House of Karelia permitted ideological defects. It states, for example, that 'the publishing house committed gross errors, which resulted in the publication of the Vasilii G. Bazanov's book *Behind Barbed Wire*.<sup>17</sup> The book was withdrawn and destroyed by the General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the Council of Ministers of the USSR (Glavlit).' 'Also in the textbook on literature for the VII tutorial class (author Topias Huttari<sup>18</sup>), the clearly defective poem of Armas Äikiä (in the archive document—Армас Эйкия)<sup>19</sup> was published due to the lack of vigilance' (f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2/15, l. 3).

The report noted that at the meeting of all editorial boards of the publishing house these instances of 'ideological defects' in the light of the Resolution of the Central

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16 Glavlit KFSSR was short for General Administration Dealing with the Protection of Military and State Secrets in the Printing Industry, attached to the Council of Ministers of the KFSSR (*Glavnoe upravlenie po okhrane voennykh i gosudarstvennykh tain v pechati pri Sovete ministrov Karelo-Finskoi SSR*).

17 Bazanov (1945). V. G. Bazanov (1911–1981) was a Soviet literary critic and folklorist, a specialist in Russian literature of 19th century. He worked as Head of the Karelian State Pedagogical Institute in Petrozavodsk (1934–1940). He also was Head of the Department of Folklore at the Karelian Research Institute and the founder and first Dean (1940–1948) of historical-philological Faculty of the Karelo-Finnish State University (PetrGu today).

18 Topias Huttari (1907–1953) was a Finnish-speaking Soviet poet and writer. He is considered as one of the founders of Karelian national literature and was one of the organizers of the Union of the Karelian writers.

19 Armas Äikiä (1904–1965) was a Finnish poet, writer, journalist and politician. From the late 1930s onwards, he belonged to the leadership of the Finnish Communist Party (SKP). His writings were under strong influence of Soviet-type Marxist-Leninist dogmatism. He immigrated to the Soviet Union in 1935. In 1940, Äikiä became a chairman of the Union of Writers of the KFSSR. He wrote the lyrics of the KFSSR Anthem. Äikiä returned to Finland in 1947, but was a Soviet citizen until the end of his life.

Committee of VKP (b) on the Leningrad journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* (1948) were discussed. It was also noted that the publishing house's editorial portfolio was revised and a number of translations of the works with a low artistic standards were removed from production (cf. Ylikangas 2004). Some of the manuscripts were returned to the authors for the reworking. In particular, V. Chekhov's<sup>20</sup> novel *On the Right Flank* and poems by Äikiä were removed from production. When Äikiä corrected his poems, they again came into production (ibid.: l. 3–4).

The Republic's authorities also closely scrutinised the establishment because it printed publications in Finnish. The same report explained that 'taking into account that part of the Republic's territory had been occupied by the enemy and that some libraries had been destroyed, *Gosizdat* plans to produce mass editions of the Marxist-Leninist classics' (f. R-1051, op. 1, d. 2/5, l. 21), literature that was to play a key role in shaping NSM.

But censorship extended to the dissemination of all kinds of information. Access to it was the privilege of carefully selected citizens who had demonstrated their loyalty to the ruling power. In this manner, the political elite attempted to create a human being that identified with everything Soviet and abandoned anything related to the capitalist West. However, the main official goal claimed for censorship was the protection of state and military secrets in the face of the enemy. As a border district, Sortavala was subject to particularly strict controls.

In Karelia, Glavlit (and later Oblit) was also in charge of 'cleaning' the shelves of libraries and bookstores of 'prohibited' literature. Publishing permits for literary publications were tightly regulated by a set of precise rules and instructions, the so-called 'common rules,' adopted by central censorship institutions and obligatory for the entire country. Censors organised meetings with representatives from the printing industry, newspapers and publishing houses to explain and comment these rules.

In the 1950s, there was a resident censor in Sortavala who, together with her colleague in the Segezha district, controlled 434 issues of local and mass newspapers (introducing twenty-nine cuts in 1957, for example). Decisions were taken on the basis of a document titled 'The List of information forbidden for publication in district, municipal, large-circulation newspapers and radio programmes,' but censors also personally raised related issues with editors. In 1957, thirty-five titles on the catalogue of local publishing houses had still not received an official license, either because their authors had not yet been rehabilitated or because they were literary publications lacking any 'historic or scientific merit' (f. R-757, op. 4, d. 1/1, l. 5 and 6).

In 1964, Ekaterina E. Turpeinen, the local censor, reported to Oblit that she controlled six issues each week: four of the district newspaper *KZ* and the issues of two large-circulation weeklies, *Communist Labour* (*Za kommunisticheskii trud*) published by a pulp-and-paper combine in Läskelä and *Glory to Labour* (*Slava trudu*) published by a pulp-and-paper factory in Pitkäranta. In addition, Turpeinen monitored twice a

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20 Viktor Chekhov (1901–1988) was a Soviet writer. He participated WWII on the Karelian front. Based on this experience, he wrote a novel *On the Right Flank* (Part 1 was written in 1946–47, Part 2 written in 1950). From 1952 onwards, he lived in Volgograd.



week local radio programmes. The year before, she had checked 169 issues of the district newspaper (f. R-757, op. 4C, d. 2/20, l. 38).

Cutting off Soviet citizens from the influence of capitalist foreigners remained important even during the years of the Thaw. In the early 1960s, Turpeinen censored two exhibitions—one on agriculture and the other of paintings—and inspected 85 local libraries. As a result, 378 copies of forbidden or outdated books were withdrawn from the shelves. On average, she paid five annual visits to the Sortavala publishing house (eight in 1964). Among other things, she informed the CPSU town committee that a book printed there and bearing the censor's stamp had been sent to a bookshop. The case was hotly debated at a meeting convened by the committee's bureau, to which a director, a chief engineer and a secretary of the primary party organisation of the publishing house had been invited (f. R-757, op. 4C, d. 2/20, l. 39).

As the media were reproducing almost exclusively the official discourse and its dominant narrative during most of the Soviet period and any other information was being censored, many ordinary citizens, but members of the intelligentsia in particular, were rather sceptical of these official sources of information. Until the 1970s, most of them turned to alternatives, such as the Russian-language broadcasting services of the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Freedom and others. After Stalin's death, Soviet mass media gradually underwent changes and a certain freedom of expression from the Khrushchev period survived during the more conservative Brezhnev era (see above), before Gorbachev's perestroika led to a significant liberalisation. While the Stalinist system had served the political purpose of reinforcing national identity at the expense of others, the perestroika years saw the reappearance of individual counter-memories that contradicted the earlier master narrative and production of national myths (Gero-vich 2008: 223).

#### **4. THE CHANGING GEOPOLITICS OF BORDER DISCOURSES**

During most of the post-war period, local geopolitical visions and narratives were dominated by the global geopolitical regime of the time. The Cold War rhetoric produced by the central elite was reproduced in the local context. Its grand narratives of a struggle between two radically different socio-economic and ideological systems produced in particular the identity of the defender of the holy socialist Motherland described above, which prevailed over other elements of local identity. Borders were invested with a symbolic meaning that reflected this view, such as in the metaphor of an 'iron curtain.' Finland, for example, was not seen so much as a neighbour than as a part of the capitalist world, which was accused of being expansionist and militaristic. In the Soviet discourse, the militarised border near Sortavala thus owed its existence to threats held to be emanating from the West.

The power of symbols on which Soviet discourse was based (Medvedev 1994) is especially obvious when it comes to the Soviet state border with the West. Beyond it lay hostile imperialist countries closely identified with the threat of war. In Soviet mass propaganda, but also in other forms of politicised discourses, such as art, the state border had therefore acquired a sacred meaning: the border defended the 'sacred

boundaries of the Motherland' (Gusseinov 1999). Sortavala's 'border mentality' was conditioned by this powerful symbolism, and the notion of a sacred border was central to the self-image of Sortavala's residents (Izotov 2013: 172).

This symbolic role of the state border was also present in popular culture. In a manner typical of the period's patriotic sentiments and, more generally, of the Russian tradition, the wartime song *Katiusha*, whose lyrics were composed by Mikhail Isakovskii, is about a girl waiting for her boyfriend, a border guard, whom she asks to preserve the Motherland just as she preserves their love (*Pust' on zemliu berezhet rodnuiu, a liubov' Katiusha sberezhet*). Similar expressions can be found in Sortavala, where the local newspaper published the Russian translation of a poem by the Finnish-speaking poet Ilmari Saarinen, 'The Letter' that evokes a border guard's emotions and patriotic feelings (KZ, 8 March 1960).

Official rhetoric and phraseology created a whole body of *novoiiaz*, as some scholars named it after George Orwell's 'newspeak' (see Zemskaja 1996), giving rise to neologisms such as 'impenetrable borders.' Official clichés thus entered everyday language, although in some cases they were ridiculed in works of art, especially songs. The famous poet-singer Bulat Okudzhava, for instance, used the ideological cliché of a 'border under lock and key' in one of his songs (see Boiko 2000) that combined public and biographical narratives.

#### **4-1. Local Border Discourses**

In contrast to the Moscow citizen who, in Okudzhava's imagination, 'walks by the border under lock and key,' residents of Sortavala rarely had a chance to even see the state border, which was literally and figuratively located in a closed zone. In newspaper articles and official documents written between 1940 and the early 1950s, the state border is practically invisible. Somebody reading only these texts would hardly realise that they were produced in a completely militarised closed border town, populated by a significant number of soldiers and border guards. In later years, references to the border turn sometimes up in unexpected places. Thus, a meeting on economic issues held in the late 1960s contains the following statement: 'The common interests of our multinational state in defending our borders form the basis of the economic development in the USSR' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/85, l. 23).

In Soviet times, many local residents were involved in activities linked to the defence of the state border. In the official discourse, they were portrayed as voluntary border guards. There existed close ties between Border Troops units and local schools, some of them going back to 1946 and 1947 (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/57, l. 7). Military officers often gave lectures, informing students about their duty to defend the border and explaining how they could assist the border guards' work.

Similarly, labour collectives at local establishments were called upon to assist the Border Troops. A study of the role of people's patrols (*DND*, short for *Dobrovol'naia narodnaia druzhina*) in Soviet discourse has shown how citizens were gradually drawn into taking part in this form of social control (Kharkhordin 1999: 285–286). In the border area, this led to the definition of special tasks. In 1971, for instance, it was reported that 280 residents participated in people's patrols at the bor-

der settlement of Värtsilä and provided intensive assistance to the border guards (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 67/1260, l. 51).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the liberalisation of the regime under Khrushchev led to the emergence of a new official discourse. In line with the idea that the establishment of a communist society was imminent, approaches to educate the masses (*vospitanie*) underwent slight changes. Henceforth it was emphasised that this education should be based on the ‘moral code of builders of communism’ whose main task was the ‘education of man (as a member) of communist society.’ It was during this period that the term ‘border town’ made its appearance in official speeches. To cite but one example from 1964: ‘Comrades, Deputies! Our border town is fighting in the name of high labour productivity, the maintenance of order and a high standard of domestic culture’ (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 44/1005, l. 48).

The liberalisation also meant that local values and a local sense of place could be represented through the opinions of ordinary citizens. In 1960, *KZ* thus published letters from local readers, reacting to the projected reduction of Soviet troops. The author of one of them, an employee at the Värtsilä metallurgic works, expressed his confidence by claiming that ‘our borders will still be safe after this measure’ (‘It’s wonderful!’ *KZ*, 19 January 1960).

The era of Stagnation, under Brezhnev, was marked by plans to develop the North Ladoga territory, when the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR, in the early 1970s, started to pay special attention to the Finnish-Russian borderlands by adopting a resolution in favour of the social and economic development of territories in Karelia and Leningrad Oblast ‘that used to belong to Finland.’ This was followed by a similar resolution passed by the Council of Ministers of the USSR, On Measures for the Further Development and Public Services in the Settlements of the Border Districts of the Karelian ASSR (*O merakh po dal’neishemu razvitiuu i blagoustroistvu naseleennykh punktov pogranichnykh raionov Karel’skoi ASSR*), which referred to the further development of local industries and the construction or reconstruction of cultural institutions. However, the implementation of this programme faced the typical hurdles of that period and only partly achieved its aims. As a speaker during a meeting of the local administration noted: ‘According to the resolution on the development of the North Ladoga region, the implementation of public services and infrastructure should have been achieved by 1980. In fact, we are way behind the schedule. Our construction firms do not have the capacity to solve the problem... We have funds in the budget for these purposes but lack the labour force to carry out our plans’ (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 78/1347, l. 37).

Issues of border security were a regular feature in official documents. During the same meeting, attention was also drawn to a speech made by A. A. Kochetov, the chairman of the Karelian Republic’s Council of Ministers, who had called for increased political vigilance in the border area and expressed his opinion on the necessity of strengthening patronage ties (*shefske sviazi*) between the collectives of local establishments and army units (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 78/1347, l. 38).

In official discourses on the education of the Soviet people, references to the principles of ‘vigilance’ were recurrent and obligatory, as witnessed by the rhetoric employed by one of the local deputies, the military commissar of the town: ‘The CPSU

takes care of the education of the Soviet people in terms of their readiness to defend the great achievements of socialism. Our major aim is to educate young people and students so that they will be ready to discharge their duty as defenders of the Motherland' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 78/1350, l. 4–5). Strengthening the ties between civilians and the military as well as social networks englobing both was held to be a major aim in public narratives and practices, expressed in the omnipresent motto 'The People and the Army are indivisible.' This led, for example, to the establishment of units of The Young Friends of Border Guards. In 1969, the local newspaper thus reported that participation in the military game Zarnitsa-69 was not confined to the town but also extended to small settlements, citing the 'battle' of two such units, recruited among the schoolchildren of Rantala and Taunan, who used self-made automatic guns made of wood (*KZ*, 4 February 1969).

Soviet symbols were used until the very end of this era to promote the people's defence of the border. One was the Red Banner, passed from collective to collective to reward activism in this field. In 1974, the regional committee of the CPSU and the KSFR's Council of Ministers thus passed a resolution that, in the *noviaz* typical of the period, awarded the Red Banner to Unit 2121 of the Border Troops stationed in Sortavala for the 'good results in the defence of the state border, good military and political training, strengthening military discipline (and) successful participation in the socialist competition for carrying out the resolution of the XXIV Congress of the CPSU' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 79/1352, l. 4).

The local authorities, too, regularly participated in these efforts to promote the identity of the homeland defender. In the 1970s, the town council organised Deputy's Days, during which local deputies attended seminars and courses, where border issues were a frequent subject. One such seminar was dedicated to the theme 'Tasks of deputies working with people in the border area' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 79/1352, l. 13). Sortavala's border town status also appeared in a variety of administrative contexts. In 1971, for example, the local Commission for Youth Affairs expressed concerns about juvenile delinquency and stated the necessity of improving the education of young people, because Sortavala 'is located in the border zone' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 64/1232, l. 66).

Ties between the military and the civilian administration were not one-way affairs, particularly in the early Soviet times, when the troops often extended their assistance to the local administration. Sortavala's border guards helped, for example, redirect energy supplies for the town from the electric power station at Hämäkoski, then in disrepair, to the hydroelectric station at Harlu. In 1945, they were involved in plans to collect scrap iron (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/2, l. 2 and 1/4, l. 2).

At the time, the administrative authorities also laid down detailed rules related to the territorialisation of the border area. As early as March 1945, the Karelian government, that is the Soviet of People's Commissars of the KFSSR, passed the resolution Of a Regime for the Prohibited Border Zone in the KFSSR, which established an 800-metre-wide border strip (*polosa*) and a 22-kilometre-wide border zone and regulated access to them as well as defined rules for those living within the border zone. Everybody wishing to enter the area had to obtain a permit from the local militia and had to register with the NKVD border guards or the local Soviet administration upon arrival. Access

to the border strip was limited to NKVD border guards. Any construction work, including on local roads, in the border area required approval by a commander of the Border Troops. Certain outdoor activities, such as hunting or fishing, were tightly regulated as well, even pigeon-breeding, a popular hobby, was not permitted at the time. Taking photographs or filming was strictly forbidden without prior authorisation (f. R-2203, op. 1, d 1/5, l. 67–70).

It was during the Khrushchev period that ordinary residents, in line with the official ideology, came to be more closely involved in border protection. New regulations in the form of The Statute on the Protection of the State Border, previously adopted through a decree (*ukaz*) of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, were published on 5 August 1960. The border strip and border zone remained in place, as did strict rules regulating entry of the area, residency and citizens' movements within the border zone. The passport regime was indeed high on the agenda. The border regime was under the control of the militia and border guard units, but the local administrations as well as the managers of local establishments were charged with taking prompt action in case of any infraction and to safeguard the local population's support of the border regime (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 38/936).

Documents from the Sortavala's municipal archives offer, indeed, evidence that this participation was more than rhetorical. In a report to the executive committee of the town council, a chairman of the commission for Socialist Law and Public Order, informed the meeting that local residents and voluntary patrols (DND) played a significant role in protecting the border, mentioning in particular the people's patrol at Värtsilä. A notable number of people infringing the border regime and trespassers were said to have been identified and captured because they had been signalled by these patrols. The speaker evoked, for instance, a DND member at the *sovkhos Zastava* [The Frontier Post] personally arresting a trespasser, who was later awarded a medal 'for extraordinary participation in the protection of the state border' (*Za otlichie v okhrane gosudarstvennoi granitsy*). Due to information offered by another DND member, yet another trespasser was reported to have been arrested.

At the same time, officials apparently did not always respect regulations of the border regime. According to the chairman quoted, 'organisational errors lead to the entry of "undesirable individuals" into the forbidden zone, make it easy to trespass at the state border and undermine public order in the town and the area.' Another report mentioned that individuals without proper permission from the militia officers or without the required documentation (*neformennye spravki*) and telegrams from relatives living in Sortavala had succeeded in entering the forbidden zone. It was recommended that these people should be deported from the border zone, but the author also noted that infringers often had big families, which would make expulsion difficult. Documents from the late 1950s and early 1960s, indeed, refer to residents without a job, who are drunkards and of whom nobody takes care. One example quoted in more detail is that of a resident of Värtsilä, who did not work and exhibited anti-social behaviour. Once, while being drunk, he was said to have followed the rails leading to Finland, but was apprehended by a border guard preventing him from leaving the country. Other inhabitants of Värtsilä were reported of not working regularly. It was stated that people like

them should not be able to live near the border. Their cases are among the examples found in official documents of lives that strongly contradicted officially sanctioned social norms.

According to the 1960 border regime, residents of the border area was obliged to always carry with them their passport or another form of identity proof while moving in the area. However, the report mentioned that many residents fail to do so and that border guards or DND patrols therefore had to arrest them until they could prove their identity. This was said to be a time-consuming affair and due to the fact that ‘people had not received enough explanations how to comply with the regulations of the border zone.’ The responsible officials were admonished to redouble their vigilance. Participants of the meeting then decided that local political actors should be obliged to inform local residents about the regulations of the Statute and stated that members of the local militia, border guards, as well as members of trade unions, the Komsomol and the Communist Party, too, ought to participate in these efforts.

Similarly, it was reported that the local administration did not enforce the compulsory registration (*propiska*) within three days of any person entering the border area. In some cases, individuals and even whole families had only registered a month later. This was said to constitute an additional burden for the border guards and people’s patrols, who had to spend time tracking suspicious individuals and trespassers, and to negatively affect their vigilance. In other cases, housing committees had submitted incomplete documents (*spravki*), with missing stamps and information, instead of the passports handed in for registration by the individuals concerned.

In the official view, some problems of defending the border stemmed from tourism. The Sortavala district attracted not only geologists and seasonal workers, but also numerous tourists. It was reported that border guards sometimes were informed too late about their presence in the area. Residents of Leningrad, for example, had made boating excursions in the area during a visit to the monastery of Valaam, while the border guards ignored everything about the presence of these ‘admirers of the region.’ Finally, the persons in charge had been obliged to inform the border troops about these visitor groups. It was held that timely control undertaken by the border troops would help reduce the numbers of ‘undesirable individuals’ and ‘hostile visitors’ (*vrazheskie elementy*).

Local archives from the 1960s also offer evidence of the participation of residents from other localities of the North Ladoga area in activities related to the defence of the state border. At the settlement of Pitkäranta, voluntary patrols were reported to work in close co-operation with the local militia to implement the border regime (*pasportno-pogranichnyi rezhim*). In 1963, workers at the factory Pitkäranta had apprehended 36 persons who had violated the regulations and a number of volunteers were awarded distinctions by the local council for defending the border (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 38/935, l. 71–72).

Local identity in Sortavala during the Soviet period was deeply marked by the symbolic meaning and the mythologising of the border guards present in the town, especially through various rituals and celebrations regularly reported by the local newspaper. In May 1978, delegates from many local establishments and organisations, led

by the first secretary of the local party branch, took part in the celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Soviet Border Troops (*KZ*, 30 May 1978). Similar to other Soviet celebrations of professional groups, an annual Day of the Border Guard was celebrated in May, the month in which the Border Troops had been established. The following quote is typical of the way these events were reported.

All Soviet people love the border guard and appreciate his services. Reactionary circles in the West continue their attempts to undermine the USSR. Under these circumstances, the CPSU and the Soviet government pay constant attention to the defence of the sacred boundaries of our Motherland... Hundreds of thousands of volunteers, members of party committees, the Komsomol and the trade unions all the time take care of increasing the vigilance of the population and the active participation of residents of the border area in the defence of the border and their assistance to the border guards (*KZ*, 27 May 1978).

The programme of the celebration included a concert, various events in the town park and the opening of memorials. Children attending groups that organised activities related to the defence of the border participated as well. Special meetings were held in many local establishments, such as the one set up at the local railway depot (*lokomotivnoe depo*) on the eve of the Day of the Border Guard to honour veterans of the Border Troops and to offer them presents (*ibid.*).

The state border with Finland was closed in Soviet times and Sortavalans, as other Soviet citizens, could only cross the border at Vyborg after having followed the required procedures. It played a crucial role in dividing the two nations. In everyday life the real border and the 'capitalist enemy' beyond it remained invisible. The lack of contact and unfamiliarity with the Finnish neighbours resulted in mythologising of the border, the border area and the foreign neighbours. Nor did the latter's misrepresentation as 'them' in official discourses favour understanding of what 'us' meant. The process of demythologisation only started in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, official narratives of the border, as exemplified by the newspaper articles published between the 1940s and mid-1980s, never depicted the border guards as real people, or individual personalities. Under the condition of censorship, there were no opportunities to publicly discuss certain aspects of the coexistence of border guards and civilian residents. Only during Gorbachev's perestroika did journalists from the local newspaper start to treat border issues in the light of individual experiences. During the May 1986 annual celebration of the Day of the Border Guard, a local journalist wrote for the first time in detail about the daily life at the local garrison, mentioning private issues and identifying border guards by their family name (*KZ*, 28 May 1986). Since then, lively and realistic descriptions of border-related issues have become a frequent feature in the local newspaper. Thus, it was only in the second half of the 1980s that subjective elements were added to representations of locality in this border area, contributing to create a sense of place as described in the approach of human geographers such as Tuan (1974b; 1977), Buttimer (1994) and Relph (1976).

#### ***4-2. Pending the Arrival of the Other: Discovering the Border***

Between 1944 and 1988 Sortavala's Finnish neighbours represented a dispelled Other, and the state border the boundary of socialism rather than a frontier with Finland. This explains the complex character of residents' first experiences with cross-border contacts. One might be tempted to think that Sortavalans perceived the border zone simply as an obstacle or barrier in their everyday lives. However, spatial representations of the North Ladoga area were much more multi-faceted. When the border regime started to become less strict, some biographical narratives emphasised the advantage of the town's close location to the border. Discussions about the consequences of expected visits by the foreign neighbours intensified in the late 1980s. But, as prospects of cross-border interaction still remained uncertain, many of the ideas vented by ordinary residents or representatives of the local authorities were of a speculative nature.

One of the discussion threads published in the local newspaper centred on fears that 'wealthy Finns' would come and buy up land or islands of Lake Ladoga. In 1989, a Soviet-Finnish joint venture, 'Ladoga,' established to promote the development of international tourism in the Sortavala area, thus led to heated and controversial debates, after the local paper had reported that a working group of Finnish and Russian experts had decided to allot a plot located on the nearby island of Kukkosaaari for a tourist centre, whose construction was to be financed by AO Sovfinturproject, Goskomturist USSR and the Council of Ministers of the KASSR (*KZ*, 12 January 1989). Many local residents voiced concerns about losing control over their territory (*KZ*, 21 and 28 January, 11 and 15 February 1989), while Vladimir Stepanov, a member of the CPSU's Central Committee and First Secretary of Karelia's regional party committee, described the decision as valuable and important for the socio-economic development of the area and actively supported the project during his election campaign (*KZ*, 9 February 1989). At the same time, this example shows that local residents now were given the opportunity to publicly express their opinions.

One of the articles spoke about a 'massive attack by Finnish firms on the economic basis of the town' (*KZ*, 11 February 1989) and raised a number of questions: Would Soviet citizens have access to the planned tourist centre and be able to establish contacts with Finnish visitors? On what basis would commercial activities be organised in the border area? And, more particularly, would the newly established Karelvneshtorg, a regional organisation responsible for foreign trade, have a branch in Sortavala? To what extent the local budget would benefit economically from the Ladoga project?<sup>21</sup> Would local residents be given the opportunity to visit border towns in Finland? There was also some apprehension about how Finnish visitors might perceive the Soviet Union:

If Finnish tourists will have free access to our town, they will have the opportunity to compare life in two societal systems. They will make certain evaluations of our economic and social problems, comment on the poor state of our roads etc. It is hard to believe that Finns will have lunch in a *stolovaia* [a basic Soviet canteen; A. I.] or buy food in our shops. Perhaps they will be shocked by the long waiting lines in our shops (*KZ*, 11 February 1989).

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21 This has to be seen in the context of the legislation on holding foreign currency in Soviet times.



On 27 November 1990, the Soviet Union's Council of Ministers passed a resolution that introduced new simplified rules for residents and certain categories of persons (tourists, veterans, artists, economic experts, etc.) wishing to enter the closed border zone. The issue was widely discussed in the local media and led to mostly negative and critical reactions (*KZ*, 5 January 1991). Local newspaper headlines, such as 'How can we live without a border zone?' reflect these concerns. The paper also published several letters by ordinary residents that unanimously protested against the decision. One of them, signed by a whole family, noted: 'We totally agree with the author, her conclusions and suggestions. We believe that it is not necessary to open up the border. It is not very difficult for us to obtain permits for our relatives and friends from other regions' (*ibid.*).

On 27 December, a decision made earlier by the Supreme Council of the KASSR to simplify regulations for entering the border zone located on Sortavala's municipal territory after 1 January 1991 was being discussed at the fourth annual session of the town council. One of the deputies held a speech in which she called the abolishment of the border zone inadmissible and was supported by several other deputies. The council unanimously voted in favour of a note to be addressed to the republic's Supreme Council, which contained the following suggestions:

Given the serious crime situation, the beginnings of foreign tourism, the lack of a developed services infrastructure, the complex ecological situation and the unpreparedness of the town council for this measure, we ask the Supreme Council to annul its decision on opening up the closed border zone and also ask that the earlier passport regime remain in place' (*ibid.*).

The hostile attitude of the local community towards the liberalisation of the border regime requires some explanation here, because it concerns the main subject of this research, i.e. the production of a sense of place. It should thus be seen in its historical and geographical context. For decades, local residents had been living in a closed territory associated with a 'quiet' and 'clean' environment. Any changes to its status were therefore perceived as a threat to an environment familiar since early childhood. The unanimous position taken by local actors with widely diverse political views and backgrounds can therefore be interpreted as concerns for losing the privilege of living in a border zone. Interestingly, this apprehension seems to have been directed mainly towards an internal threat, stemming from visitors from other territories of the former Soviet Union, because many of those opposed to the Supreme Council's decision adopted a favourable attitude towards opening up the area to foreign tourists, economic actors and other visitors from abroad.

Newspaper articles published during the following years appeared to confirm the validity of local arguments made both against and in favour of a lighter border regime. The arrival of organised crime, drug trafficking and prostitution lived up to the expectations of those who had warned against the impact of international mass tourism on a relatively small area, while opportunities created by cross-border interaction offered new prospects of life to many local residents. And, indeed, this situation gave rise to rival local narratives about cross-border interaction: euphoric stories about social and political changes that inaugurated a new era, on the one hand, others, deeply pessimist, denouncing the dramatic fall in living standards and a state no longer providing for the

welfare of its citizens, on the other. This debate took place in a situation where foreign tourists who looked rich and respectable arrived in unfamiliar big busses and a certain number of North Ladoga residents eventually succeeded in finding informal ways of obtaining foreign currency from these visitors.

The early period of this meeting of East and West culminated in an international event that celebrated the inauguration of the new era, the festival 'Worlds Meet' in June 1990. During this music festival, which also included The World Party organised in Joensuu, visitors not only from Finland but also from other countries arrived for the first time in huge numbers in the formerly closed border area. A special train linked Joensuu with Sortavala. With the assistance of Finnish experts, the town of Sortavala built an imitation of the legendary Laulurinne [Singing Slope] in the local Vakkosalmenpuisto Park.<sup>22</sup> The programme included performances by Soviet, Finnish and various international artists, among them Karelia Brass, a jazz ensemble from the Finnish-speaking collective Manok from Petrozavodsk. A second World Meets festival was successfully organised two years later, in June 1992, but did not attract as many visitors. Its programme was a combination of Russian and Finno-Ugric folk art that was reminiscent of earlier Soviet cultural practices in Sortavala, and performers wore ethnic costumes. The main attraction was Samppa Uimonen (1927–2001), the Finnish kantele player and rune-singer, who performed Kalevala epic poetry.<sup>23</sup>

#### ***4-3. The Homeless Soviet Man: Discourses on Socio-Economic Identities***

Inspired by Marxist-Leninist doctrine, Soviet official discourse schematically described Soviet society as composed of the working class, the peasantry and a layer of intelligentsia between the two. In a more realistic approach, it would be possible to identify various interest groups, foremost among them the nomenklatura, which was the main promoter of Soviet identity politics, from its earliest Stalinist strongly dichotomous expression to its later, more alleviated forms, such as the notion of 'developed socialism' characteristic of the late Brezhnev years (see above). The nomenklatura system, whose constitution was more or less complete in the late Stalinist period, was introduced in Karelia in 1946. Access to the nomenklatura was on the basis of criteria such as party membership, nationality, social or family background and the level of education. The most important quality required by the pretender to a nomenklatura position was his (implicit) willingness to execute directives issued at higher levels of authority. In terms of territorial identity, this means that Karelia lost any hope of developing regional self-governance after the war. Although the region was then given the

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22 The site is reputed to offer Europe's best acoustic environment because it is partly enclosed by a high rock (*Karelia*, 17 February 2001).

23 Uimonen was born in a village located on the Lake Ladoga island of Tulola, about 10 kilometres from Sortavala, and spent most of his life in Kitee, a twin town of Sortavala on the Finnish side of the border. A cable TV company from Petrozavodsk produced a short documentary of the second Worlds Meet festival that included an interview with the artist by anchorman Alexander Nikolaev. The documentary can be consulted at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uh8kyt8Diyo> (last accessed on 27 October 2016).

status of a national republic,<sup>24</sup> the latter's significance was a far cry from that defined by the nativisation or indigenisation (*korenizatsiia*) policy of the 1920s and early 1930s (see Kangaspuro 2000: 143–147).

In political science, social identity is usually conceived in terms of particular groups or categories (nation, social class, subculture, ethnic group, gender etc.) that individuals use to describe themselves as belonging to. How then did residents of post-war Sortavala perceive themselves? As already mentioned, most of them were resettled from other parts of the Soviet Union. In addition to their ethnic and cultural diversity, they were also characterised by their different social backgrounds. Many of them had been born into a peasant family. Stalin's modernisation project, with its emphasis on rapidly industrialising the country and the leading ideological role of the working class, had led to the formation of a specifically Soviet type of socio-economic identity that also shaped the identity of Sortavalans.

An examination of this identity must take into account the structure of the local economy, which was based mainly on agriculture and the production of consumer goods, as well as on transport—Sortavala was located at a railway junction. The most important establishment of the consumer goods industry was the furniture and ski combine in Helylä, one of the main producers of skis in the Soviet Union, with which not only its employees but also most residents of Sortavala proudly identified themselves. Its disappearance in the post-Soviet years is thought to have profoundly affected Sortavalans, leading to radical changes in their self-identification as economic actors and a reframing of local identity.

Many of the Sortavalans who resettled there in the late 1940s came from villages elsewhere in the Soviet Union, became town dwellers and received an education or technical training during the country's modernisation, which allowed them to join the working class or the intelligentsia. In the agricultural sector, the authorities established several *kolkhozes* after the war, which soon were transformed into *sovkhoses* that is state enterprises that employed agricultural workers. People working in this sector not only had to live in rural areas that lacked a basic infrastructure but also had few privileges. For instance, they did not have internal passports, which would have allowed them to leave their village. Industrial workers, on the contrary, were held in high esteem. Official discourse, relayed by the local media, glorified the working class as the most important strata of the population and attributed to it a strong socialist consciousness.

In the 1940s and 1950s, there were numerous newspaper stories about representatives from the various migrant communities that had resettled in Sortavala. Most of them experienced significant changes in their life after moving to North Ladoga. In addition to living in an unfamiliar cultural environment and becoming part of new social networks, many took up a new professional career. It can therefore be assumed that work identities were often in a state of flux.

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24 The Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic (*Karelo-Finskaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika*) was established in 1940 and was incorporated into the Russian SFSR as the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (*Karel'skaia Avtonomnaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika*) in 1956.

The institutional agencies promoting this new identity were labour collectives as well as schools and other educational institutions. According to the official Soviet discourse, members of the working class demonstrated their moral values to other social groups through their ‘heroic labour.’ In media narratives, this idea was used as a tool to encourage practices aimed at socio-economic development. Between the 1960s and early 1980s, newspaper publications often used these kinds of narratives with the intention to improve working ethic or reinforce a culture of labour. Their authors generally called upon the working population to revise its attitude towards work. Higher labour productivity was seen as the ultimate goal of the Soviet economic model.

## 5. PRODUCTION-BASED PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

Public narratives emphasised full employment as one of the major achievements of the Soviet economic system, which thus distinguished itself from capitalist economies. Unemployed people had no official status in the Soviet Union and were considered criminals. In Sortavala as elsewhere in the USSR, full employment was considered more important than other economic goals, but here in a context of an insufficient labour supply. Under the conditions of a planned economy, this led to frequent difficulties of implementing state-funded programmes of socio-economic development in North Ladoga (see section 4-1.).

### 5-1. *The Industrial Sector*

Industrial production in Sortavala partly relied on the old technical infrastructure of former Finnish companies, partly on new establishments created in Soviet times, such as the furniture and ski combine (SMLK) at Helylä. Sortavala’s industrial sector also included a sewing factory, a brewery, a meat factory, a printing house, a metallurgical factory, mineral quarries and an establishment producing materials for road construction. In the late 1960s, the town counted eleven establishments of the primary and industrial sectors: in addition to the above mentioned enterprises, there were a dairy, a bakery, a fish-processing factory, the West-Karelian Electricity Company, Leskhov [forestry], a combine producing construction materials (*Kombinat proizvodstvennykh predpriatii*) and a state establishment for repair works and other services (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 60/1205, l. 32).<sup>25</sup> The local state enterprises accounted for five per cent of Karelia’s industrial production. Technologically, few had changed since Finnish times. Sortavala’s industrial landscape had therefore remained virtually unchanged.

Public narratives about the sector focussed on efforts to fulfil the objectives defined by yearly or pluriannual plans, a subject treated in close connection with party ef-

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25 The four main industrial establishments in the Sortavala district, the SMLK, a metallurgical factory at Värtsilä, a plywood combine at Lahdenpohja and a marble-and lime-processing factory at Ruskeala, together employed about 4,000 people; the sixteen other local factories accounted for 2,600 employees (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 54/1133, l. 25). A significant number of people were also employed at the local railway station and depot. The little-developed construction sector suffered from a lack of labour.

forts to create NSM. In 1948, for example, the town executive committee's department for industrial production analysed local economic indicators in the following terms: 'Enterprises of our town have implemented 102.1 per cent of the annual plan's norms (calculated for the entire municipal economy) as a result of the strenuous efforts made by the Party and the council administration.' Labour collectives at the furniture and sewing factories were positively singled out, even though only half of the production capacities had been used. Underuse of capacities and inefficiencies were noted for other enterprises as well (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 5/197, l. 9).

The important role of public celebrations has already been noted in other contexts. A study of public speeches held during the era of Stagnation under Brezhnev shows that productivity achievements in the planned economy were often accompanied by pompous political celebrations. The following quote from the year 1970 is typical of the phraseology employed to improve work ethic:

The collectives of the industrial enterprises are working with great enthusiasm to fulfil the socialist pledges and are taking part in the events dedicated to the well-merited celebration of the Centennial Anniversary of Vladimir Il'ich Lenin's birthday. Eight out of nine industrial enterprises have successfully implemented their sales targets. The plans for labour productivity have been achieved at a rate of 100.5 per cent (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 60/1205, l. 4).

The Russian geographer Viacheslav Glazychev suggested the concept of 'slobodisation,' introduced to distinguish the urban landscape of Russian mid-sized and small towns from their European counterparts by opposing an imitation of urban space to real urbanisation. In his view, a *sloboda* is a semi-urban, or semi-rural, space in which housing, infrastructure and cultural organisation all serve a central giant industrial enterprise instead of offering services to the residents (Glazychev 1996). The urban landscape of Sortavala's town centre can hardly be compared to a *sloboda*. The furniture and sky combine SMLK, the town's industrial giant and main employer (*gradoobrazuiushchee predpriiatie*), was in fact located at the settlement of Helylä, about five kilometres from the town centre. But for this reservation, Sortavala can well be described as a mono-industrial town, because Helylä resembled many of these kinds of settlements typical of the Soviet Union. Most of the dwellings there were barracks that offered poor living conditions. The combine was even one of the largest enterprises in Karelia and played a central role in the town's economy. In 1970, the town's executive committee admitted, for example, that 'the Committee is taking measures to implement the budget, but fulfilling or not fulfilling this task entirely depends on two enterprises—the Sewing Union and SMLK' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 60/1205, l. 70).

It is a well-known fact that consumer goods of the late Soviet period were usually of bad quality. The socialist command economy, however, lacked proper mechanisms to solve this problem, its only recourse being propaganda. In the 1970s, officials therefore introduced various medals, banners and other distinctions to award the best workers and thus to encourage higher labour productivity. One of these inventions to improve labour morale was a label called 'A Sign of Quality.' In 1974, a collective at the ski factory in Helylä, for example, reportedly attempted to obtain the state's quality label (*Znak kachestva*) for its ski brand Karelia (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 81/1371, l. 54).

The achievement was used as an example for the moral and ideological education of the population in various forms of celebration, such as a Day of Celebration in Honour of the *Udarniks* [superproductive shock workers; A. I.] of Communist Labour. A similar celebration had been organised by the ski factory, a subdivision of the SMLK combine, on 23 February 1970, on the occasion of the Day of the Soviet Army. During a solemn evening event at the combine's club, exemplary workers from the enterprise along with the best sixth-year students were awarded prizes.

In Soviet times, local enterprises usually organised social activities and ensured certain municipal services, a practice still continued in contemporary Russia. Big establishments were, for example, responsible for supplying water and heat to local residents. In other cases, enterprises took charge of housing, offered health and other services or even ran local restaurants. Labour collectives organised summer activities for children, such as Pioneers' camps, ran nursery schools and, more generally, were responsible for all kinds of institutions for children or adolescents. The local newspaper on several occasions reported on the furniture and ski combine's involvement in improving living conditions at Helylä. Articles mention the combine's decision to build a so-called household-building (*bytovoi korpus lyzhnogo tsekha*) where services to households were being provided for employees of the ski factory and to repair residential buildings, to extend the gas infrastructure of the settlement or to build a nursery school and a dormitory for its employees (*KZ*, 16 and 30 January 1982).

SMLK's paternalist policy clearly identifies the combine as a 'town-forming enterprise,' to use the Soviet terminology. The studied material richly illustrates this local version of Soviet spatial planning. In addition to providing public amenities and social services, the enterprise also took care of the moral education (*vospitanie*) of the young generation, administrating schools and even intervening in family affairs. One of its organisations, the Council for Assisting Families and Schools, organised meetings of schoolchildren with labour veterans and offered career counselling about employment opportunities at the combine (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 58/1180, l. 14).

In 1980, a women's council (*zhensovet*) was established at the combine, which initiated a debate on how to arrange services for families with children and to support them, notably because the combine did not offer facilities for children of non-employees in its nursery school. The council eventually suggested that the combine provide funds so that these families could care for their children at home for a period of three years (*KZ*, 8 March 1989). Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, SMLK thus looked after the social welfare of its employees and, more generally, the settlement's residents.

### ***5-2. The Agricultural Sector***

The first state farm established in Sortavala was Sovkhoz No. 1, located at a distance of almost two kilometres (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/8, l. 3). It produced bread grains, potatoes, milk and meat for the state (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/85, l. 22) but also rye, wheat, barley and various vegetables. Between the 1960s and 1980s, six *sovkhozes* operated in Sortavala district, employing some 4,000 workers in 1969 (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 54/1133, l. 25). The same year, each exploited a total of 5 hectares of farmland (*sel'khozugod'ia*), arable land (*pashnia*) and meadows. Pastures accounted for 25 hec-

tares and short-term and long-term fallow land for up to 15 hectares (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 60/1205, l. 31). Farms constantly experienced difficulties throughout Soviet times. In 1955, for example, the first secretary of the party district committee admitted that agricultural production in the district suffered from neglect. The so-called ‘assistance of the city to the countryside’ was the main mechanism through which the Soviet authorities hoped to solve socio-economic problems in rural areas. Media narratives frequently referred to these urban-rural ties. In 1955, the local newspaper thus informed readers that ‘the Party had sent 28 communists to the countryside for assisting the agricultural economy in order to strengthen the economic position of the state farms and *kolkhozes*’ (KZ, 2 March 1955). In the 1950s, the recruitment of educated young people, students and various kinds of professionals for work in rural areas was widely practiced in Sortavala. Volunteers were hard to find because living standards there were very low.

Attracting agricultural labourers from other regions of the Soviet Union, particularly Belorussia, was seen as one solution to improve the agricultural economy of the district. In 1955, a meeting of *kolkhoz* members passed the following resolution:

Dear *kolkhoz* members of Sortavala district! The state has supplied us with thousands of hectares of land [see numbers quoted above!] but we do not use a considerable part of the arable land. One of the reasons are labour shortages in rural areas. This is why we have decided to ask *kolkhozniks* from the Belorussian SSR to take up permanent residence here in the KFSSR. We have decided to invite five families this year and another five in 1956 to work in the *kolkhoz* to help us with the agricultural production (KZ, 7 August 1955).

The essentialist approach in human geography emphasises the ties between people and their place of residence in the sense of people’s sense of local roots. It is difficult to see how this approach could be applied to the migrants who moved to Sortavala in the 1940s and 1950s. The rural, and in particular agricultural, infrastructure left behind by earlier Finnish residents of this rural area must have seemed alien to them, because they were so distant from both the way of life they knew and Soviet-type agriculture. The Finns had exploited tiny fertile plots of land located on the shores of Lake Ladoga on farms run by individuals or families and located at a considerable distance from each other. Early Soviet migrants settling in North Ladoga were unfamiliar with this type of settlement and therefore gradually moved from these isolated farmsteads (*khutor*) into large villages (Hakkarainen 2005: 48–49), significantly transforming the rural landscape and agricultural economy in the process.

Although Sortavala’s production-based local identity experienced several changes in line with those of the dominant Soviet discourse, the social and political underpinnings of it largely remained the same, except for the transformation of all local *kolkhozes* into *sovkhazes* [state farms]. So did the public narratives about the socio-economic situation of the rural area and agriculture, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1971, the town executive committee discussed, for example, twenty issues related to the agricultural sector, reporting among other things that all state farms worked unprofitable (*nerentabel’no*) (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 58/1186, l. 14–15). The traditional peasant identity had already been destroyed by the Stalinist policy of collectivisation, and the Soviet economic system offered no incentives to increase labour productivity. News-

paper articles and official documents offer evidence that agricultural workers mostly adopted an indifferent attitude towards their work. The little progress made in the agricultural production cycle appears to have depended entirely on resolutions adopted by the Party, such as a decision by the local party committee to improve the conditions for cattle wintering at the *sovkhoses*.

Since the early 1930s, Soviet discourse had voiced political and ideological suspicions of the peasants as a social class, attributing to them a ‘backward psychology.’ Nikita Khrushchev was well-known for his radical actions against the ‘peasants’ consciousness,’ a policy that must be understood in the context of his strong belief in technology as a means of escaping backwardness (Autio-Sarasma 2011: 133–149). The modernised and urbanised part of Soviet society despised villagers, and even those born in the countryside no longer identified themselves with farmers. Agricultural knowledge and willingness to work the land thus disappeared. During his rule, Khrushchev imposed, for instance, strict limitations on the private ownership of domestic animals, such as cattle, sheep and goats, which resulted in rural families’ increasing reluctance to keep them—a phenomenon that could also be observed in Sortavala district. Despite the Party’s unfavourable policies, local residents continued, however, to privately produce food. Family production thus accounted for a significant share in the milk supplied to the population, although the district’s official economic policy was aimed at developing the local dairy industry. In 1971, the local administration passed, for instance, a resolution that directed the dairy to organise the purchase of milk from residents by calculating monthly norms (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 62/1222, l. 9).

When the political elite finally revised its policies towards private farming and animal ownership in the late Soviet years, it was mostly too late to interest people in agricultural activities. At the time, Sortavala’s local authorities paid some attention to the development of private subsidiary plots (*lichnoe podsobnoe khoziaistvo* or LPH). During the years of the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1971–75), vegetable gardens cultivated by residents were reported to have increased. More than a decade later, these garden plots amounted to a total of 365 hectares, 384 of them cultivated with potatoes and 14 with vegetables (*KZ*, 20 May 1986). Private cattle ownership, by contrast, declined, from roughly 1500 heads of cattle in 1976 to less than 800 in 1988 (*KZ*, 31 January 1989).

In the aftermath of this new approach towards private farming, media narratives radically changed in comparison to those of earlier decades. In the late 1980s, it was reported that some agricultural workers had started to rent state-owned plots and agricultural buildings to create individual farms, although the leaseholders were still seen as assistants of the state farms. During the perestroika period, local party leaders also participated in public debates on the future of the local agricultural sector. Viktor E. Bogdanov, a secretary of the town party committee, thus expressed his views on the prospect of individual farms in the district. Interestingly, he referred in this context to specific local factors linked to the history of the area. He argued, for example, that the isolated farms (*khutor*) of the Finnish period had been productive but that the area’s present-day residents, who had moved here from Russia, Belorussia and Ukraine, had completely different agricultural traditions. Bogdanov claimed that it was necessary ‘to take into account these differences’ and concluded that, for these reasons, only those



former Finnish farms should be renovated that were located close to existing settlements and roads (KZ, 31 January 1989). Very likely, these ongoing transformations of the rural space, and especially of its built-up environment, also changed the ways in which local residents perceived the countryside around Sortavala.

During the same period, newspaper reporting about the rural population changed significantly, too, focussing more on individual life stories and changes in the mentality of rural inhabitants. In early 1989, an article thus told the story of a family from the state fur farm Kaalamskii, who had been doing contractual work for the farm since November 1987, looking successfully after heifers and bull calves. The family members, who were described as diligent and assiduous, had however ceased its activities, mainly because of the hostile attitude of their neighbours towards the idea of family farms and small businesses, as it is described in the article 'The end of the family farm':

Some of the rural inhabitants have started to calculate an admittedly modest separate family income. Not all neighbours have approved of such a careful attitude towards the common state property (namely to *sovkhos* property not their own) and the practice has excited envy (KZ, 10 January 1989).

The main barrier to introducing private farming appears to have been mental and may have had historical roots, perhaps not so much in Soviet collectivisation but rather traditional Russian ideas of communal property that ran contrary to the attempts made by the reformists among the political elite.

To sum up, the public narratives designed to shape the identity of the agricultural workforce examined above show the complex and contradictory nature of Soviet identity politics. After years of repression, the traditional peasant identity had to a large extent disappeared. At the same time, rural workers had never fully accepted the official discourse with its ideological focus on a working class identity. Work ethic and labour productivity in the agricultural sector consequently suffered. In practice, the intensive gardening of private plots (*duchnyi uchastok*) even by urban residents remained not only an economic necessity but was also a highly attractive and popular leisure activity.

### ***5-3. Shaping Work Identity***

The Soviet economic model was based on the concept of the leadership and directing role of the Communist Party in the society. Documents issued by the Central Committee constituted a sort of master narrative that was later relayed and implemented by party committees at lower levels, with the Party delegating the execution to state institutions, such as for the implementation of the multi-annual plans for the economy. While the official discourse produced by the Party was designed to legitimise the notion of NSM, local authorities in particular had to deal directly with people and organise their everyday practical activities. Soviet discourse oscillated between 'what is' and 'what ought to be,' and those involved in everyday economic practices focussed on the former.

Under the conditions of the planned command economy, the Soviet political elite could not rely on market mechanisms to provide incentives for the labour force. Instead it attempted to create a work identity through its narratives and various actions of economic and socio-cultural mobilisation and thus to increase labour productivity.

One of the key elements used for the education of the working masses was the discourse on heroic labour and self-sacrifice introduced during the Stakhanovite movement of the 1930s and the Great Patriotic War, which romanticised labour and used symbolic devices to ensure the individual and collective mobilisation of the workforce. Stakhanovism, for example, was a myth created to increase labour productivity and to demonstrate the superiority of the socialist economic system in the face of a culture of labour one of whose main characteristics was lack of discipline and which was pervasive throughout the Soviet period.

Soviet traditions of mobilisation, typical of the 1930s Stakhanovite and *udarnik* [shock worker] movements, continued to survive in the 1940s and echoes of them can be found in post-war Sortavala. In January 1946, for example, the local newspaper reported on a logging campaign named after Aleksei Stakhanov, the Soviet miner and Hero of Socialist Labour, which was aimed at ‘providing socialist assistance in fulfilling plans for logging by using manpower (100 workers) from various enterprises and organisations in town’ (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/36, l. 2).

Stakhanov’s name reappears in a public appeal launched by the commission that was set up in 1948 to prepare the celebration of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the KFSSR:

The Stakhanovites as our most advanced people involved in the production process should play a decisive role. They should transmit their progressive experience of labour to workers who are lagging behind and help to pull up their work to a high level. It is necessary to intensify work on the eve of the anniversary. Every worker ought to fulfil 160 to 170 per cent of the norms. We call on all Stakhanovites in town to participate in a Stakhanov Watch in honour of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of our Republic. They should mark this glorious occasion in the life of the Karelo-Finnish people by accomplishing a feat of labour (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 5/193, l. 17).

The Soviet authorities distinguished between two categories of advanced workers, the Stakhanovites, considered to be more advanced, and the *udarniks* [shock workers], with the former being obliged to teach their advanced work methods to the latter. In Sortavala’s transportation sector, the Second Railway Division, for example, counted 121 advanced workers in 1948: 91 Stakhanovites and 40 *udarniks*, and the roundhouse 91 Stakhanovites out of 279 employees (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 5/193, l. 18).

The notion of advanced labour also extended to other aspects of the communist work identity. In a resolution passed in November 1946, the town executive committee commented on shortcomings in the educational work done at two local logging establishments, Gortop and Lestrop, which supplied local households with wood for heating. Among other things, the resolution noted that workers were unwilling to subscribe to newspapers, that labour collectives did not discuss governmental documents and that there were no boards of labour achievements (sometimes also interpreted as ‘The Walls of Honour’). In addition, the committee blamed the directorship for not organising socialist competitions and workers’ meetings and for not encouraging the work of the trade union (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/77, l. 8).

Socialist competition (*Sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie*), opposed to capitalist competition (*kapitalisticheskaiia konkurentsiiia*), was another key element of the Soviet

master narrative concerned with labour productivity. The first was conceived in terms of like-minded people sharing the same goal, whereas the latter was opposing social enemies whose interests fundamentally differed. In practice, socialist competition was said to be targeted at more rational tasks, such as improving the organisation of production, thereby increasing efficiency and the quality of products. In this context, Stakhanovism, trade unions and the Komsomol were held to play a key role. Socialist competition was to be practiced in all branches of the economy as well as in other spheres of social life by defining individual and collective 'socialist duties' (*sotsobiazatel'stva*). A resolution voted for in the late 1940s thus noted the absence of individual and shop 'socialist duties' at the workshops of Raznepromsoiuz<sup>26</sup> (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/6, l. 16).

Socialist competition put its stamp on the urban landscape, too. Since the early 1950s a board of honour exhibited in Karelskaia Street, in the town centre, celebrated the achievements of local workers by publishing the names and portraits of winners of socialist competitions. In 1954, the town executive committee decided to add the names of worker-heroes awarded in honour of the election campaign for the Supreme Council of the USSR, mentioning among others three workers who had accomplished their pledges and fulfilled respectively 270, 195 and 122 per cent of their norms (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 16/516, l. 25–26).

The 1960s were characterised by a new form of strengthening communist social and work ethic. It was during this period that appeared the movement of communist labour brigades. At the time, 90 employees of the local public catering sector were reported to have declared their intention to compete for the title 'communist labour collective.' Sortavaltorg, the town's trade office, was participating in a socialist competition with the *Torg* of the town of Olonets (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 34/896, l. 25). Similarly, the local RSU (short for Repairs and Construction Administration or *Remontno-stroitel'noe Upravlenie*) entered into a competition with a construction administration unit (SU) from Petrozavodsk in 1965. A common meeting defined socialist pledges (*obiazatel'stvo*) for the coming year to gauge the achievements of labour brigades and even smaller groups of workers (*zveno*) and arranged for the publication of quarterly summaries which reported to what extent work allotted by foremen (*masterskie uchastki*) had been accomplished. Trade unions were the preferred organisations for arranging and controlling socialist competitions, whose results were usually summed up during semi-public sessions of the primary trade union committee (*postroiikom*). The report of a meeting describes, for instance, the handing over of the Red Banner and mentions cash premiums of 60 Rubles (f. R-2204, op. 1, d. 44/1010, l. 19).

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26 Raznepromsoiuz refers to Soviet co-operatives, a legacy of the New Economic Policy of the early 1920s. By the end of the 1950s, there still existed 114 workshops and small industrial establishments in the Soviet Union, employing some 1.8. Million individuals and accounting for 5.9 per cent of the GDP. They mostly produced furniture (40 per cent) but also toys, clothes, tableware and other consumer goods. After a governmental decree from 14 April 1956, they were gradually reorganised into state enterprises and had almost disappeared by the mid-1960s, except for those operating in the fields of housing-construction and folk-art. As co-operatives were at all times controlled by the state, they could never develop autonomously as in the West (see e.g. Makerova 2007).

Yet another tool employed consisted in attempts to spread best practices across the Soviet Union, particularly during the era of Stagnation. In 1967, the Shchekinskii chemical combine of the Tul'skaia district near Moscow started an experiment that was aimed at 'mobilising the collective to increase the volume of production through higher labour productivity,' a goal to be achieved through a better organisation of the production process, better labour efficiency and a better system of remuneration. The Central Committee approved of the experiment and later held it up as a universal model under the slogan 'Higher Production, Less Employees.' This model also inspired similar but ultimately unsuccessful attempts in Sortavalan enterprises and the town executive committee had to admit that the Shchekinskii combine's labour methods had not been fully implemented by local collectives (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 60/1205, l. 5). Almost the same terms were used almost a decade later, in 1978, to describe shortcomings in imitating an initiative promoted by party organisations in the Rostov Oblast. There, labour collectives had rallied under the slogan 'Work without Laggards' (*rabotat' bez otstaiushchikh*). In Sortavala, the local newspaper conceded that in many cases the imitation had ended in failure (*KZ*, 9 December 1978).

Gorbachev's perestroika finally brought a fresh approach to the management of the Soviet economy under the motto 'perfection of socialism' and appears to have met with more success, perhaps due to its greater emphasis on economic mechanisms to increase labour productivity and industrial output. In Sortavala, newspaper articles from the late 1980s reported that the local SMLK had increased its production and begun to operate cost accounting (*khozraschet*). It was explained that total output had been increased by 13.1 per cent, labour productivity by 20 and profits by 47.7 per cent and that the latter amounted to 1.5 million Rubles. More savings had been made through a better use of materials. In 1988, SMLK had produced 21,000 pairs of skis more than indicated in the plan and the quality of its products had been improved. Skis for racing competitions had been awarded with a gold medal at the All-Soviet competition (*KZ*, 10 January 1989). As history has shown, the idea of combining a planned economy with market mechanisms did not have a happy ending. In the 1990s, SMLK went bankrupt and ceased its industrial activities. Only a few local wood-processing shops still existing at the time survived in the 2000s.

Other institutions were involved in Soviet attempts to enforce labour discipline under conditions of full employment. One of them was the so-called comrades' courts, which had been established to examine violations of labour discipline and hand out penalties to those found guilty.<sup>27</sup> During the first half of 1963, 203 such violations were reported for Sortavala's leading enterprise SMLK. The local authorities also tried to involve the public (*obshchestvennost'*) to discourage irresponsible behaviour by employees. The permanent commission on Socialist Law thus asked the combine's collective to enforce public measures against them:

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27 Interestingly, a similar institution, called 'honour court' (*sud chesti*), was created at the Värtsilä customs house in the post-Soviet years to discipline dishonest officials (*Ladoga*, 3 April 1996).

The management of the combine should consider measures of public control (*obshchestvennoe vozdeistvie*) for its attempts to strengthen labour discipline. Despite a low labour morale at the enterprise, the comrades' court pronounced guilty only five employees who had shown disrespect for discipline. The management believes that administrative measures are enough to solve the problem. We disagree with this; these measures are not enough (f. R-2203, op. 1. d. 41/967, l. 77).

Numerous other examples offer ample evidence of the gap between everyday reality and the Soviet project of reprogramming human nature and creating NSM. 1965, the comrades' court at the Construction and Assembly Directorate (*Stroitel'no-montazhnoe upravlenie* or SMU) reported 22 cases of petty hooliganism and 697 of labour absenteeism (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 44/1005, l. 4). In January 1970, the town executive committee remarked on the very slow decline of the numbers for labour absenteeism at the local enterprises. In 1968, these had amounted to 406 employees responsible for 955 man-days (*cheloveko-den'*), 216 employees and 455 man-days at SMLK alone (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 60/1205, l. 75). Official data on the violation of labour discipline are available for the whole period, until the very end of the Soviet era. In 1987, for instance, 898 cases of absenteeism were recorded and the following year 1038 cases. Every fifth employee had failed to report for work at least once a year (*KZ*, 25 January 1989).

Another institution widely used to enforce labour discipline in the 1960s and 1970s were the committees of people's control, part of a semi-governmental organisation established to prevent such acts as theft at the work place. In accordance with the Programme of CPSU In April 1978, for instance, a supernumerary inspector of the town committee of people's control reported thefts at the meat factory and the state enterprise *Selkhoztekhnika* and a representative of the organisation noted that the management did not pay attention to these acts (*KZ*, 27 April 1978).

The Gorbachev period brought several democratic reforms to the economic sector. In the late 1980s, the local newspaper thus informed about the new phenomenon of electing managers. However, the worsening economic situation after 1987 revealed some of the negative consequences of these reforms, notably the squandering of investments provided by the central state and inefficient management. After further directives from the Central Committee, local enterprises therefore began to experiment with self-financing and electing directors of labour collectives. In the local media, these experiments, particularly at the local electricity company *The Electric Network*, were the subject of extensive interpretations and comments. In March 1989, the collective of the enterprise, in a move that reminds the early revolutionary years, had decided to organise a general assembly to elect its director on a competitive basis. The election was won by an outsider against the former director, the chief engineer and other candidates. A participant of the meeting was quoted to have said: 'The collective decided that in these new times these leaders are not suitable for leadership at the enterprise, because they talk to employees in the language of orders' (*KZ*, 7 March 1989).

Public reaction to the perestroika was complex and differed widely. Many of the town's—and beyond—the region's citizens perceived it as just another political campaign launched by the central elite, probably because the official discourse used its

catchwords—such as ‘acceleration’ (*uskorenie*) and ‘intensification’ (*intensifikatsiia*)—in a similar way. Their constant use in public speeches and debates seemed to have had hardly any impact on the real social and economic situation, as witnessed by the statement quoted hereafter. In June 1986, secretaries of primary party organisations from several Karelian districts met for a seminar-discussion in Sortavala, during which the second secretary of the regional party committee commented on shortcomings in the implementation of the decisions taken by the 27th Congress of the CPSU, particularly in the field of economic reforms:

The primary party organisations have asked for the increased responsibility of communist administrators in intensifying production. Meanwhile neither Mekhleskhoz [a forestry establishment; A. I.] from Sortavala nor the Department for Public Services and Amenities (*Gorbytupravlenie*) aspire to move forward. Their plans predict too small growth for the production and labour productivity’ (*KZ*, 17 June 1986).

This speech can be seen as a typical instance of Soviet methods, here of the Party’s management, of socio-economic development by making use of the ‘newspeak’ of the perestroika. It indicates the continuity of a hierarchical model of decision-making in people’s minds. A similar top-down approach was adopted for the introduction of a ‘certification of workplaces’ (*attestatsiia rabochikh mest*), designed to improve working conditions and labour organisation in enterprises, during the early years of the perestroika.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, many enterprises only reluctantly participated in the scheme. The perestroika’s rhetoric of economic reforms frequently had recourse to catchphrases such as ‘introducing progressive technologies’ and ‘advanced forms of labour organisation,’ which were used by CPSU regional and local party officials to recommend certain measures for Sortavala’s enterprises. In reality, few orthodox communist leaders were interested in radically changing the society or transforming the socio-economic system and few other actors considered these changes to be essential in the local context.

Another catchword of the late 1980s was the ‘integrated development programme’ (*kompleksnye programmy razvitiia*). Such programmes were elaborated for all administrative levels, from the All-Union to the regional and local. In Sortavala, an integrated development programme for the production of consumer goods and services, the principal local economic sector, for the years 1986–2000 noted the importance of increasing the production of high-quality goods that would be in demand from consumers and of introducing progressive forms and methods for their sale and for services, with the aim of better serving the local population. Better regulation of the business contacts between the trade organisations and the producers were also on the agenda. Finally, it was strongly recommended that a study of the population’s demand for consumer goods be carried out (*KZ*, 10 June 1986).

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28 Post-Soviet Russia has set up a similar system of certification, carried out through specialised auditing firms. Their services include compliance checks, inspections and monitoring to create indicators for working conditions, ratings of employees and their qualifications, compliance with health and ecological standards, etc.

In fact, articles of general consumption continued to remain scarce in the local as well as the national market, a situation that lasted until the end of the Soviet Union. In retrospect, Gorbachev's economic reforms of replacing traditional forms of labour mobilisation with market mechanisms have not been successful, contrary to his policy of glasnost, which has led to liberalisation and democratisation. Freedom of speech in particular has paved the way for the emergence of a new dominant discourse in the late 1980s.

Gorbachev's perestroika also gave birth to the co-operative movement. In manufacturing and the services sector, thousands of small co-operatives appeared across the country, despite numerous initial bureaucratic hurdles. Initially, their legal status was uncertain, many lacked experience and funds or faced problems with the supply of raw materials. Moreover, the rest of the population often misunderstood the movement and adopted a hostile attitude towards it, although the media drew a rather positive picture of these initiatives. In Sortavala, the local newspaper closely observed the activity of the first co-operatives during this period. On 1 January 1989, thirty co-operatives were registered in the town. Four of them were engaged in various kinds of repair work, three each in fishing, transportation and musical services, and five in mixed activities. Most of them were either involved in repair work and construction (Signal, Azimuth, and Mir) or in transport and production (Agroservice, Tekhnik-2). Seven people had registered as being self-employed. In some case, co-operatives worked together with state enterprises. The local co-operative Vympel, for instance, helped an experimental shop at the sewing factory with trimmings of shirts, kepis and other articles (*KZ*, 10 January 1989). The members of these early co-operatives can well be seen as prototypes of future entrepreneurs.<sup>29</sup>

The hostile attitude of parts of the population towards those who no longer worked for the state is attested for Sortavala, too. It was seen as the main problem by the chairman of the co-operative Tekhnik-2, which had been founded in August 1988 and consisted of five former employees of the town's signal office (GUS — *gorodskoi uzel sviazi*) who specialised in the design, construction, repair of and services for technical objects, such as communication, heating and ventilation equipment:

The housing administration (*domoupravlenie*) cancelled our rental agreement for the premises we use. We are faced with a completely hostile attitude to our co-operative from local residents, including officials (*KZ*, 14 March 1989).

During the late 1980s, Soviet identity-building was thus in a state of flux, with many ready for changes and many others holding on to the past.

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29 Gorbachev's perestroika had legitimised a new national project that was as much a consequence of Soviet urbanisation and modernisation. In contrast to initial expectations of a socialist society based on a collective consciousness, history created a society of autonomous individuals when a policy of liberalisation and the relatively high level of education increasingly came into conflict with communist rhetoric. Gorbachev's policy of new thinking favoured these new identifications.

## 6. ENCOUNTERING REMNANTS OF THE PAST: ORCHESTRATED CULTURAL, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES

Sortavala was a cultural and educational centre for the North Ladoga region, in Finnish as well as Soviet times. During the Soviet period, the town had a municipal library, a museum, cinemas, music and arts schools, seven secondary and two vocational secondary schools, the School for Trade and Economics (established in 1946 and also called *Finansovyi tekhnikum* during some years) and the Agricultural School (*Sel'skokoziastvennyi tekhnikum*), both of them still existing today, while other schools had been closed in the late 1940s. This section will focus on the role of the numerous local cultural and educational institutions in Soviet identity politics.

### 6-1. Ideology vs Culture

Soviet cultural policy was closely intertwined with ideology. In accordance with Lenin's idea of a cultural revolution, culture was seen as a tool for building communism. Therefore, Soviet culture played a major role in the national identity project, including on the local level, as a study of newspaper articles and official documents confirms. Mass cultural work (*kul'turno-massovaia rabota*) was strongly impregnated with ideology. Moreover, in Sortavala, cultural activities were also linked to processes of territorialisation, offering the Soviet settlers a means of appropriating their new habitat.

Early Soviet cultural policies go back to the period when the first post-war settlers from other regions of the Soviet Union arrived in North Ladoga. In 1946, Sortavala's town council established a department for cultural and public enlightenment, whose staff consisted of seven people from various professions. At about the same time, the local cultural club—and later House of Culture—started organising its activities. In Soviet times, local cultural institutions were either called clubs, when they were located in villages, other rural settlements or were part of small enterprises, or Houses of Culture in the case of towns, cities and bigger establishments. This is where people came together on weekends to celebrate national holidays (1 and 9 May, 7 November, New Year, etc.) or particular local events and for recreational activities such as dancing, choir singing and watching films, theatrical and other shows. Lectures of an ideological character were often part of these events. In 1946, for instance, 74 such lectures were reported to have been given in town. They were prepared by a group of 12 lecturers, set up by those responsible for ideological education and propaganda. Subjects varied considerably and were drawn from science, history, literature and politics (e.g. observations on the 'international political situation'). Some six thousand people were reported to have attended these lectures (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/88, l. 15).

The dominant Stalinist discourse during the Second World War and its aftermath was characterised by a partial return to pre-revolutionary values, notably nationalism and Russian patriotism, and attempts to revive memories of Russia's heroic past, whereas the earlier official historiography had focussed only on heroes of the October Revolution and the civil war. Reports from Sortavala's cultural department confirm that narratives of Soviet and Russian (*rossiiskii*) patriotism were a frequent feature of presentations given at the local cultural club, as well as of amateur shows organised there (f. R 2203, op. 1, d. 2/88, l. 15).



Another characteristic of early Soviet cultural policy in Sortavala was the symbolic appropriation of architectural remnants from the Finnish past, such as the town garden built in Finnish times (*Vakkosalmen puisto*). The garden's architecture combined Nordic functionalism and Finnish romanticism, and was later recognised by Soviet experts as a historical monument of landscape architecture (see Izotov 2008: 185). In 1946, the garden was turned into a 'park of culture and leisure,' named after the Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol), and became part of the local network of cultural institutions. It was also used for mass celebrations, which were highly popular in the Soviet Union during the 1940s and 1950s. Furthermore the new authorities added sculptures created in the aesthetic style of the period ('Victorious Soldier,' 'Fisherwoman,' 'Female Collective Farmer') and decorated the park with placards bearing ideological slogans, giving it a somewhat eclectic appearance. In the 1950s, the park became one of the centres for then very popular open-air entertainments. Its programme for the summer season of 1955 mentions theatrical shows, an operetta and concerts of light music. Concerts by professional artists from Karelia and other regions also took place there. Finally, there was a boat rental (*KZ*, 3 June 1960). The park thus came to occupy a crucial place in Sortavalans' memories and significantly contributed to their sense of place.

Mass celebrations were a major feature of social life in Soviet times. They were called 'demonstrations,' perhaps because they had been designed to demonstrate popular support for and loyalty to the authorities and the political elite. The three main annual events were May Day, Victory Day and the Anniversary of the October Revolution on 7 November. They can be seen as an orchestration of the moral and political unity of the Soviet people with the Party, intended to manifest approval of party policies. The local leaders were watching parades of marching townspeople and reproduced highly stylised speeches based on the dominant public narratives. The celebrations were conceived as a major tool for transmitting core Soviet values to the local community.

The participation of the masses in Soviet cultural practices were usually linked to specific forms of social organisation, such as the widespread amateur groups. Almost every educational institution had its choir, dance troop, poetry group or other collective of amateur performers.<sup>30</sup> In the 1940s, similar collectives were formed at the Children's House, which belonged to the local railways section, and at Sortavala's printing house. All these amateur artists generally attracted big audiences. Twelve thousand visitors were reported to have attended amateur concerts in 1946 (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/88, l. 18).

The local Society for Young Writers and Poets was established in October 1955. Jaakko Rugoev, a well-known Karelian writer and chairman of the board of the KFSSR's Union of Writers, gave a speech at the inaugural meeting, informing participants about

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30 In the late 1940s, Sortavala had a professional-technical school (*proftekhshkola*), the FZO School No. 7 (*Sviazi*, a vocational school for telecommunications, located at Karelskaia St. 5), two secondary schools (one of them not fully functional) and a number of vocational schools (*tekhnikum*) specialised in Finances, Forestry, Physical Education and Agriculture.

his vision of the goals and tasks of the society (*KZ*, 19 October 1955). Rugeov's participation was symbolically important, because Karelia was still a national republic and the writer a representative of Karelian culture. In later years, his views were less well-represented in local literary circles. Mari Ristolainen (2010: 122–131) has argued that Ilmari Saarinen, a local poet of Finnish origins, stood for a rather different interpretation of Karelianness, which was part of the Soviet project of producing NSM in the local context.<sup>31</sup> Vladimir Sudakov, who had begun writing poetry under the supervision of Saarinen in the late 1960s, later became part of the Russian nationalist current in local literature circles. His work emphasises Sortavala's local identity in the light of the history of Novgorod, Russia and the Soviet Union (Ristolainen 2010: 111–112).

One of the key tasks of cultural institutions was their ideological mission. A 1965 report on these institutions from Sortavala thus mentions propaganda work as their main goal, in particular in relation to 'the XX, XXI and XXII Congresses of the CPSU' and the 'resolutions of the plenums of the Central Committee of the Party,' followed by the advanced experiences and the expansion of cultural services for residents of the town (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 44/1004, l. 62). A central feature of this propaganda was the celebration of the great figures of Soviet history and above all of Lenin. In 1970, on the occasion of the centenary of Vladimir I. Lenin's birthday, the town prepared for a pompous event, because this famous date was said to 'form the basis for the entire cultural work in town.' A programme for the festivities was elaborated and approved by the town executive committee. It included a conference on Lenin's *The Immediate Task of the Soviet Government* and various debates on his political writings. The local libraries were issued with posters and organised book exhibitions and book presentations. Trade unions and groups looking after the Red Corner in enterprises organised bus trips to Leningrad, during which Sortavalans visited historical sites linked to Lenin's life. Finally, all Red Corners mounted exhibitions devoted to Lenin's biography and revolutionary activities.

But Soviet cultural policy also had more pragmatic goals. Culture was not seen as an autonomous sphere but rather as an additional tool for promoting economic development, in particular higher output. Cultural institutions were expected to participate in socialist competitions. Local evidence for this role can be found in a 1974 report on the activities of a suburban rural council:

The connection between the cultural institutions and the production sphere has become closer of lately. The cultural institutions constantly point out the successes and shortcomings of the shops, the brigades and individuals involved in the production process. The activity of hobby groups has been revived through the purchase of a significant number of new musical instruments. Thanks to the activity of the rural council for culture, the amateur collective, consisting of 60 people, has shown its programme to local residents at the amateurs' art festival (*smotr khudozhestvennoi samodeiatel'nosti*). The collective has received an award from the town party committee (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 81/1371, l. 69).

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31 The author's grandmother, a good friend of Saarinen and his mother, recalled that Finnish-speaking local residents half-jokingly expressed their regrets that the poet produced political poetry rather than love lyrics.

The Brezhnev era brought out the contradictions of this approach of Soviet identity politics. As people became more educated, these rituals and other forms of cultural rewards, created for a largely illiterate population, were being increasingly perceived as obsolete. The already mentioned Red Corners continued to exhibit primitive political posters and other simple objects of agitation work that seemed no longer attractive to contemporaries. Officially sanctioned cultural forms appear to have hardly changed. Thus, in January 1974, Sortavala's permanent commission for culture discussed the issue of 'cultural services for the employees of enterprises in the construction sector,' i.e. the local PMK-117 and RSU, and passed a resolution commenting positively on them, mentioning in particular the Red Corners at RSU. Among the other activities reported were 'the nights of rest' (evenings of entertainment ending in dancing parties) organised at the settlement of Partala, various lectures and presentations, concerts for construction workers by talented amateurs, as well as the visual agitation work provided by Red Corners and the use of mobile libraries (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 81/1369, l. 57). The commission recommended to the town council's department of culture to provide 'methodological and practical assistance to the Red Corners' so that the latter could organise 'intensive mass and political activities among construction workers' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 81/1369, l. 57). Other documents from the early 1970s confirm this picture of a local elite attempting to employ these standardised cultural practices for the construction of a local identity. A 1974 report on the activities of cultural institutions thus typically presented a detailed list of cultural services for residents and stressed their ideological importance by claiming that the 'main direction in the work of the cultural institutions is to support the communist education of employees' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 74/1310, l. 98).

In the long run, Soviet cultural dogmatism and conservatism did, however, not succeed in preventing the emergence of new cultural forms. As early as the second half of the 1970s, Soviet mass culture adopted elements of Western culture. Dance floors, for instance, were renamed into discotheques, and their musical repertoire usually included Western pop and disco music, a trend reinforced later, during the perestroika years. Sortavala's leading disco-club was located at the DK, the local House of Culture. But in late 1985, a new disco-club called Spektr appeared at the dormitory of the vocational school for trade (*Torgovyi tekhnikum*). A local journalist called the organisers, employees of the Western Karelian Electricity Network in Sortavala, an 'informative discotheque,' because it provided substantial comments on pop music and bands, and complained that clumsy disc-jockeys had complete control over the organisation of these disco nights. He suggested the establishment of a council that would be responsible for 'co-ordination and methodical assistance' to these amateur DJs and pointed out that disco-clubs were in need of a 'certification' procedure for their activities (*KZ*, 13 February 1986). This can be interpreted as a sign that the local political elite attempted to adopt this new informal culture while at the same time trying to maintain more traditional forms of ideological and political control over it.

Overall, tolerance of Western ways of life increased during the early perestroika years. This also extended to contacts with the West. Whereas trips to Finland would become a banal occurrence only a few years later, travelling to Finland was quite an

event in the mid-1980s, as can be seen from ‘The Trip to Finland,’ an article written for the local newspaper by an employee of the printing house, in which this neighbouring country, only 60 kilometres away, appears as a sort of *terra incognita* to the nine employees who went there as tourists:

Most of us visited for the first time a foreign country. Consequently, we were worried. Although we knew that we were visiting our neighbours, we also knew that they were living in a totally different, capitalist world. Before we crossed the border, we went to Petrozavodsk. There, at the regional committee of the trade union, we were given a detailed lecture on Finland (KZ, 9 April 1986).

The travel narrative with its positive attitude towards a foreign country sharply contrasts with earlier descriptions, but its tone and vocabulary still remind of the official discourse. Generally, publications of this type showed the lively interest of Soviet tourists in Finland during that period, something that radically changed in the 1990s. The travellers thus told of being ‘stricken by the intense neon lights of Helsinki.’ The idea of a strict boundary between them and us is still evident in this article, a legacy of the geopolitical worldview of ordinary Sortavalans during the Cold War (see Section 1-3).

Identity is crucially being shaped by memories of the past. How then did local officials and residents react to and perceive the Finnish historical and cultural legacy of the town and of the North Ladoga region? Local officials generally adopted a contradictory attitude. Several official documents from the 1940s emphasise, for example, the need to protect the Finnish architectural heritage. At the same time, the local political elite did not encourage local historians to study the Finnish past and even forbade them to do so. It was only during the perestroika years that this terrain was opened up for the *kraevedy* (Ristolainen 2010: 113–114), or enthusiasts of local history, and that, in the words of A. Popadin (1998), the subconsciousness of Sortavala began to manifest itself.<sup>32</sup> But for most of the post-war period, efforts focussed on the surviving architectural remnants. Even during the era of glasnost, the local media largely avoided such subjects as the mass executions under Stalin. However, numerous local residents, along with many of their fellow citizens elsewhere, eagerly read the so-called public and political journals (*tolstye zhurnaly*) published in Moscow and Leningrad: *Novyi mir*, *Zvezda*, *Znamia* etc., which promoted revisionist views of the official Soviet historiography. Since, at the same time, official cultural practices still adhered to the old Soviet cultural forms, this resulted in a situation where political polarisation within the local community became common and in a hybridisation of local identities.

In time, the formerly close ties between culture and ideology loosened. Newspaper articles from the mid-1980s less often stressed the political or ideological meaning of cultural events and judged art on its own terms. In 1986, the local newspaper dedicated a whole page to the cultural life in town, reporting on the many professional and amateur artists of Sortavala, such as the well-known wood-carver Kronid Gogolev, without referring once to the official ideology. The director of the Sortavala’s House of Culture wrote, for instance, about the local orchestra of Russian folk instruments,

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32 The contemporary Russian author, scholar, local activist and architectural historian used this formula to describe the German legacy of Kaliningrad, the former Königsberg.

founded in 1972 by the accordion player Raimond Leino, an ethnic Finn from North America and a teacher at the local music school, who also directed the orchestra (*KZ*, 26 April 1986). She simply described the musicians as local music enthusiasts and well-trained professionals, making no mention of any political tasks linked to their activities. Other local artists were being mentioned for their depictions of the beautiful natural landscape of North Ladoga.

Even mass culture changed during those years. During earlier Soviet decades, women could only compete at work. In February 1989, for the first time, a beauty contest was organised in town for female students of the vocational school for trade in co-operation with employees of the local House of Culture, an event greeted by the local newspaper: ‘Beauty contests, which not long ago were “labeled” as the “anti-culture of the bourgeoisie” are more and more suited to the Soviet people’s taste’ (*KZ*, 25 February 1989).

During the later years of perestroika, the former cultural forms of mass education almost disappeared. Culture and art that had no ideological content became the norm. In 1989, the local newspaper thus published an article on the avant-garde painter Alexander Kharitonov, who had spent his childhood in Sortavala and studied art in Leningrad in the 1960s and 1970s, on the occasion of the exhibition ‘Searching and Experimenting’ at Petrozavodsk, where the artist then lived (*KZ*, 11 March 1989). There were also attempts to promote the Russian cultural legacy of Sortavala. Nicholas Roerich, the famous painter-philosopher had lived there in 1917 and 1918 and made many friends among the Finnish artists (see, among others, Soini 2001). In the late 1980s, one of his followers, the poet-philosopher Yuri Linnik suggested to dedicate a museum to Roerich in Sortavala. In his view, a building designed by the architect Eliel Saarinen, located in the very centre of the town, in Karelskaia Street, was particularly suited for this purpose.<sup>33</sup> In Finnish times, it was housing a bank, but became a militia station in Soviet times before being once more used by a bank in post-Soviet times.

### ***6-2. Sports as a Constitutive Element of Identity***

Next to culture, sports played a similar central symbolic role in Soviet identity politics, and this since the 1920s. As in the Nordic countries, winter sports were highly popular in Northwest Russia, particularly various disciplines of skiing and ice-skating. In post-war Sortavala, many local residents practised them or were involved in other forms of physical culture since their childhood. The town’s very active sports organisations and its state-sponsored sports schools produced several outstanding athletes whose successes significantly contributed to local feelings of pride, echoed by the local media. Several talented local sportsmen became national, European and even world champions, among them the ski jumper Petr Kovalenko, who participated at the 1964 Olympic Games in Innsbruck, Austria; Jurii Kalinin, who competed in the 1972 Olympic Games in Sapporo, Japan; Jurii Ivanov, a multiple champion of the Soviet Union and a participant of the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, United States; and the

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33 It is perhaps worth mentioning, that the Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York occupies a building with a similar Art Deco architecture.

skater Sergei Khlebnikov, who became a World Cup champion in 1982 at Alkmaar, in the Netherlands.

As Eric Hobsbawm (1990) has pointed out, the 'symbolism' of sport is a crucial part of people's identification with their nation. Sport events, as other forms of mass culture, also have an ideological and political meaning (Combs 1990: 33). Between the 1940s and the 1960s, major sport events attracted huge crowds, partly because open-air activities were then vastly more popular and partly because most people could not yet watch these events on television. Sport competitions had a ritual character and contributed to social cohesion. These characteristics also pertained to sport events in Soviet Sortavala. On the annual Day of the Border Guard, for instance, dozens of them took place across the town, such as a rowing competition on an inlet of Lake Ladoga, football and volleyball matches and various athletic competitions (*KZ*, 24 May 1978). As already noted, local sports practices often were part of the paramilitary training of the civilian population, with its ethos of socialist defender of the homeland.

Ski competitions and similar outdoor activities thus contributed to the local sense of place and shaped Sortavala's local identity. The earliest trace of local sport life in the municipal archives goes back to January 1946. At the time, the town executive committee adopted a resolution related to the organisation of a ski competition and the participation of local residents in the Fifth People's Ski Festival of the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/44, l. 2). In November 1946, a decision was taken to renovate the municipal stadium, particularly the seats, the pavilion and the water supply system, in order 'to improve conditions for sport events and for the better organisation of young people's leisure time.' In addition, it was recommended that the director of School No. 1 create a skating rink on the inlet of Lake Ladoga in front of the school building (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/79, l. 30). One of the early school teachers for physical education in town was William Wickman, a Finn by origin, whose engagement in favour of public sport events is still fondly recalled by Sortavalans (see *KZ*, 7 January 1955).

Participation in voluntary sports clubs was strongly encouraged, including through radio broadcasts, a major media of Soviet propaganda in the 1940s and 1950s, as shown by a speech of the director of the Special Ski School Ivakin on the tasks expected from organisers of sport events, which was transmitted during this period. Students of the local vocational schools were reported to have joined the sports club Labour Reserves (*Trudovye rezervy*) and similar organisations. In October 1948, the authorities established a children's sports school, locally famous for its department of gymnastics. During the summer season, rowing was one of the most popular sports. Young sportsmen trained on the Ladoga inlets of Vakkolahti and Leppäjarvi and took part in regional championships. Sortavala also had a number of talented trainers, such as Nina Hiamialainen (rowing), Arkadii Fedotov and Alexander Zuev (skiing) and Alexander Kuznetsov (ice-skating). Local as well as regional newspapers devoted a large number of articles to sports activities in Sortavala (see in particular *Leninskaja Pravda*, 21 July 1977, 5 August 1980 and 18 February 1984; *KZ*, 14 August 1979, 17 December 1983 and 3 November 1987; *Ladoga*, 13 March 1999). The local development of sports reached its apogee in the 1960s and early 1970s. Already in the 1980s, successes in

competitions became less frequent and the town's sports infrastructure slowly fell into decay. By 1987, equipment's and sports grounds were reported to be in poor condition (KZ, 3–5 November 1987). A formerly major component of Sortavala's local identity thus lost its importance in the late Soviet period.

During the first post-Soviet decade, the state substantially reduced funding for local sports organisations, clubs and collectives, as elsewhere in the country, and sports no longer occupied the same central place in local society and for the symbolic identification of Sortavalans. However, memories of the more glorious past and its legendary champions live on in the media and in numerous online publications dedicated to the subject and still constitute a crucial element of local patriotism. The social network group 'We are from Sortavala' has been highly popular among local residents.<sup>34</sup> More recently, the online photo gallery *All about sports in Sortavala* has focussed the local public's attention, with users uploading 124 pictures as well as numerous scanned documents about the history of sports in Sortavala since the early 1950s. In addition to these nostalgic manifestations, there have also been attempts by members of the younger and older generations in town to revive sports life. Sports have thus been a major contribution to the symbolic production of locality and, to a lesser extent, still continue to so.

To sum up, the main political and ideological goal proclaimed by the Soviet elite at all stages of Soviet history was the creation of a new human being, i.e. NSM. The material presented above shows how Sortavala's local elite attempted to produce narratives that supported this overall aim in various spheres of life, political, ideological, military and cultural. All these aspects of Soviet identity politics contributed to the production of a local sense of place.

Soviet political culture can be seen as a continuation of Russian traditions of subordinating the individual to the collective. Its authoritarian character has thus deep roots in history. Its manifestations were autocracy, the supremacy of the state over society and a dominant state ideology. Communist collectivism was also grounded in the social realities of peasant communalism. Although the Orthodox Church suffered from severe repression, its tradition of subordinating the individual to the religious community, lived on in new forms. Soviet culture was under the ideological control of the Party. All official documents and media publications in post-war Sortavala drew their inspiration from party directives emanating from the centre. In official discourses, the spiritual development of individuals had to take place on the basis of a communist consciousness.

The construction of a Soviet identity was also the ultimate goal of educational institutions. Newspaper articles, for example, offer multiple local evidence of the close links between military and border issues and the tasks of communist education, notably in the promotion of an identity that saw local citizens mainly as defenders of the homeland. Another crucial component of local identity was sports, whether in the form of everyday practices of Sortavalans or their enthusiastic support for well-known local sportsmen.

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34 The relevant pages are available through the URL: <http://www.odnoklassniki.ru>

While local official discourses reproduced to a large extent narratives of the various national identity projects, they also manifest local peculiarities. More particularly, they can be perceived as attempts to build a local identity that coincides with a Soviet national identity in the local historical context of a culturally and ethnically highly diverse community most of whose members previously had no close ties to their new home. The discursive productions across the various spheres of social life richly illustrate how this task was implemented in Soviet times, from the Stalin period to the years of perestroika and glasnost under Gorbachev.

### **6-3. Local Ethnic Discursive Contexts**

Studies of localisation processes frequently refer to ethnicity as a major element. As Suutari (2010: 7) has argued, although cultural institutions are created on a national scale through government policies, local initiatives have also been of decisive importance for cultural practices linked to ethnicity, regional culture and landscape, as witnessed by the countless amateur ensembles and independent artists in the Republic of Karelia. This section will discuss the ethnic dimension in public narratives.

Historically, national policies in Soviet Karelia were at times used both to support ethnic minorities and to suppress indigenous culture and language in the Republic. After the announcement of Stalin's indigenisation policy in 1920, the authorities of Karelia—the Finnish former Social Democrats Edvard Gylling, Kustaa Rovio and others—took up the task of developing the Republic on the basis of Finnish language and culture. Gylling believed that the successful development of a socialist Karelia could serve an example of the construction of socialism to the Finnish working class. Thus, the Finnish national-minded heads of the Republic proclaimed the task to establish the Karelian-Finnish Republic. Finnish researcher Markku Kangaspuro (2000) called this period 'Red Karelianism' (pp. 143–147). This period could be seen as important from the point of view the development of culture in the Republic which to large extent took place as a result of enforcement of Finnish and North-American Finnish immigrants. As Jänis and Starshova point out, the so-called 'red' Finns played a significant role in shaping the linguistic situation in Soviet Karelia and that Finnish language became the official written language in that period (Jänis and Starshova 2012: 189). At the same time, Karelian language and culture were not a target for this policy. As Nick Baron puts it, Gylling was not concerned with Karelian development as an end in itself. From the very beginning, he planned to transform 'backward Karelia' into a model socialist economy (Baron 2007: 36). During the second half of the 1930s, the conceptual framework of national policy was changed. In 1937, Stalin gave his famous instructions for employing political vigilance and to create new cadres. Thus, a new concept was laid down according to which Russians were a leading nation becoming the 'elder brother' in a family of Soviet peoples. The term *korenizatsiia* disappeared from use in the press. This was followed by a liquidation of Finnish literature and shot-lived favouring of the Karelian language. The main aim was to eliminate the role of the Finns in the history of Karelia.

During the post-war period, the issue of Finno-Ugric ethno-cultural identities in Soviet Karelia was mainly treated in the context of Soviet nationality policies. This



meant that regional party leaders generally reproduced the dominant discourse on the friendship of Soviet peoples in their directives, speeches and other public presentations, while the media almost exclusively echoed their statements. Under these conditions, issues related to the culture and language of ethnic minorities were largely overlooked. The dramatic demographic decline of Karelians in the region was thus occulted by official discourses of prospering Soviet nationalities. It was only in the late 1980s that the media began to show some interest in the subject and to evoke it in a controversial way. In March 1989, the Sortavala's local newspaper published under the general title 'Invitation to a debate' an article, 'The Karelians: A Look at Tomorrow,' written by L. Markianova, vice-director of the Institute for Language, Literature and History at the Karelian branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Petrozavodsk. Despite its Soviet rhetoric and its references to Lenin's writings, the article operated a complete revision of the hitherto dominant official discourse, with its emphasis on the 'friendship of peoples.' Its author noted in particular the contradictions between the Soviet theoretical approach to the building of national cultures, political slogans and actual political practices. The following passage clearly demonstrates her critical attitude towards Soviet nationality policies in the case of the Karelians:

The fate of the Karelian language and ethnic culture was not always a matter of the Karelian people itself. No one asked Karelians their opinions in the 1920s when the elite made a decision on their language. The further development of the Karelian language was declared inexpedient. The officials in charge did not take into account the antiquity of Karelian history. In the 1930s, a written Karelian language was created. But these attempts to render justice to the Karelians ended in failure. The language was (officially) used for only a few years. There are plans to discuss the question whether the Karelian language should be taught as one of the native languages. Karelian children in nursery and elementary schools could then study in their native language (*KZ*, 8 March 1989).

Markianova also mentioned the issue of ethnic identity, making several proposals to promote Karelian traditional culture and language in Karelia. In her opinion, Karelians, Finns and Vepsians living in the KASSR should have the right to develop their native language. She claimed that the loss of their mother tongue resulted in people losing their ethnic roots and identity as well as less identifying with each other. This would lead to underestimate the role of a 'small homeland' (*malaia rodina*), as opposed to the Motherland (*rodina*), i.e. Russia. Markianova finally offered some prospects for the nationality policy in the Karelian Republic, in particular with regard to the situation of Karelian traditional cultures:

Today we have to realise what should be the consequences of the mistakes made in the nationality policy. The Karelian language and Karelian folklore still exist in the republic, they are in need of support from the state. Karelians are the foremost ethnic group, we should realise this. We have to organise a wide debate of Karelia's national policy. Indeed, we are now on the eve of the Plenum of the CPSU's Central Committee where nationality issues are on the agenda (*ibid.*).

In the late Soviet years, biographical narratives that discussed ethnic aspects of cross-border interaction regularly appeared in the local newspaper. Some people quite

openly referred to their nationality and cultural origins. In 1989, a discussion about relations with the Finnish neighbours, for example, took place in Sortavala. A newspaper reader reacted in the following terms to an article on this event:

I support contacts with Finns. We should be friends with them. We have much in common with them. I, for example, am a Karelian and speak Finnish. I have read a lot of books written by Finnish authors. At the same time, I was fighting the Finns during the war. But now times have changed. The goals of the new generation have changed as well. Therefore, let us live in friendship with our neighbours (*KZ*, 18 March 1989).

This shows how ethnic discursive contexts changed during the late perestroika years. In the late 1980s, Sortavala's media increasingly referred to life stories and everyday practices of the borderlanders, in which local residents manifest their closeness to the Finnish people and called for good relations between the Karelian Republic and Finland.

In the following section, Sortavala's spatial identity will be described in more detail. Here, this issue will only be interpreted in relation to the local linguistic context and imagination. One interesting example is offered by the destiny of topographical names in Soviet times. When the Soviet Union annexed the formerly Finnish territory of North Ladoga, the Finnish names of settlements, rivers and lakes were almost never changed, because Karelia still benefitted from the status of a national republic, while practically all Finnish toponyms in Leningrad Oblast and on the Karelian Isthmus were Russified. Documents from the local archives illustrate how the early post-war settlers struggled with the Finnish names. In many early documents, the town's name often appeared in a corrupted form, such as 'Sartovallo' or 'Sortovallo' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/74, l. 7 and 2/80, l. 4). In the very first official documents, dating from 1944, the town was referred to by its former Russian name of Serdobol (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/2, l. 5 and 6). In other cases, the Finnish and Russian names were used alternately in a single document (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/3, l. 1, 77 from December 1944). By contrast, most of the town's streets were rapidly renamed, Seminarian Street, Sariola Street and Tapiola Street were the few that kept their name for a short period. During a meeting of the town executive committee in February 1945, for instance, the question was raised how to name the streets 'having no name.' A small lane between Seminarian Street and Sariola Street was finally named Pioneer's Lane, probably because of its closeness to a school.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the local authorities were confronted with an overlapping symbolism of local landmarks. As already mentioned, the town's architecture and its urban environment in general were reflections of the spatial imagination of Finnish nationalism, while Soviet identity politics were aimed at producing a new spatial imagery, mainly through the promotion of socialist heroes. Streets named after heroes of the Great Patriotic War were a common feature across the Soviet Union. One of Sortavala's streets thus received the name of the cult figure Alexandr Matrosov, who had been awarded with the title Hero of the Soviet Union after throwing himself onto a German pillbox, thereby blocking a machine-gun. In later years, a number of local streets were named after war heroes and military officers who had served in the North Ladoga region, such as Tapiola Street, near Matrosova Street, which was re-

named into the Russian Ivan's Street (*Ivanovskaia ulitsa*) in 1946 (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/4, l. 1 and d. 1/6, l. 8).

Only two of the town's street finally kept their former name, Karelskaia [Karelian] Street and Sadovaia Street (Finnish Puutarhankatu, Garden Street in English). The former symbolised the Karelian identity of the town, which was still officially recognised at the time within the framework of the then prevalent nationality policy, and the second bore a politically and ideologically neutral meaning. Both names were, however, translated into Russian. One of the central squares has also kept its name, that of a main character of the Kalevala epic: Väinämöinen (*Väinämöisen aukio*). In 1935, a bronze statue of the local runic singer Pedri Shemeika had been erected in honour of the centenary of the first edition of *The Old Kalevala*. In the Finnish historical perspective, the statue and the surrounding urban landscape were a symbol of the romanticism characteristic of the newly independent state's yearnings for a national identity. This meaning was overshadowed in Soviet times. However, since *The Kalevala* was a major symbol used in the official discourse of Soviet Karelia, the statue and the square were interpreted as representing the Finno-Ugric tradition of the region. In 1949, the town library thus organised a literary soirée dedicated to the centenary expanded version of the first edition of *The Kalevala* (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 6/721, l. 28).

Elsewhere, Sortavala's town centre underwent rather radical changes. The former Peter and Paul Square with its cobble stones, for example, had resembled a typical Western European market square. It was turned into a sort of garden in Soviet times and received the rather standard Soviet name of Kirov's Square—every town in the former Soviet Union had a street or square of this name.<sup>35</sup>

Generally, the new Soviet authorities attempted to erase any memories of the Finnish past and of the formerly Finnish inhabitants whenever this came into conflict with the new ideology. In this respect, a particularly brutal decision was taken in May 1945 to destroy the Finnish soldiers' graves from the recent war, located in the town centre, with the proclaimed aim of 'improving the general view of the central part of town.' The title of the relevant administrative document made this appear as a routine embellishment of the town through creating just another garden (*O blagoustroistve i ozelenenii tsentral'noi chasti goroda Sortavala*) and the text itself emphasises the aesthetic considerations that led to the graveyard's destruction:

When Sortavala was under Finnish occupation in 1941–1944, one of the most beautiful squares in the town centre was turned into a graveyard. Graves bearing crosses are barriers to further plans for the development of the town. This graveyard blocks a general view of the area. Therefore, the committee has decided to destroy the graveyard. We ask the SNK KFSSR [Council of People's Commissars of the Karelio-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic; A. I.] to give permission to close the graveyard, to remove the crosses and to create a garden on its site. Establishing the garden means planting trees, bushes, flowers and other plants.

Chairman of the executive committee of the town council:  
Ivan Kostin (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 1/12, l. 10).

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35 One of the central squares of the Karelian capital Petrozavodsk still bears this name.

The new symbolism introduced by the regional and local authorities after the war used references to three historical contexts. The first of these was Russia's pre-revolutionary past. While the early Bolsheviks had adopted a largely negative attitude towards the tsarist past, the Great Patriotic War had resulted in a revision of the former Soviet historiography and in the promotion of patriotic narratives that emphasised Russian nationalism. In post-war Sortavala, the local authorities thus organised public lectures that glorified the country's pre-revolutionary era, such as one given in 1946 on 'The Emergence of the Russian State' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/88, l. 15). Another lecture was dedicated to the 'Great Russian Patriotic Writers—Gogol and Lermontov.' An amateur group also performed a recitation of the poem 'Rus', written by the classical author Ivan S. Nikitin. The second historical reference focussed on the early post-revolutionary decades of the 1920s and 1930s as the beginning of a new era in history. Local examples of this included a recitation of Vladimir Maiakovskii's famous 'Poem of the Soviet Passport' during amateur performances, while the official discourse on the friendship of the various nationalities of the Soviet Union found its expression in such creative activities as performing Russian, Moldavian, Ukrainian and other folk dances, including the Karelian kadril and Ritta Kandru (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/88, l. 16).

Karelian traditions constituted indeed the third historical frame of reference, especially for the organisation of cultural activities. The official justification for this was the KFSSR's status as a national republic and Sortavala's local elite thus demonstrated its support for the nationality policy. In 1946, Helmi Malmi, a well-known cultural activist of Finnish origin, received, for instance, an invitation to join a local commission established to prepare an amateur competition of folk-dance groups. She was to represent the Karelian and Finnish cultural traditions of the region (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/54, l. 4). Malmi was the choreographer of the folk-dance troop Kantele and, for several decades, developed ethnic dances in the republic.

Soviet nationality policy in Karelia also gave rise to the practice of allocating quotas for the region's ethnic minorities in the political institutions. Representatives from the region's titular nations thus occupied a significant number of political positions, although this did not mean a real share in power given the centralised nature of the Communist Party and the Soviet government. Until the 1960s, between 25 and 30 per cent of the regional nomenklatura was composed of ethnic Karelians, Finns and Vepsians in Soviet times, and in the so-called nationality districts (*natsional'nyi raion*), 68 per cent of the political leaders were from these minorities (Vavulinskaia 2001: 670). This practice continued in post-Soviet times.

As previously unpublished census data show, the share of Finno-Ugrians in the overall population of Karelia severely declined between 1959 and 2002, although the numbers are not strictly comparable because of administrative changes that intervened in the late 1950s and early 1970s (see Section 1 above). The 1959 data, for example, refer to three districts, including Sortavala district.

**Table: Ethnic Composition of the Population of Sortavala District, 1959–2002**

<i>Census year</i>	<i>Karelians</i>	<i>Finns</i>	<i>Vepsians</i>	<i>Russians</i>	<i>Total population</i>
1959	3,045	1,883	229	51,102	72,848
1970*	1,955	881	131	38,794	52,991
1979	1,743	622	89	26,765	36,845
1989**	1,394	490	75	28,569	37,690
2002	1,126	411	72	28,744	35,596

\* Total calculated by the author

\*\* Absolute numbers calculated by the author on percentage figures

Source: Suni et al. (1998) (Data for 2002 is available online: <http://gov.karelia.ru/gov/Power/Committee/National/district07.html?print=1> (accessed 8 September 2016).

The shrinking numbers of ethnic Karelians, Finns and Vepsians can partly be explained by people's preference for a passport indicating Russian nationality. Members of ethnic minorities sometimes chose the Russian nationality, although both their parents were, for example, Vepsians. The same was true for children born of mixed marriages.

As already noted, the media only started to pay attention to ethnic issues in the late 1980s. In January 1989, the local newspaper thus published for the first time data on the ethnic composition of Sortavala's population. According to the article, representatives from 49 nationalities were then living on the town council's territory. Russians accounted for the largest numbers (26,765), followed by Belorussians (over 5,000), Karelians and Ukrainians (about 1,000 each). Others mentioned included Finns, Tatars, Poles, Vepsians, Mordvas, Uzbeks, Chuvashs, Lithuanians, Jews, Estonians, Moldavians, Udmurts, Germans, Latvians, Bashkirians, Azerbaizhanis and Komis (*KZ*, 14 January 1989). Another article noted the increasing number of mixed marriages, 85 out of 313 concluded in 1987 (*KZ*, 4 March 1989). In February 1991, the paper published 'Finns in the Mirror of the Census,' an article written by a well-known scholar of ethnic issues and ethnic Karelian, Evgenii Klement'ev. The author critically analysed the nationality policy of Soviet Karelia and its consequences for the region's Finno-Ugric ethnic minorities. He also offered some evidence for the dramatic decline of their numbers, quoting the last census data, which had indicated that only 333 ethnic Finns were living in town (*KZ*, 14 February 1991).<sup>36</sup>

While some of the highest positions in Soviet Karelia were occupied by ethnic Karelians during the Soviet period, this was not true at the local level. During the post-war decades, the local party branch and the local administration were almost never headed by Finno-Ugrians. In August 1945, the nomenklatura of Sortavala's town council counted forty Russians, three Karelians and Vepsians each, two Ukrainians, one Finn and one employee of Jewish nationality. Between August and December 1945,

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36 Another 157 ethnic Finns were living in the surrounding rural areas (see Table above).

the council's chairman was Aleksandr Ivanovich Gorbachev, an ethnic Karelian, but he was relieved of his post by the Central Committee of the VKP(b) and the Council of Ministers of the KFSSR. Kriakina Vera Petrovna, a senior inspector of the state insurance company, was the only official of the town council who claimed to belong to the Finnish nationality (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/89, l. 1 and 2).

In April 1953, the members of the executive committee, included in the nomenklatura of the executive committee of the Petrozavodsk District Council, counted 16 people, a Russian chairman, eleven other Russians, two Belorussians, a Vepsian, a Karelian and a Ukrainian (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 15/498, l. 7). In 1965, six deputies of the town council were ethnic Finns (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 44/1004, l. 1–3). Of the 153 deputies elected in 1963–64, seven had Finnish second names; a Finn and a Vepsian were among the nine members of the executive committee, the others being Russians (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 38/935, l. 8). During the same period, two Finns were members of deputies' commissions of the town council (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 38/935, l. 44). Several ethnic Finns from Sortavala have been highly praised for their public activities by the town council. One of them was Erna V. Leinonen, head of the Commission for Public Health and Social Welfare (*sotsial'nogo obespecheniia*) and a gifted organiser in her field of work; she was a medical director of Sortavala's tuberculosis dispensary. In September 1966, the town executive committee consisted of ten people, nine party members and a party candidate, seven of them Russians, two Karelians and one Finn (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 47/1050, l. 9).

Contrary to the early 1930s and late 1940s, the political situation did not favour Finno-Ugric culture and languages in later decades. Those rare individuals of Finno-Ugric origin who were represented in the local political and administrative institutions had to strictly adhere to the party's nationality policy. Since the mid-1930s and especially since the winter and Continuation Wars, residents with a Finno-Ugric background were regarded with suspicion by the authorities and sometimes labelled 'Finnish nationalists.' Moreover, post-war Sortavala was dominated by citizens who had arrived from other regions of the Soviet Union. For these reasons, Finno-Ugric culture was more present in official discourses than in everyday practices at this local level. The national status of Soviet Karelia was legitimised through rather symbolic and formal regulations, such as the recognition of two official languages, Russian and Finnish. In April 1946, Sortavala's town executive committee, for instance, reminded local administrators of trade establishments that all new shops had to use bilingual signs (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/59, l. 22).

Decades later, the region's Karelian identity was one of the issues discussed during public debates of the new 1977 Constitution organised by the political elite (see Section 1-3). At the time, the Sortavala newspaper published a series of articles under the heading 'We Are Discussing the Project of the Constitution of the KASSR.' One of them, titled 'We Believe in the Great Future,' had been written by an engineer technologist from the local printing house:

The project of a new constitution for the KASSR has been met with huge interest and strong approval by the working people of Sortavala. Once again, we have been convinced of our native Karelia's long and glorious path during the years of Soviet

power. A formerly backward region populated by illiterate people on the periphery of Tsarist Russia has been turned into an advanced region of the world's most ardent readers (*KZ*, 25 May 1978).

The quote shows, however, that this regional identity could only be publicly referred to within a closely defined ideological context, that of the 'friendship of the Soviet nations.' Examples of this rhetoric can already be found in early documents of Sortavala's local administration, such as a resolution by a meeting of the town's managers (*khozaktiv*) on the results of the first year of Stalin's Fourth Five-Year Plan from September 1946, which noted that 'as a result of the successful implementation of the Leninist-Stalinist nationality policy, the economy of the KFSSR was strongly developed.' The resolution contains the usual catchphrases, such as 'the working class of the town, together with the entire Soviet people, has accomplished a great contribution,' followed by a passage emphasising the friendship of nations: 'The people of the KFSSR, with the help of other nations of the Soviet Union, once more follow the trajectory interrupted by the war.' It ends with yet another affirmation of this friendship: 'The unity and brotherhood of the republics as well as the assistance by the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic; A. I.] to the national republics help to implement the five-year plan of economic development' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 2/85, l. 10, 14 and 23).

Propaganda of Soviet internationalism was even recommended for the indoctrination (*vospitanie*) of children. The municipal authorities responsible for schools (*obrazovanie*) thus planned several measures in order to implement party directives on this subject. During the school year 1971–72, for instance, they obliged schools to react to the decisions taken by the 24th Congress of the CPSU by organising activities for children such as the Pioneers' 'relay race of friendship.' It was also recommended that the schools' collectives should study the experiences in teaching (*vospitanie*) pioneers and pupils internationalism (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 66/1250, l. 23). Meetings with Finnish-speaking public figures for young people were another facet of teaching (*vospitanie*) internationalism. In 1978, the commander of a Komsomol detachment based at the working-and-training camp Romantic-1978 reported on such a meeting with the poet Nikolai Laine, the editor of the Finnish-language Journal *Punalippu* [The Red Flag]. The celebrated writer told his public about his life and read some of his Finnish and Russian poems to them. The newspaper reporter called the meeting a remarkable event that would live on in the memories of those who had participated in it (*KZ*, 24 June 1978).

These forms of indoctrination even left traces in the vocabulary of ordinary residents, as illustrated by the poem quoted below, which had been sent to the editorial board of the local newspaper by one of its readers. Above all, the poem refers to one of the core ideas of the internationalist discourse, *i.e.* the inseparable links between Karelia and Russia. It also introduces another cliché of this discourse through its expression of gratefulness to Russia for making the Karelian people happy and enjoying life. Its preface suggests that its author, Viola S. Rybakova-Hakkarainen, was living in a Western or more westernised environment, most likely in one of the Baltic republics or even in Finland: 'I have Finnish origins, Karelia is my native region, but I did not

live there for a long time. I love Karelia very much. My uncle Toivo lived and worked in Sortavala for many years.’ Her attempts to praise the advantages of her Motherland over other places, especially outside the Soviet Union, can be interpreted as the result of the patriotic education she had received, according to which the Soviet Union was the best place in the world. In this context, Karelianisation generally meant Sovietisation (see Ristolainen 2010: 109).

I would like to sing a hymn to our glorious Motherland in my own manner.  
The place where I live these days is nice but the beauty of the parks and lawns here is cold. Thus, my heart prefers the forests of Karelia the Russian villages and the pure Russian speech...

We have to preserve the Russian songs.  
My love to Russia is so strong that it is almost painful.  
Russia has not the haughtiness of a Great Power.  
Glory to Russia! Due to her, the Karelians are still singing their native songs!

(KZ, 16 March 1986; English translation by Alexander Izotov)

What makes this poem interesting is that it was published during one of the most liberal periods of the Soviet years. It is unlikely that it was composed within the institutional framework of Soviet identity politics or for any ulterior political motives, typical of earlier decades. It can be assumed that its author sincerely expressed her thoughts and that the poem reflects her personal sense of place. It should be noted that amateur poems published these days on various websites, such as *stihi.ru*, often continue to reproduce the clichés of Soviet narratives.

The nationalist imagery observed in local discursive practices was, however, the result of wider institutional efforts of building a national identity. It was often celebrated in pompous All-Union or regional competitions. In 1970, for instance, the town’s Park of Culture and Rest took part in a review (*smotr*) of the best parks of the Karelian Republic and was awarded with a prize for the best theatrical show, produced under the title ‘This country of mine, my Karelia’ (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 58/1184, l. 25).

Though barely present in the everyday life of most local residents, symbols and signs of the region’s Karelian and Finnish legacy were used in some local practices, such as naming local produce. The skis produced at the SMLK combine in Helylä thus were sold under the label ‘Karelia.’ Later, in the 1980s, a furniture ensemble produced at the same combine was named ‘Aino,’ a Finnish female first name (KZ, 3 January 1989). Similarly, a children’s dance troop of the mid-1980s, mostly composed of Russian kids, chose for its name ‘The Aurinko,’ using the Finnish word for ‘sun.’ In 1989, the ensemble took part in the Third All-Union Festival of Folk Arts at Pitkäranta (KZ, 25 June 1986 and 18 March 1989).

In the early post-Soviet years, the label Karelia was used by several NGOs. In February 1991, the local newspaper, for instance, published A Public Appeal by the Republic’s Social Welfare/Security/Protection Fund ‘Karelia,’ which proclaimed to be a non-political public organisation. The organisation’s declared aim was to solve acute problems within the region. It also announced its intention to promote a revival of regional ethnic cultural traditions, notably of the Karelian people and other regional minorities (KZ, 5 February 1991).



With the exception of Elias Lönnrot's edition of *The Kalevala*, works of Finnish classical and contemporary literature were not widely distributed in Soviet Karelia, whether in the original language or in Russian translations. Most of the Finnish-language books available in the region had been written by Finnish-speaking authors living in Soviet Karelia. For ideological reasons, Sortavala's Finnish past was largely ignored. The sole exception was the Finnish writer Algot Untola, better known under one of his pen names as Maiju Lassila, who had lived in town during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. His books reached a wide audience in the Soviet Union thanks to his translator, the brilliant writer Mikhail Zoshchenko, a victim of the Zhdanov campaign in the late 1940s. A film based on Lassila's fiction *Borrowing Matches* (*Tulitikkuja lainaamassa*, in Finnish) was produced by a Soviet-Finnish team of cinematographers in 1980. Lassila was executed as a 'revolutionary writer' in 1918, during the Finnish civil war. In November 1978, the town publicly inaugurated a memorial plate that was placed on one of the walls of the wooden building that had housed the former teachers' college and, in Soviet times, was occupied by an evening school (*vecherniaia shkola*) for working youth.<sup>37</sup> The local newspaper reported on the event (it took place twice 28 November in Finnish and 29 November in Russian) and reminded its readers that 'the classical Finnish writer of the late nineteenth century had been studying at the teachers' college in Sortavala. Lassila, well-known to Soviet readers, was executed by the White Finns in 1918' (*KZ*, 30 November 1978).

Finally, the local Park of Culture and Leisure offered special programmes related to Karelia, such as 'The Evening of Karelian Poetry' (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 44/1004, l. 63). Karelian here probably did not mean poetry in the Karelian language but rather written by ethnic Karelians or even by authors living in the region. This raises the question what this Karelian identity could have possibly meant in a town inhabited by a majority of ethnic Russians or, more generally, who seemed to identify themselves rather as Soviet citizens. In fact, in the case of Sortavala, Mari Ristolainen (2010: 212) has argued that both Sovietness and Karelianness should be understood as cultural constructs referring to a place. In any case, the historical documents studied here suggest that Sovietness prevailed over Karelianness throughout the entire Soviet period.

In the later Soviet years, when members of the Finnish Ingrian and immigrant communities were getting older and died, cultural life related to the Finnish language apparently slowed down. In the late 1980s, however, the arrival of the first visitors from Finland stimulated a renewed interest in and official tolerance of Finnish studies. In an article published at the time, 'We Read in Finnish,' S. Smirnova, a local teacher of the Finnish language at the local School No. 6, wrote about her experience:

The first year of Finnish studies at our school has ended. Finnish lessons have been given to second-year students. I have taught Finnish regularly—three times a week. According to the programme, the lessons will continue until the last and tenth year. As to this year's results, students learned to read and translate Finnish texts. They also already know how to count in Finnish. On the eve of the New Year's Party, the children learned a Finnish song, too (*KZ*, 23 April and 7 June 1986).

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37 One of the buildings no longer used in the 1990s and 2000s was recently destroyed by a fire.

Sadly, these experiments of teaching Finnish in Sortavala's schools were gradually abandoned before cross-border interaction became more intense only shortly afterwards. According to the local authorities, the main reason was not a lack of interest in the language but a lack of qualified teachers. Indeed, most graduates of the Finnish-language department at the Petrozavodsk State University at the time were offered better paid employment opportunities as interpreters for businesses, while others moved to Finland. Teaching Finnish, however, survived in the form of courses for adults during those years.

*The Finnish Community.* In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviet media depicted Finland as a friendly state and good neighbour. Information about Finland in the local newspaper was, however, confined to the section on international affairs and mostly highlighted co-operation on the state and diplomatic level and consisted of reprinting articles of national newspapers. A typical example is an article from 1960 on the work of the Soviet-Finnish Trade Union Commission (KZ, 12 January 1960). Although cross-border contacts did not exist on the regional or local level, the friendly climate between the two countries had a positive impact on the perception of the Finnish community in Karelia.

Sortavala's Finnish community was composed of immigrants who had left either Finland or North America in the late 1920s and early 1930s and came to live in Sortavala in 1944 and 1945. Most of them were native speakers of Finnish and used this language for everyday communication. Many of them maintained contacts with relatives in Finland and America. Since the period of the Thaw under Khrushchev, they were able to travel abroad for visits to their relatives. The adaptation of these Finnish immigrants to their new cultural and social environment and their attempts to preserve their national identity have been the subject of numerous memoirs and academic publications, particularly several books written in English by Mayme Sevander (1993 and 2000).

During the post-war years, the town's linguistic and cultural diversity was much greater. In time, the Russian language and culture became dominant, along with Soviet traditions. The former were not completely unfamiliar to many of the Finns who lived on the northern shores of Lake Ladoga (2.6 per cent of the population), as they were Ingermanlanders and Russian Finns who had settled in Russia several centuries ago. But the majority of Finnish immigrants, whether they had legally emigrated or been classified as *loikkarit* [defectors], had settled here for political or economic reasons and faced difficulties in adapting to the Soviet reality. North American Finns had arrived in the Karelian Republic after an invitation by the Soviet government to be employed, above all, in the timber industry or the construction sector. As a rule, immigrants from Finland and North America were well-educated and well-qualified (Izotov 2005). Before the Second World War, many of them lived in the Karelian capital Petrozavodsk and worked at the Anokhin State Publishing House, the Gosizdat (Sevander 2000: 82). Later, entire Finnish families would be working at the Sortavala printing house.

Other Finns worked at power stations and for electricity companies. The careers of many Finns were thus linked to Karel Energo. The local newspaper regularly published 'labour biographies' of Sortavala's Finns, such as the story of Arne Leinonen, published under the title 'The place in life':

Arne Leinonen is a member of the local band. He plays the *baian* [accordion] and the guitar and sings. As a child, he graduated from the music school. Leinonen started his professional career in 1969, when he became an employee of the electricity company, right after graduating from secondary school. He began as an electrician's assistant. Later, he became an external graduate of the Leningrad Technical School of Energy Production. Leinonen's co-workers describe him as a diligent, assiduous and creative worker (*KZ*, 12 October 1978).

Sortavala's Finns were famous for their special affection for and devotion to cultural activities and sports. Among the most enthusiastic cultural activists in town was Elina M. Ermolaeva (Impi Toikka), born in Finland, who directed the Finnish amateur folk choir in 1971 and was a council member of the local Department for Culture (*otdel kul'tury*) (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 65/1236, l. 28). Many of them showed a lively interest in events that were happening in Finland, mostly by listening to Finnish AM broadcasts, which were not affected by radio jamming. The Finnish newspaper *Kansan Uutiset* [People's News], published by the Communist Party of Finland and the Finnish People's Democratic Alliance since 1957, was usually available at local newsstands. Issues of *Apu* ('Help,' a weekly family magazine), *Seura* (another weekly family magazine) and other magazines were passed around after they had been received from relatives in Finland. The town library had a section of Finnish-language literature, but books were also brought in from Finland and circulated locally. Despite modest incomes and difficult general circumstances, local households of ethnic Finns rather resembled Finnish than Russian households in many respects such as in the choice of food, a preference for coffee over tea, more modest family celebrations the consumption of Finnish media or the wearing of clothes presented by relatives in Finland had an authentically traditional character. By the mid-1980s, even Russian-speaking Sortavalans preferred to watch Finnish television programmes, because Soviet television still made extensive use of official propaganda. The trend became even more widespread and more popular over time, until Soviet and later Russian channels recaptured audiences. Brief interviews undertaken in 1986 show that local residents were largely uninterested in the Soviet state channels. One of the interviewees said their programmes were 'dull' with the exception of 'Vzgliad' ('The Look,' catering for a younger audience), claiming that he was satisfied with watching programmes from Finland and Leningrad (*KZ*, 25 March 1986). Since most Sortavalans did not understand Finnish, this could be interpreted as a sign of interest in neighbouring Finland rather than in its television programmes.

As to the Finnish community, its maintenance of a strong social identity seems remarkable in face of its long-time exposure to the Soviet environment. Political and economic factors appear to have played no role in this, in contrast to cultural and linguistic ones. In addition to the cultural practices already described, it should be noted that the Soviet authorities, both on the regional and local level, created an admittedly limited cultural and social space for the expression of this cultural identity.

In Sortavala, the municipal authorities organised, for example, various cultural events in the so-called Party hall that allowed local residents access to Finnish communist periodicals and recently published Finnish-language books, i.e. those that benefited from an official authorisation. The Karelian writer Raisa Mustonen recalled that as

a little girl she attended such cultural meetings in Sortavala together with senior family members (Interview in Petrozavodsk, 2005). These forms of socialising may have been promoted by the regional authorities and by Finnish speakers working for the local authorities, such as the well-known activist Toivo Hakkarainen. In the 1970s, regional policies still paid particular attention to Finnish speakers. In May 1947, the KASSR's Council of Ministers passed a decision to provide funds for public libraries in rural areas so that they could acquire Finnish-language literature (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 79/1352, l. 22). By then, however, most of the targeted readers had reached at least middle age and the selection of books had to conform to rules of ideological and political censorship. During the perestroika years, an increasing number of books published in Finland were regularly distributed in the districts through the National Library at Petrozavodsk. In January 1986, the local newspaper thus informed readers about an upcoming exhibition of Finnish-language books recently received from the region's capital, which included fiction, culinary books and works on floriculture and fancywork (*KZ*, 25 January 1986).

On the eve of the Soviet Union's dissolution, political and ideological patronage was abandoned in favour of a rhetoric that emphasised the authorities' concern for ethnic minorities and their social situation. It was in this context that the town party committee of Sortavala set up a meeting with members of the Finnish community on its premises. The Finnish participants, most of whom were middle-aged or old and some of whom brought along their children and grandchildren, were reported to have 'discussed the relevant problems concerning the Finnish ethnic group and its development within the local community,' mainly in Finnish (*KZ*, 6 February 1991). At the time, the Finnish-speaking population of the town had considerably shrunk, partly through mixed marriages, so that many younger people no longer spoke or understood Finnish (see Klement'ev 1992: 221; Laine 2001: 61–62).

In the late 1980s, the CPSU's nationality policy had become once more a politically sensitive issue, after conflicts had broken out in the Caucasus region and the Baltic republics. As a result, the Party adopted a more moderate stance towards ethnic issues, partly abandoning some of its rhetoric of the friendship among Soviet nations. The 1989 election programme of Vladimir Stepanov, one of the political leaders of the KASSR and a candidate for the Congress of People's Deputies, offers evidence of this new mixture of Soviet ideological clichés and Gorbachev's 'new thinking':

As a deputy, I am planning to participate in the Leninist ethnic policy to successfully extend the rights of the national and autonomous republics. My programme of nationality policy aims to create the conditions for favouring the development of ethnic minorities in the country. It also details the needs of the nationalities and ethnic groups and takes into account the particular circumstances of the republics (*KZ*, 9 February 1989).

Against the background of the events in the Lithuanian republic, Sortavala's local newspaper, in early 1991, launched a public debate on the country's nationality policy. Several readers expressed their indignation about the central government's actions in the Baltic republic, while other letters sent to the editorial board rephrased the official discourse:

I cannot accept the expressed opinion, which reflects separatist goals and hate of the Soviet system, the Army, the KGB and the CPSU. We, who are living in Karelia, need not come into conflict with Karelians. We need no separatism. It is not the empire that strikes but rather separatism that strikes the Motherland of the October Revolution. Do you not see that separatism in Lithuania smells like fascism and aims to discriminate other peoples? Someone wants the bourgeoisie to be back in power. Those who defend the separatists are helping them. It is obvious that they want to destroy the Soviet Army to create a situation where the people will have no defender (KZ, 29 January 1991).

The debate clearly shows how the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union led to a sharp polarisation of opinions about the country's destiny, even on this local level. Local residents were obviously deeply worried about the nation's and the region's future.

To sum up, the ethnic dimension of Soviet identity politics found its major expression in the nationality policy, with its emphasis on 'flourishing' nations. In Soviet Karelia, this meant that Karelians formed the titular nationality of the republic, although they only accounted for a comparatively small minority within a largely Russian-speaking population. Karelianness thus became a somewhat ambiguous notion that referred at the same time to the regional Finno-Ugric traditions and to a wider regional identity that had little to do with ethnic, cultural or linguistic forms of identity but was rather part of Sovietness. In Sortavala, the main goal of the political authorities was to transform a multi-ethnic community of migrants into homogenous Soviet citizens, with cultural concessions to the local Finnish-speaking minority of Finnish Ingrians and immigrants. These succeeded in maintaining their social and cultural identity to a certain extent, but suffered from declining numbers through a variety of factors, such as mixed marriages and a predominantly Russian-speaking and Soviet environment.

#### **6-4. Religious Discourses: Modernisation vs Tradition**

The role of the Russian Orthodox Church during the Soviet period is a complex one. As already noted, its traditions can be seen as having survived in different forms in Soviet society, notably its idea of subordinating the individual to the collective or community (Kharkhordin 1999: 55 and 212). The most obvious manifestation of this continuity was probably the ideological concept of socialising the masses (*vospitanie*) with its indoctrination of a new communist ethic. Articles from Sortavala's local newspaper *Krasnoe Znamia* offer plenty of evidence of the attempts made by the local authorities to establish control over individuals in ways similar to those employed by the Church. A closer look at these practices might reveal even more specific parallels in the Soviet matrix of psychological and behavioural models. The Orthodox notion of *sobornost'*, or the 'spiritual community of many jointly living people',<sup>38</sup> may, for instance, have inspired the Soviet *subbotnik* (voluntary work on Saturdays), the Church's prosecution of heretics Stalinist terror, and God's Kingdom communist society (Afanas'ev 1995: 1–14). This might explain the strong and fast revival of Christian beliefs and church activities in the post-Soviet era.

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38 See Lazarev 2001: 580, and Khoruzhyi 1994: 25.

Soviet policy towards religion, and in particular the Russian Orthodox Church, varied greatly throughout the entire period of Soviet rule, from complete negation to a relatively favourable attitude. Its overall direction was to replace Orthodox religion with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. As Robert Service has argued, ‘seven decades of Marxist-Leninist propaganda and atheistic repression had their effect... The communists in the Civil War and later in the 1930s conducted a violent campaign against religion.’ The state’s policy changed, however, in the 1940s, when ‘Stalin in the Second World War allowed the Russian Orthodox Church to function more freely’ (Service 2002: 89–90). This policy of promoting pre-revolutionary values continued until the Khrushchev era, during which national identity projects generally excluded religion from the ‘spiritual development’ of Soviet citizens and Soviet society, that is the development of a socialist personality through familiarity with and knowledge of secular arts and culture. The latter was the task of the *shestidesiatniki*, as representatives of the intelligentsia were called during the period of the Thaw, in the 1960s. The term designated intellectuals—mainly artists, writers and poets—who had been encouraged to express their views by Khrushchev’s liberalisation and anti-Stalinist rhetoric. They included officially recognised and even celebrated individuals as well as dissidents, although most of them stood for the further development of socialism in an anti-Stalinist form. The ‘complex development of personality,’ promoted by the dominant narratives of the Khrushchev period, was intended to replace the dichotomous identity characteristic of the Stalinist discourse. References to a more traditional understanding of ‘spiritual life’ could only be found in the books of a few marginalised authors.

At the local level of Sortavala, traces of Stalin’s favourable policy towards the Russian Orthodox Church are present in the local archives. One is the application by some twenty local residents to the Commissioner for Orthodox Church Affairs at the SNK USSR on the territory of the KFSSR (*Upolnomochennyi po delam Pravoslavnoi tserkvi pri SNK SSSR po KFSSR*), asking for permission to establish an Orthodox parish under the leadership of the Patriarch of Moscow and All-Russia Alexii at the local Nikolskii Church. In his response, the Commissioner wanted to know who had initiated the petition and questioned whether this person had any mercenary motives. He also raised the question whether the number of believers was sufficiently big to warrant the establishment of an Orthodox community. The petition had been initiated by a pensioner, who had been working as a carpenter, and was supported by five housewives, seven dependants, four theatre musicians, a military serviceman and several employees of local enterprises (f. R-310, op. 1, d. 1/11, l. 1–3). The final response was positive.

Another issue was the status of religious buildings. In Soviet times, many cultural activists and celebrities called for the protection of churches and monasteries of the Orthodox Church as monuments of the country’s spiritual legacy. While they were successful in some cases, many former churches received a new destination, at best as museums. In Karelia, the famous wooden cathedral on Kizhi Island is still a museum today. In the Sortavala district, the Nikolskii Church on the island of Riekkalansaari, once a part of the Valaam Monastery, was used as a social club. Another building that had belonged to the monastery, a chapel located in the yard of Kirov Street 4, in the

town centre, was transformed into a shooting club, when the local Osoviakhim council rented the premises in March 1947 (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 3/103, l. 27).

Although more liberal in many other respects, the Khrushchev years saw a new wave of prosecution against the Church. Local documents attest the predominance of atheist rhetoric typical of the 1920s and 1930s. Plans for ‘political work’ with students at local schools, elaborated by the town council’s *gorono* (department for education) in the early 1960s, speak of ‘systematic active and offensive anti-religious work’ (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 38/934, l. 66). Although churchgoers were mostly elderly people and the earlier modernisation of the country had increased the number of well-educated people, Khrushchev’s anticlerical campaign was enforced throughout the country. In Sortavala, one of the mandates (*nakaz izbiratelei*) of the 1963–64 election campaign suggested ‘to close the local Nikolskii Church and to open a new club instead’ (f. R-2203, op. 1, d. 38/935, l. 9). During the era of Stagnation under Brezhnev, the Party continued its anti-religious policy. Atheism was one of the discipline taught at state universities within the framework of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Anticlericalism was less virulent and Orthodox religion was increasingly being considered a thing of the past, which raises the question of the revival of the Orthodox Church in post-Soviet times.

Historically, Sortavala presents an interesting case. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Karelian identity was closely linked with the Russian Orthodox Church, but came under the significant influence of the Lutheran Church and Soviet atheism in the twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> It can be assumed that most of Sortavala’s post-war settlers had a cultural and family background marked by the Orthodox tradition. However, the small parish established in 1946 only counted twenty believers. It is true that church services were not encouraged by the authorities and that church visits were strictly prohibited for members of the Party and organisations close to it. In addition, scientific and technical progress, Soviet space exploration and a rising level of education were factors that contributed to promote an atheist worldview among ordinary citizens. However, at a time when young educated people in Western countries turned towards Eastern religions in the 1960s, members of the Soviet intelligentsia and middle class adopted non-traditional spiritual beliefs, too. In the Sortavala area, the philosopher-artist Nicholas Roerich (see above) had many followers, although he was a *persona non grata* for the Orthodox Church, because his teachings were said to contradict Russian traditions. And the revival of the Russian Orthodox Church in post-communist Russia is yet another sign that religion continues to be a major element of social and national identity.

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39 In the Soviet/Russian discourse this influence is represented as Finnicisation of North Ladoga region. These authors (Reznikov 1987; Dmitriev 2005; Pulkin 2003) state that the Orthodox Church experienced schism/dissidence (*raskol*). It means ‘new style’ of public worship (for instance, using the Gregorian calendar instead of Julian one) and more generally a ‘Finnish direction’ in life of the Orthodox Church. Especially inconvenience was demand to carry out the responsibilities similarly to the Lutheran priests. For these issues with regard of the particular area in North Ladoga—settlement Salmi (Pitkäranta district): see Heikkinen (1989).

## 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 *khrushchevki* (*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 Activists<sup>40</sup> (*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

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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*)<sup>41</sup> 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

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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.<sup>42</sup> 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

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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.<sup>43</sup> 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

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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.<sup>44</sup> 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

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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

and paramilitary training started in childhood and continued well into adult life in the form of voluntary people's patrols and other institutions. Military personnel and border troops were omnipresent in this garrison town. The state border with Finland was invested with a symbolic meaning that gave it the status of a 'sacred boundary' that protected the Motherland and had to be defended against a foreign capitalist enemy. Ironically, few civilians among the local residents had an idea of what the border itself looked like.

Local socio-economic development was strongly informed by the highly centralised command economy. Like most peripheral Soviet towns, Sortavala experienced numerous shortages and low standards of living, even more so in the nearby countryside. Its industrial sector relied to a great extent on infrastructure and technology developed in Finnish times so that the local economy, but for a few exceptions, maintained its pre-war structure of providing local services and producing consumer goods. However, the Sovietisation of the local economy led to concentration in the form of larger or very large combines, such as the furniture and ski factory of Helylä, one of the largest industrial complexes of Soviet Karelia. Helylä, located some five kilometres from Sortavala, became a typical Soviet mono-industrial town, where the local combine took charge of almost every aspect of daily life, acting as a public utility company, creating a public infrastructure, providing housing to employees and looking after their social welfare.

Given this powerful ideological and socio-economic context, it is not amazing that Soviet narratives of Karelia focussed on the taming of a wild, untouched nature and the modernisation of a traditional society, thereby creating myths that bore little resemblance to historical realities. Karelian cultural traditions became institutionalised as codified folk arts and customs and incorporated into Soviet political socialisation projects and Soviet official culture with the aim of strengthening popular allegiance to the Party and the State. The more high-brow literary and artistic expressions of Karelianness were closely monitored and censored, if necessary, but also given limited public recognition within the Soviet nationality policy, particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War, when Karelia was still a national republic. Karelian songs and the *Kalevala* poem, for example, were seen as cultural resources that could be mobilised for promoting the idea of a multi-ethnic Soviet Union based on the friendship between its peoples. Over time, Karelianness less and less referred to the past or to the Finno-Ugric minorities and increasingly to a regional identity that was mostly Soviet in nature.

The Finnish-speaking community of Sortavala, composed of Ingrian Finns (*Ingermanlanders*) and Finns who had immigrated after the Finnish civil war or from North America and resettled in town, apparently succeeded in maintaining a distinct social and cultural identity during most of the Soviet period, but suffered increasingly from dwindling numbers through ageing members, mixed marriages and Russification. This evolution was, however, counterbalanced in a sense by other, Russian-speaking migrants who gradually discovered, explored and appropriated the cultural and natural landscape of North Ladoga, notably through various leisure activities, giving rise to new forms of local identity that can no longer be described as purely Soviet.

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