

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.³⁰ 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 Rugojev, 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

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.³¹ 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).

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.³² 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,

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.³³ 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

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.³⁴ 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.

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.³⁵

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).

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).³⁶

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,

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.³⁷ 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).

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',³⁸ 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.

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 Osoaviakhim 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 Nikol’skii 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.³⁹ 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.

39 In the Soviet/Russian discourse this influence is represented as Finnisation 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).