Living on the both sides of an invisible border – the impacts of Covid-19 in the Tornio River Valley¹

Helena RUOTSALA

University of Turku, School of History, Culture and Arts Studies,
Etnologia/European Ethnology

helena.ruotsala@utu.fi, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4352-3421>

ABSTRACT

In her article “Living on the both sides of an invisible border – the impacts of Covid-19 in the Tornio River Valley” Helena Ruotsala discusses what impacts the Covid-19 had in the cross-border region between Finland and Sweden. She uses concepts of transnationalism and multilocality when studying local everyday life. The area is divided by a national border, which has been invisible until March 2020, but when Covid-19 spread over the nations, Finland and Sweden, the border became visible and was marked by a riot fence. The effects of Covid-19 and closing the border from the point of view of local inhabitants are discussed in this article.

Keywords: covid-19, korona, cross-border area, transnationalism, Tornio River Valley

Introduction

Borders (according to Massey “Space, place and gender” 67–68) are tools for organising social space and part of a process wherein places and their identities are produced. The Tornio River Valley is a region in the border zone of Finland and Sweden. It is also known as *Meänmaa*, which literally means ‘Our Land’. Swedish, Finnish and ‘meänkieli’, which literally means ‘our language’, are spoken in the area. Meänkieli is viewed as a separate language in Sweden, but it is regarded as a dialect in Finland, so usually Finnish people have no problem in understanding

1 This article is based on a key-note paper, which I presented at the pre-congress of Congressus XIII Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum on 17.8.2020.

it, although meänkieli loans words, pronunciation from Swedish and Swedish words are declined according to Finnish grammar.

Already in 2010s I have done ethnographic fieldwork in the area of Tornio River Valley, where I focused on the narratives and experiences of transnationalism and multilocality in the twin city of Tornio-Haparanda². I understand transnationalism here as it is now used in cultural studies, which adapted it earlier from migration studies. According to Steven Vertovec, transnationalism refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states. This transnational aspect challenges concepts which are earlier used in national discourse e.g. in ethnology as national, Finnish and Swedish or in studies focusing on geographical and cultural borders. Tornio River Valley is an excellent example of transnationalism and its meaning. (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc; Wimmer and Glick Schiller) The meaning of place has also gone through several changes. We have to bear in mind the changed situation when studying places and their meanings. Multilocality can briefly be understood of being operating in many places simultaneously. People are attached to many places or they find that many places share the same importance for them. (Massey 51; Rolshoven “Von der Kulturraum- zur Raumkulturforschung”, 189; Rolshoven “The Temptations of the Provisional” 22–25.)

I focused on cross-border aspects of life, everyday transnationalism, as it was experienced by the town dwellers. For people living in border regions, the spatial dimension is always present. What use they make of the border area depends, besides their own interests and skills, on the political systems of the border states. Altogether I made sixty interviews in both sides of the border. In addition to this, I also spend several weeks on fieldwork, taking part in different activities. My informants belonged to different age groups and gender. They also represented different ethnicities and language groups as well as different professions and interests.

The two towns, Tornio and Haparanda, demonstrated various forms of co-operation in different sectors. They have e.g. a joint sewage treatment plant, a joint travel center³ (2014) and a joint museum of Tornio Valley (2013). In 2011 a square, which connects both cities, was opened. (Häkli 213–214.) This co-operation was important also for the inhabitants, but I wanted to study how the local people used this cross-border region from a perspective of multi-locality and transnationalism. The basis for contemporary multilocality in this area is defined in terms of a shared past, a common language (Finnish) and a common culture. Forms of multilocality included for example day-care, school, work, shopping, hobbies, leisure activities and social networks. In addition

2 *Tornio is Finnish and it is Torneå in Swedish. The name of Haparanda is in Swedish, but in Finnish it is Haaparanta. I use here the international name Haparanda.*

3 *The joint travel center could not operate during the pandemic, because it was situated on Swedish soil. I can't go deeper in this question here.*

to economic and social factors, multilocality was characterized here by deep emotional ties to the home area. (Ruotsala “Ez a határ”, 137–138.)

When the Covid-19 and the pandemic spread over Finland and Sweden, its effect were unexpected in the Tornio River Valley, which belongs to two different nation states, but inhabitants do not accept the border, but use it as it were without a border. In this paper I will again study the Tornio River Valley, but now I wanted to investigate how the people experienced the new border caused by the coronavirus and how did it effect on their everyday life. To follow the invisible border on the Victoria Square, which connected the two towns, a riot fence was placed splitting the square. Before it I will focus on the history of Tornio River Valley, because the background of the border-area is important in understanding its meaning for the inhabitants.

The history of Tornio River Valley

Until 1809, this area was part of Finland, a time when all of Finland belonged to the realm of Sweden, but when Sweden lost the so-called Finnish War of 1809, Russia acquired Finland. Hence, Finland became part of the Russian Empire. This meant that a border had to be drawn between Finland and Sweden, as it was to become the new border between Russia and Sweden. After the peace negotiations, the border ran along the Muonio and Tornio rivers, with the exception that Suensaari, a peninsula on the Tornio River connected to Sweden where the city of Tornio was located, became part of Finland, and hence, Russia (Kuvaja 354–356; Teerijoki 144–145; Ruotsala “Transnational everyday life”, 129).

This new 1809 border was drawn through the Finnish-speaking area. It split families and relations, houses, farms and villages, parishes and recreation areas. To this day, kinship knows no border: families, relatives and friends live on both sides of the border. The lands of one family could remain in the territory of one state, while the churches and cemeteries remained entirely on the other side of the border. For years, those living on one side of the border used churches and cemeteries belonging to another state, as it took years to create new congregations and build churches and cemeteries. On the Swedish side, opposite Tornio, Haparanda was established for purposes of commerce and other traffic. (Lähteenmäki 66–67; Lappalainen et al.) Over the years, it grew from a small village into a town of more than 9,600 inhabitants. The population of Tornio is now approximately 22,000.

The border was drawn through a unified cultural area, an area where people spoke the same language, practiced similar livelihoods and had similar religious inclinations, namely Laestadianism, a conservative revivalist movement within the Lutheran Church. The new rulers, Russia and Sweden, constructed their own state symbols along the border, such as an Orthodox church on the Tornio side for Russian soldiers

and merchants and a large railway station — both at the end of 19th century — and a prominent hotel on the Haparanda side. Each state strategically and tactically appropriated markers of cultural heritage and historical space. Border crossings were also monitored and controlled, but local people crossed the border as before, regardless of the ruling authorities and controls. Customs control was avoided in many ways, and in the last century, for example, smuggling was important, even an industry of sorts, during both the First and Second World Wars and up until the 1960s. A variety of migrants relocated to the border area as a result of the First World War and subsequent political events, such as a civil war and Finland's independence. Tornio-Haparanda was at the forefront of world politics at the time, since it was possible there to exchange prisoners during the First World War between the Eastern and Western fronts, as Sweden was a neutral state. Soldiers, spies, journalists, traders, smugglers and stars of the entertainment business met in the galleries of the Haparanda Hotel (Lähteenmäki 66–67; Ruotsala “Transnational everyday life”, 132). These events have later been used in cultural heritage and tourism production events, including photo exhibitions, theatre performances and popular talks.

The new 1809 border was an economic boundary for a long time, up until the 1970s and 1980s. Smuggling is even said to have advanced the economic fortunes of Finnish Lapland more quickly than the economic recovery experienced by the rest of Finland after the devastation of the Second World War. After all, Sweden was not involved in the war, and most of Lapland's residents fled to Sweden when the German army, which had previously been collaborating with the Finns, destroyed Lapland, using scorched-earth- tactics as they withdrew into northern Norway. The following spring, the inhabitants returned. (Ruotsala “From Crime to Cultural Heritage”, 36–37.)

Since the regions shared a common history, language and culture, everyday life and cross-border co-operation began to thrive especially in Tornio and Haparanda. Co-operation between the cities increased from the 1960s onwards, and, for example, a common water treatment plant and landfill site and a shared language school were built, and in recent years a common market square and bus station have also been built. Co-operation was further strengthened after both nations joined the EU in 1996. (Nousiainen 433–435; Häkli 213–217.) Such joint actions help to save resources but require work, as the local collaboration efforts are not always well understood in Helsinki, Stockholm or Brussels. For instance, in 2014 a joint Tornio River Valley museum was opened. It had earlier only been for the Finnish side, but now Haparanda agreed to pay part of the expenses, like the salary of a joint museum pedagogue. School pupils from both the Finnish and Swedish side visited the museum.

Since 1996, the towns of Haparanda and Tornio have gradually grown together. They share a joint market square, which is named Victoria Square, named after the Crown Princess of Sweden, and a joint

bus station, which actually lies on the Swedish side of the border because the soil on the Finnish side proved too unstable. They also have a joint tourism information service and use the logo of a twin city. For the people in the area, the border between Finland and Sweden has always been invisible. They have long viewed the whole area as a single entity. For them, the border only exists for administrative purposes. (Häkli 213–217; Ruotsala “Transnational everyday life”, 136–137.) Some people cross the national border even several times a day for work, school or to practice hobbies.

Covid-19 split the joint area

All countries have been suffering the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020. It has changed the situation for the local people in the Tornio River Valley quite dramatically. I emphasise here that this paper does not deal with the coronavirus itself, its symptoms or people’s experiences of illness, nor with the fact that the coronavirus strategies of the Finnish and Swedish states differed considerably; the differences have been hotly debated since the beginning of the pandemic. Yet, the different strategies of the two nation states have also influenced how the border has been, and still is, perceived and how it has affected people’s daily lives in the region since March. My aim is to focus on the twin city of Tornio-Haparanda, which has been one of my research topics in recent years. (See more in Ruotsala “Ez a határ”, 36–48.)

In March 2020, when the Covid-19 virus arrived in the Nordic countries and was soon classified as a pandemic, the government of each country devised its own solution. Of course, these solutions were based on the ongoing advice and recommendations of the health authorities as the pandemic unfolded. To better control the virus, Finland’s borders were closed by government decree at midnight on 19 March 2020. The bridges and streets connecting the twin city of Tornio-Haparanda were closed at all but two points. For vehicles, the checkpoint was on the E4 road, while the pedestrian checkpoint was at Victoria Square, which is shared between the cities. Border control was handled by the Finnish border guard staff.

In addition to this internal EU border between Finland and Sweden, Finland closed its maritime border with Estonia and borders external to the EU, namely the borders with Norway and Russia. Norway and Russia also closed their borders, but Sweden did not. In other words, while it was possible to travel to Sweden with Swedish permission, travel to Finland was at the beginning only possible on the basis of certain restrictions and criteria, discussed later.

In the twin city of Tornio-Haparanda, the border figuratively split the heart of the cities in two at Victoria Square: the border was drawn using riot fences through the heart of the square. As a metaphor, the heart is meant for photography and marks a border between countries

that is not otherwise visible. Tourists wanted a place where they could see the border between different nation states. During the coronavirus, the border between the nation states of Sweden and Finland could only be crossed at certain official places controlled by border guards.

Everyday cross-border life is a reality for many local people, as work and residence or school may be on a different side of the border than families, relatives and other friends. Pursuing hobbies and shopping on the other side of the border have been quite natural for a long time. This region forms a unified economic area divided by the national border. (Ruotsala “Transnational everyday life”, 134–135.) The pandemic’s effects were inconceivable, as the fact that this is a single economic area was not understood when Finland made its decisions in March 2020. However, commuting to work could continue.

The subject of this article is on the effect of this new visible boundary, drawn as a result of the coronavirus, on local everyday life. During the time of the pandemic, local people experienced several phases of border politics, not all of which do I have the space to discuss here. Some of the phases lasted only a couple of weeks, some for a much longer time. Why did people have such a strong and emotional response to this border, which was now visible again? Everyone had their own view on it, but why and how did such views emerge? These questions gave rise to the central theme of this article: an invisible border becomes visible again. I will argue that the history of the border also affects contemporary experiences of it.

It is interesting to see how the inhabitants of this area both in Finland and in Sweden understood the re-emergence of the border in March 2020. At that point, the Finnish Border Guard took back internal border controls over its territory after the government decided to restrict internal border traffic. So, how have residents experienced this visible border, which had not been there for them before? After all, for decades they had been used to living life just as if the border did not exist, and they had crossed it whenever they wanted, both before and after both countries joined the EU. For example, in the urban areas of Tornio and Haparanda, there are normally seven bridges or areas of land where the border can be crossed. One such place is a shared golf course, where play now required special arrangements.

To give you some idea of cross-border life in Tornio and Haparanda, statistics show that before the coronavirus period there were about 40,000 crossings per day, whereas from March to April 2020 the number of border crossings decreased markedly but have now risen again to around 15,000 to 20,000 crossings a day.

In brief, border residents have experienced for themselves how the varying practices of the two nations have caused problems. Those living and working in the border area — beyond just Tornio and Haparanda — have experienced how the coronavirus spring of 2020 adversely affected their lives and daily existence in many ways. In particular, border controls and the different national coronavirus restrictions and

strategies caused much frustration and confusion. Problems occurred, for example with unclear communication of information and with cultural exchanges, social life and cross-border family relationships. Right at the beginning, the weekend before 19 March 2020, it was unclear how, for example, those working in the fields of health and social care might continue to commute to their jobs. The government and relevant ministries had not understood how much care of the sick and elderly in Norrbotten County, in Sweden, is dependent on a Finnish workforce. Gradually, after various rounds of questioning, information emerged that an employer's certificate would be required to verify the need for such an employee. An identity card was likewise required. Authorities also agreed that such workers would be tested for coronavirus twice a week in Sweden. Sweden also promised that intensive care units could be used for Lapland patients — there were fewer intensive care units in Finnish Lapland than in Sweden at the time. The border could thus only be crossed for essential work tasks and the transport of goods — as stated in EU rules.

The importance of the border to the area's inhabitants

During the time of the pandemic, I have been doing fieldwork on the internet (see, e.g. Haverinen and Östman 49–67). Since the beginning, I have used two different surveys and have, over time, collected and read media articles and discussions on social media about the border between Finland and Sweden. I conducted a small survey⁴ myself at the end of March 2020. The survey does not meet the criteria for structured research, as I sent it only to local acquaintances in the Tornio River Valley, both in Finland and in Sweden. Some of them I had interviewed for my research earlier, some I had gotten to know through other means. I asked them to write to me on how they felt about the closing of the border and how it had affected them. At the same time, I asked for permission to quote them.

I received more than twenty responses. I emphasise that the matter under discussion was the border, not the difference in coronavirus strategies, which has been much discussed on social media and in various newspapers and radio broadcasts. I received answers from both sides of the border in Finnish, Swedish and Meänkieli, mainly from Tornio and Haparanda.

The first answer that came to me first was quite revealing about the true meaning of the border for local inhabitants:

There's a strange feel at this time, as the border 'didn't use to be there' but now it's there. We can't drive to Haparanda to

4 The material is now in my personal archive. I am very thankful for those who participated in this survey and especially I want to thank my friend Hannele Kenttä, who is living and working in Haparanda, for her comments on this article.

get sweets or something the way we could just a week ago, when it was a completely normal part of everyday life.

This and many other responses like it underscore the fact that there is no border for these people; they make use of shops and other services on both sides of the border. The border was not even noticed in everyday life, but now it had become different, as noted by one informant who had been working throughout her life in Tornio while having lived in Haparanda for a long time:

Although we are two different countries, no-one noticed the border in everyday life until it closed. It feels sad when you can't visit your little sister or do business on the Finnish side. It feels sad and weird.

In the opinion of a politician who has carried out cross-border collaboration, the situation is also symbolically wretched:

Throughout the course of my political life, I've worked to eliminate the border between Tornio and Haparanda. Once upon a time, we were at the forefront of cross-border cooperation in Europe. Today, the border was closed, a necessary act say the elite in Helsinki. But they have never lived here. Now we have been split in two!

Many people used similar types of expressions, to the effect that we have been split in two or the other part of us is missing. One of my interviewees wrote: 'this is now like half a city; my home is Haparanda-Tornio. There was no border here, but now there is.'

Some thought of it as a state of war: one demented person had burst into tears at seeing the border guards with their guns at the border. The border had always been open, with the exception of the world wars. This has been emphasised by many local people. As stated earlier, in the post-Second World War Lapland War (1944–45), Lapland evacuees fleeing the destruction of their homes were welcomed across the border in Sweden — my home village and relatives included, for example.

The following informant speaks for many about the significance of the border and the restrictions:

I understand the precautionary measures of the current exceptional situation and the restrictions on movement, but I do not understand how the national border is where movement must be cut first.

In these responses and elsewhere, people understood quite well why the restrictions were put in place but were of the opinion that the nature of this border was not understood in the place where the decisions were

being made. This lack of understanding in Helsinki and Stockholm was stressed all the time in the responses. People criticized that the capitals are situated too far away. It was easy to see again the centre-periphery discussion.

The fact that so many in this twin city, and more broadly in the Tornio River Valley, have family members on the other side of the border was clearly highlighted in the responses. A few would have liked to go to the shops or pharmacy for their parents or otherwise help them or care for their grandchildren as usual, but that was no longer possible. Neither was it possible to adequately account for those at risk and those over seventy years of age. People did not want to get used to this closed border because they hoped it would not be closed for very long, as crossing the border is part of their lifeblood. In addition to relatives and friends, many pastime activities are located on the other side of the border, as the respondents also noted. A holiday home in the other country was also a cause of concern for many, as crossing the border to visit a holiday home was not yet allowed in April 2020. Later, permission was granted to do so. It is very common for people in one country to buy a cottage in the other country.

One resident of Kolari parish summed up the meaning of the border as follows:

This border has always been a border of peace. The border should not have been put on the map here in the first place; it should have gone across the Kalix River. The border was made in the middle of our own land. We are the same family and people, and we have the same language. And the same mindset! We've been living seamlessly together, especially now that the border is opened by the EU's doing. Some of my close relatives have now stayed in Sweden. Crazy we can't meet them . . . This present situation is my worst-luck nightmare.⁵

These responses on the meaning of the border were pretty much the same for everyone. For many, the border situation also changed when, at the end of April and beginning of May 2020, it became clear to everyone that according to the Finnish constitution, Finnish citizens can come to Finland and leave again. The emergency law put into force due to coronavirus could not prevent such travel. This made it easier for many to cross the border; in Haparanda, for example, approximately 40% of the inhabitants are Finnish citizens or dual citizens. The number of dual nationals has increased during the coronavirus, but the application process costs money and people find it expensive in relation to the benefits it affords here at the border.

5 Actually, she has two sisters living in Sweden, and she could not visit them nor they her.

Another material source I use here is a Gallup-type survey done by the Facebook group ‘Tornio in words and pictures’, which asked what people want from the other side of the border, in this case Haparanda in Sweden. I just read how the locals answered to this question. Everybody who was participant in this group, could answer and also comment other answers. The answers — approximately 300 discussions — can be roughly divided into three parts: 1) most importantly, to see family members, relatives and friends; 2) followed by a desire to buy familiar foods and snuff, which may not be sold in Finland; and finally, 3) free movement across the border, as Tornio is nothing without Haparanda, and vice versa.

In my opinion, these answers clearly demonstrate that this is a single city, regardless of the national border. The fact that so many specifically mentioned that they want to purchase dill chips not available in Finland tells us how much the border is a matter of everyday life. It is only noticed when it cannot be crossed; the emergency law that came into force during coronavirus put a stop to shopping trips to Haparanda. The survey addressed to the people of Haparanda in the Facebook group received similar answers. Intimate relations and free movement were at the forefront of responses here as well.

The surveys were conducted in April 2020, when people assumed that the border could only be crossed for work matters. Later, crossing the border became easier. Life became quite different between spring of 2020 and spring of 2021, but during the summer of 2021 it became easier to cross the border once more because people had been vaccinated. Differences still remained between the two nations, though, with it being easier for Finnish citizens to cross the border into Finland. In the spring 2021, internal border controls by the Finnish Border Guard were forbidden, but the border guard stayed in Tornio because the town had asked them to help to control the health situation by preventing those suffering from coronavirus from entering Finland. This control again gave rise to a lack of clarity and problems for the locals. They for instance expressed anger about the long lines of cars at the border.

The significances of the border closure

As previously stated, for many decades people had been accustomed to the border as a collaborative space, not constituting a barrier to interactions. The boundary connects, it does not separate, as my informants said.

After all, the border between Finland and Sweden was not closed when the coronavirus contingency laws came into force, even though people thought so in March and April of 2020. Finnish politicians and the Finnish Border Guard, which controlled the border on the Finnish side, did not correct this misunderstanding. What was needed was one professor of political science, Martin Scheinin, and articles in

newspapers specifying that the constitution guarantees Finnish citizens the right to always leave Finland and always return to Finland. Due to the exceptional nature of the coronavirus, though, they needed to be quarantined for two weeks after arrival. Sweden had not closed its own border earlier, but it did so in spring of 2021 for several weeks. It represented a significant step for Swedish people living near the border because then Finnish people could no longer enter Sweden freely. Finnish people had to provide proof of a negative coronavirus test or they had to live or work in Sweden, meaning many Finnish people could no longer enter Haparanda, Sweden, freely without an important reason. It gave rise to envy and also caused many problems in everyday life. People were used to shopping for several items in Finland because those shops could not be found in Haparanda. People then had to travel to Kalix or Luleå, which are several hours away.

The border crossing process was also facilitated for Swedes, as the rule gradually came into force that Swedish citizens could also travel to Finland if they owned real estate there, had a relative who needed assistance, which necessitated travel to Finland, or had a job that required them to cross the border. Until May 2020, many locals who had a summer cottage on the other side of the border did not make it over to observe the snow or temperature situation, as crossing the border was forbidden. Similarly, the closed border created difficulties for divorced couples' children attending school in one country or the other, especially if they took turns living with their parents in the different countries. There were examples of children not being able to stay at the home of the other parent, even though such exchanges should have been allowed.

Until mid-April of 2020, authorities had permitted people to exchange goods, such as keys or medicines and some groceries, in the market square connecting the cities, though only through the fence that separated them. It took three to four weeks before this practice was banned, with no reason being given. For example, one of my informants talked about how she gave the keys to her summer cottage to her brothers living in Finland so that they could check that everything was well there. The resident is a dual national herself and her husband is a Swedish citizen. Later, they could themselves travel to the cottage — after Finland changed the rules about who could travel to Finland and why. This swap of keys and other stuff was entirely dependent on the will of the border guard on duty at the time, as some were denied this sort of exchange. For example, a resident of Tornio was unable to fetch the car's summer tyres from her child's garage on the Swedish side of the border, but other people managed to do so. Border guards were also criticised for not treating everyone equally; the rules depended on who was on duty. Many respondents emphasised this point, with information on social media and the radio also confirming it. 'How you looked affected whether you got to the other side [of the border] then in early spring', said one respondent.

All of this activity — different coronavirus rules between countries, a border marked by a riot fence, unclear border-crossing practices and inconsistent and perhaps somewhat inappropriate behaviour at the border — contributed to the growth of nationalism and comparable opinions at the border. Some went out to shout their anxiety histrionically at the border, others agreed to a date or a meeting at the border. From May 2020 onwards, some, as if for fun, even went over to the Haparanda side without any purpose whatsoever, just in a showy way. Gradually, it began to feel like a Swedish-Finnish national competition of some sort was going on, akin to the World Hockey Championships, with Finland and Sweden as contenders. People began to talk in such terms, and it was even reflected in their behaviour to a degree. The conversation intensified on social media.

The closure of the border has again led to a more visible type of nationalism (Billig 6). Cars registered in one country have been stared at in the other country. When there is a car with a Swedish registration plate outside a shop on the Finnish side of the border, for instance, or even vice versa, then people wonder out loud about what on earth it is doing there. At least once, a can of Coke was poured on top of someone's car. Swedes working in Finland were not allowed to shop in Finland, and the same applied to Finnish people working in Sweden. At the beginning of July 2020, several Swedish-registered cars were in the yard of a shop in Tornio, so two border guards went to the shop and said all cars with Swedish registration had to return to Sweden immediately. Regardless of whether or not this was permissible by law, no one objected, and everyone meekly left. Complaints have been made about being turned away at the border by both Swedish and Finnish citizens. There are many examples of a general fear of Swedes and the Swedish language being stoked among Finns out of fear of the coronavirus.⁶ It was indeed more a fear of coronavirus, and not hate, as several newspapers at the time claimed.

Conclusion

In my previous study (cf. Ruotsala "Ez a határ") I have focused on transnationalism and multilocality of the people living in the border-zone. Both transnationalism and multilocality were key issues how people reacted on the closure of the border in the Tornio River Valley. The border still defines very strongly the economic, social and cultural relations in the twin city of Tornio-Haparanda. It is seen in the everyday life and in the customs of the area (see Billig 1995). If you understand multilocality according to different generations, the situation reminds the views of Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola, that the multilocality experienced by the younger generations belongs to the routines of everyday life. The experiences

6 *These are stories told by my informants, but I have not referred here to the interviews.*

of the border and multilocality of older generations belong to the war time and post war era. Also, the working years in the southern parts of Sweden is part of their stories and experiences. Haparanda has attracted those older Finnish people, who have earlier spent their working years in the southern parts of Sweden. So the everyday life of people living in the border-zone is transnational and multivocal. At the same time, it also contains multiple voices and is rich in nuances. Emotional ties are very important. The history of a joint Tornio River Valley is very old.

The situation caused by coronavirus has been continuously discussed in various media since March 2020. As pointed out earlier, changes have been made in people's border-crossing rights, with it being easier to cross the border into Finland if a person received a negative coronavirus test or was fully vaccinated. The debate about legalities and fairness was still ongoing in August 2021.

The closure of Finland's borders and the introduction of the Emergency Preparedness Act were drastic measures and are not being used lightly. In March 2020, the effects were not entirely thought through: the intention was to avoid the coronavirus. Experience has shown that closing the border in the twin city in the Tornio Valley shaped a completely different reality for locals compared to those in southern Finland or on the eastern border. This was further emphasised by the fact that most of the border guards were transferred here from the border between Finland and Russia, where they are used to completely different border crossings and crossing practices, as the Haparanda-Tornio border is called the most peaceful border in the world.

In the Tornio Valley, the border has been more a borderless border (Jukarainen 10). An open, borderless border is an important part of Tornio Valley identity on both sides of the border. The importance of the border for both good and ill has varied; it was only closed a few times previously. Even with WWII, it was quickly re-opened in the autumn of 1944 when the people of Lapland had to evacuate to Sweden. This story has been used as an example even now.

Everyone hopes that the effects of the pandemic will not go on to affect cross-border co-operation, but that border collaboration will only improve afterwards. Some wonder whether, if there had been more collaboration and sharing, the border would ever have been closed in this way. The restrictions resulting from the coronavirus have led to an important initiative: a collaborative organisation, the Tornio Valley Advisory Council, has taken the initiative of setting up a special area here that would not be cut off by the state border as it was during the pandemic. One informant put into words the fear that many feel at the moment: 'I don't like closing the border, but I understand the reason and accept it. However, I fear the possibility that some will want to make this permanent. At least in some respects.'

An open border is important for people of all ages. In summer of 2021, some young people in Haparanda made a rap song when it gradually became possible to cross the border. The name of the rap song was

Återförenas, 'Re-joining' in English. The message included in the song is that how the re-joining of the twin city is important for everyone. The lyrics are both in Finnish and Swedish, and it is also played in both towns (*Återförenas*).

Only time will tell how such a special area will work in the future, but the conditions for cross-border transactions and everyday life in the area have developed over the years and still exist. Local people attempted throughout the pandemic to keep the border in the same state as always: it does not exist if you do not think about it being there (Juntti) This is the essence of the meaning of the border for the people who use it on a regular basis. They tried to continue living a transnational live even during the pandemic. The local voices are multiple, but they are evidence of transnational phenomena that consist of social formations and cultural practices transcending nation-state borders.

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Author's profile

Helena Ruotsala is a professor in European Ethnology at the University of Turku. She has done ethnographic fieldwork especially in Sápmi (in Finland and on Kola Peninsula, Russia) and later in Mari Republic in Russia. Her main interests are northern cultures and animal studies. Her previous study was on transnationalism and multilocality in the cross-border region between Finland and Sweden. Before the Corona pandemic she studied a rural village in Mari El and its changes during 2000's. Now she is involved in a multidisciplinary project "Paimio Sanatorium: Social, historical and cultural perspectives", which focuses on the experiences and memories of patients and members of staff of the former tuberculosis sanatorium in Paimio, Southwest Finland.