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Border-Regional Resilience in EU Internal and External Border Areas in Finland

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Abstract

European border regions have witnessed a long history of remarkable mobility shocks stemming from complex ecological and economic changes and geopolitical events. The experience of near-continuous regional and global crisis has increased interests towards the idea of resilience, that is, the ability of communities and regions to adapt and cope with disturbances and transitions. Inspired by the literature of regional resilience and the evolutionary approach, this paper will examine the difference that borders and geopolitical conditions make from the perspective of regional resilience and especially 'border-regional resilience'. Particular focus will be on irregular cross-border mobilities and consequent transitions in EU external and internal border towns, here the Finnish towns of Lappeenranta and Tornio. The study points out that the geopolitical environment and the openness of the border partly determine the regional development trajectories and the ways of coping with cross-border mobility-related changes. Although the border location entails some vulnerability, formal and informal cross-border institutions and relations of trust are of crucial importance from the perspective of border-regional resilience. The paper proposes a research agenda for studying border-regional resilience in the context of environmental, economic and social changes and geopolitical events.

Key words: regional resilience, border region, border-regional resilience, mobility, tourism

Introduction

Border towns and regions have traditionally been understood to have unique problems related to regional development because of the closeness of the border and their often peripheral location within the country. The establishment of free trade area agreements and European integration has shifted border regions from a peripheral position to a more favourable one, and has facilitated growth in border regions (Blatter 2003; Hanson, 2011; Prokkola, 2019). During recent years, however, European border regions and towns have witnessed remarkable mobility and immobility shocks stemming from complex and often unpredictable ecological and economic changes and geopolitical events. They have become gateways for increasing numbers of migrants, which many states have responded to with border closures and securitization even in the EU's free movement area (Brown, 2017).

In response to the crisis that global warming but also the 2008 financial crash and large-scale irregular migration are understood to exemplify, governments and researchers have turned their attention towards the idea of resilience, that is, the ability of groups, communities and regions to cope with disturbances stemming from environmental and socio-political change (Adger, 2000; Walker et al., 2004). Resilience thinking has been discussed, criticized and developed further in regional studies and planning, where regional resilience has ushered in a new way of researching regional vulnerabilities and strengths from a holistic perspective. The focus has been on factors that could explain why some regions and communities succeed in adapting to changing conditions while others do not (Hassink, 2010). Resilience is often described as the capacity to accommodate shocks and to move back to the conditions before the shock. However, many geography scholars have turned their interest towards the long-term capacity of cities and regions to reinvent their institutional structures and to establish new growth paths (Boschma 2015, p. 734; Christopherson et al., 2010). This study is

inspired by the literature on regional resilience as well as the evolutionary approach, in which resilience is approached as a process (Boschma, 2015). The work on regional resilience and coping mechanisms is taken a step further by examining the effects of borders and geopolitical conditions on regional resilience. The study contributes to the literature on resilience by bringing in the perspective of borders and to border region studies by setting a framework for studying resilience.

Border towns and regions are highly interesting sites for studying resilience, not least because the stability of border areas and fluent border-crossing are understood to be important from the perspective of state security and the functioning of society in general (Longo, 2018). This paper studies how geopolitical events and sudden, unpredicted changes in cross-border mobilities and consequent economic and socio-political transitions have been coped with in the EU external border town of Lappeenranta, Finland, and the EU internal border town of Tornio, Finland, as well as how the regional transition can be approached in terms of *border-regional resilience*. It examines specific, sudden cross-border mobility shocks in Lappeenranta and Tornio, the key argument being that geopolitical situation and formal and informal border institutions partly determine the modes of adaptation and coping mechanism. The research seeks answers to the following questions: First, how do regional stakeholders in Lappeenranta and Tornio conceptualize the border and cross-border mobility-related changes as a regional issue? Second, what factors have supported or hindered adaptation to and coping with cross-border mobility and consequent regional transitions? And third, what particular characteristics of border-regional resilience can be identified in the EU internal and external border areas in Finland?

The paper highlights the importance of borders, geopolitical environments and irregular cross-border mobilities in the study of regional and urban resilience. The geopolitics of mobilities are often opaque and beyond the control of individual states. Both EU internal and external border regions may struggle

with uncertainty and unpredictable mobility shocks caused by geopolitical turbulence and related mobility fluctuations. Shifting political environments and the opened/closed nature of the border partly determines the development trajectories of border regions as well as their resources for coping with political and economic changes. In the long term, a specific mobility shock may sometimes lead to a positive outcome in one industry, network or institution while simultaneously stagnating or eroding the growth factors and sustainability of others (Boschma, 2015). The phenomena of regions facing large-scale migratory and touristic mobility fluctuations is by no means restricted to border areas; however, border towns and regions are commonly the first places to cope with these sudden changes.

Theoretical perspectives on border-regional resilience

The popular yet contested concept of resilience originated in environmental studies and has been adopted in the social sciences; it has been theorized and operationalized differently depending on the research context. In environmental science, the focus is on determining biological capacities to adapt under changing environmental conditions. In social sciences, the interest is on the capacity of an individual, community, region, or state to adapt to changing circumstances and recover from crisis (Adger, 2000).

Christopherson et al. (2010, p. 3; see also Simon & Randalls 2016) attribute the popularity of the term 'resilience' to its malleability; it can mean different things to scholars, research communities, etc. Resilience has rapidly become a key term in the vocabulary of regional planning and development at all geographical scales, ranging from global and supra-national to national and local (Coaffee, 2013; Mulligan et al., 2016; Wagner & Anholt, 2016). Even though the determination and examination of

resilience factors varies across academic and policy debates, diversity, modularity, learning, collaboration, sense of community, trust and equality are typically associated with resilience (Lucinda, 2018; Boschma, 2015; Hassink, 2010; Holm & Østergård, 2015; Suire & Vicente, 2012; Kotilainen et al., 2015; Lowndes & McCaughie, 2013).

The term resilience is often loaded with positive connotations. The growing interest in resilience can be read as a response to the contemporary sense of uncertainty but also as an attempt to find models for adaptation and thus survival (Christopherson et al., 2010, p. 3). Resilience opens new avenues in research and in policy-making but also implies problems. In critical scholarly literature, the drive to increase regional and community resilience is understood as a governmental strategy to adapt to prevailing situations (i.e. neoliberal market rationales), and thus to prevent open resistance (Welsh, 2013; Chandler & Reid, 2016). MacKinnon and Derickson (2012, p. 261) underline how the crises that affect regional economies are not caused by “immutable external forces” but are “internal to capitalism as a system” where urban and regional agglomeration promotes economic growth in geographically and socially disparate ways. Resilience governance is seen to shift responsibility to the regional and community levels, and to individuals, which is considered problematic from a normative policy perspective (Wagner & Anholt, 2016, pp. 415 - 6). Moreover, resilience thinking is often defined with reference to its roots in ecological studies and ecological system thinking. In social scientific research and regional studies, it is important to recognize that cities, regions and communities are not organisms, neither do they function according to uniform principles of self-organization (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2012). From this perspective, it is not surprising that many geographers are ambivalent about the concept of resilience, notwithstanding whether or not the ideas of resilience are even useful for examining regions. Regardless of the problems and ambiguity of the notion of resilience, it is nevertheless fruitful to attempt a clarification of the concept (Martin, 2012), and to ask in what ways it might be useful for studying border regions and what new perspectives the

study of borders might offer to resilience. The border approach encourages us to recognize the significance of socio-cultural norms and political contestation, matters that have been neglected in the studies of resilience (Phelan et al., 2013, p. 202; Gong & Hassink, 2017).

The increasing interest towards resilience in regional studies stems from the fact that the opening of state borders has made places and regions more permeable to the effects of what were previously thought to be external processes (Christopherson et al., 2010, p. 3). Border towns and regions are fruitful sites for studying resilience since a border location entails specific vulnerability to cross-border mobility fluctuations (Hansen, 2011). Their development trajectories are strongly linked to border openings and closures, which are often responses to geopolitical events and perceptions of global and national insecurity. In border research, open borders in particular are considered a resource for regional development; a border location entails proximity to foreign markets and labour, the possibility to take advantage of cost differentials, the diffusion and stimulation of new knowledge and ideas as well as new regional identities and brands (Sohn, 2014). Some cross-border regions are also argued to serve as “innovative platforms for multidimensional integration processes, which are needed for more sustainable ways of living” (Blatter, 2000, p. 402). It has been shown that the ability of local and regional actors to strategically take advantage of opportunity structures at different spatial scales (local, cross-border, national, EU) is an important factor influencing the development of border regions (Prokkola, 2011). Border-regional resilience should therefore be considered in relation to other spatial scales and to the state institutions in particular (see also Gong & Hassink, 2017). Borders are contextual phenomena, however, and the economic and social dynamics of a border region is often highly dependent on the qualities of the border, cross-border institutions and trust relations (Blatter, 2003; Jakola & Prokkola, 2018). An interesting yet neglected question is how border towns and regions cope with and adapt to cross-border mobility shocks and whether they are able to establish new paths for regional development and growth.

The question of why some regions and border regions succeed in overcoming even rapid economic adversities while others do not is a challenging methodological question because multiple factors affect regional development and their effects are highly relational (Hassink, 2010). Boschma (2015) criticizes the literature on regional resilience for its tendency to perceive adaptability as a move away from regional path-dependence rather than see the historical path as a possible resource. He thus proposes the evolutionary approach as a remedy. In the evolutionary perspective regional resilience is approached as a continuous process rather than understanding it merely as a more or less fixed 'property', as something that would determine the capacity of an entity to adapt to and recover from external stress in such a way that it can resume its original configuration and trajectory afterwards (Welch, 2013, p. 1). From this perspective, the focus ought to be on the long-term capacity of regions to adapt their institutional and industrial structures in a continuously evolving, interdependent economic system (cf. Boschma, 2015, p. 735).

The evolutionary approach highlights the role of human agency, institutions and structural change (Boschma, 2015; Christopherson et al., 2010). It underlines that regional history and institutions are the key to understanding the ability of regions and regional industries to develop new paths of development and growth. Boschma (2015, p. 735) also notes that institutional resilience and regional resilience are in many ways intertwined; the chosen research perspective often determines which one is considered the sign and the determinant of resilience. Following this understanding, studies of border-regional resilience need to pay attention to the ability of a border town or region to accommodate mobility shocks as well as recognize their ability to reconfigure socio-economic and institutional structures and by this means develop new regional growth paths (cf. Boschma, 2015, p. 734). Previous studies have analyzed how both formal and informal factors such as trust, norms and sense of belonging influence the success of cross-border cooperation and the path of border-regional

development (Jakola & Prokkola, 2018). Although the existing institutions and networks are understood to provide possibilities, it must be recognized that the capacity of peripheral and semi-peripheral border regions to respond to sectors-specific shocks are more limited than in urbanized capital regions, which usually have multiple skill-based industries and related industrial variety upon which to build new growth (Boschma, 2015, p. 739; Kotilainen et al., 2015).

In geopolitically sensitive border regions such as the Finnish/EU-Russian border, the geo-historical path of regional development is present in many ways. Yet, as Boschma (2015) underlines, history should not be seen merely as something that hinders regional development but historically formed relationships and knowledge are crucial factors that enable regional stakeholders to find solutions even in difficult conditions. The question of border-regional resilience does not merely concern the regional economic and industrial coping mechanisms but includes complex social and political aspects such as the sense of security among populations and institutional trust (see Laurian, 2009). It is therefore important to appreciate the significance of societal norms and the reality of political contestation (Phelan et al., 2013, p. 202) in border regions as well as between a border region and a state centre (cf. Jakola, 2016). In this study, border-regional resilience is not perceived as something that is bound within the territorial-administrative borders of the region but is approached from a more relational perspective (Allen & Cochrane, 2007; Allen et al., 1998) which means that emphasis is placed on the interconnectedness of regional resilience. In border areas, the mechanism of adaptation and coping may be linked with both the state-centred institutions and cross-border networks and institutions at multiple scales. Alongside the question of specific border locational vulnerability, it is important to recognize the ability of border towns and regions to take advantage of and foresee transformations instead of seeing them merely as entities that react to external stress (cf. Kotilainen et al. 2015, p. 67). Cross-border mobility shocks create challenges in the short term but in the long-term historical perspective they may afford new possibilities and avenues of development.

Research area, material and methods

The research material has been collected in Lappeenranta (73 000 inhabitants), which is part of the South-Karelia region, and in Tornio (22 000 inhabitants), which is part of the Tornio River Valley region. The criteria for selecting the eastern border town of Lappeenranta and the western border town of Tornio is premised on the fact that they have recently faced sudden regional mobility and immobility shocks and are therefore fruitful sites for studying resilience. The geopolitical environment and the experienced mobility shocks of the two regions are different. However, in both cases it is possible to find evidence of particular coping strategies. Lappeenranta and Tornio are both border-interdependent towns where institutions, industries and networks often extend across the border (Figure 1). In Lappeenranta, Russian cross-border tourism forms a specific facet of regional economy and development. The town of Tornio provides an interesting case from the perspective of regional planning and development due to its long cooperation and ‘borderless’ city building projects with the Swedish town of Haparanda.

In this paper, the two different yet in many ways geopolitically interlinked mobility shocks and their regional implications are scrutinized. The Lappeenranta case focuses on the rapid decrease of cross-border shopping from Russia to eastern Finland due to the Crimean crisis and consequent sanctions. Moreover, the developments in the Lappeenranta region are illustrative of how the economic crisis influenced Finland, where the global economic recession materialized a somewhat later than in many other EU countries because of the strong trade relations between Finland and Russia. The Tornio case examines the ways of coping with the 2015 influx of migrants and asylum-seekers in which the northern Finnish-Swedish border crossing in Tornio formed the key route from Europe and Sweden to Finland. The selection of the different border region cases is justified by their recent experiences of considerable localized mobility fluctuations.



Figure 1. Lappeenranta is located near the Finnish/EU-Russian border and Tornio next to the Finnish-Swedish border. The population statistics are from 2017.

The examination is based on different sets of material: regional statistics, regional strategies and documents, and open-ended interviews with regional stakeholders. Together these provide access to the question of cross-border mobilities and resilience from a regional perspective. First, regional development trajectories are examined from the perspective of statistics and regional strategies to gain understanding of the volume of cross-border mobilities and transitions that have been taking place in the border regions. Second, to gain understanding of how the regional authorities and

stakeholders conceptualize and cope with border and cross-border mobility-related transitions, open-ended interviews (cf. Bennet, 2002) were carried out in the border towns of Tornio and Lappeenranta. The interview material includes together 32 tape-recorded semi-structured interviews (19 in Tornio, 13 in Lappeenranta, lasting approximately 1 hour each) with regional authorities, planners and representatives of regional and civic organizations. The interviews were conducted between 2016 and 2017 and, with the exception of two phone interviews, the discussions were done face-to-face. The selection of the interviewees was based on optional sampling in which the researcher chose the informants to be interviewed and the snowball method was utilized to find more people for the interviews. However, it was easier to convince people to be interviewed in Tornio, probably because they had recent experiences of the migration influx and wanted to share their experiences. The interviews were conducted in the work places of the authorities and experts, who were invited to talk about regional development, border and cross-border mobilities/immobility, and their own perceptions and experiences of coping with the mobility transition. Each informant was encouraged to speak about the themes from the perspective of their own areas of expertise.

The interview transcripts have been analyzed and interpreted by utilizing qualitative content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018) and contextualization. The complexity of relating resilience and regions is recognized in the analysis. As Boschma (2015, p. 735) notes, regions consist of “individuals, organizations, industries, networks and institutions” and in empirical research it may appear that these possess their own distinctive forms of resilience in time and place. By taking two Finnish border towns as contextual examples, this paper proposes that in some sub-regions particular geopolitical changes may have a stronger impact on regional development trajectories than in others. The recognition of the sub-regional scale of resilience is especially important in the context of Nordic countries, which are some of the most decentralized OECD countries. Finnish municipalities have had a strong regional self-autonomy for a considerable period of time (Andre & Garcia, 2014) and

local governments have possessed considerable decision-making power over public investments, land use policy and the provision of social services, among others. Moreover, states often share more than one border with the neighbouring states and sub-regions are positioned differently in relation to these. The quality of the border affects the distinctive coping mechanisms of regional organizations, industries, networks and institutions, thus partly determining their capacities and coping strategies. In the following sections, the findings drawn from the cases of Lappeenranta and Tornio are analyzed, compared and discussed from the perspective of the identified coping mechanisms, that is, formal political relations, informal socio-cultural connections and attitudes, and existing business relations.

Results

Coping with the sudden absence of Russian tourists in Lappeenranta

Cross-border tourism in the Finnish-Russian borderland has a long and varied history that has been determined by 'higher geopolitics' and the binational relationship (Laine, 2017). The border was gradually opened after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which boosted tourism trips from Finland to Russia and vice versa. In the early 21st century, daily shopping tourism from Russia to eastern Finland became the cornerstone of regional economic and tourism development in Lappeenranta and South Karelia. Lappeenranta is well accessible from Russia through three international border crossing points, Imatra, Nuijamaa and Vanikkala and it is a two hour drive from St. Petersburg. The numbers of border crossings at the Finnish-Russian border and overnights of Russians increased rapidly in the first decade of the 21st century (Figure 2) as the economy and wealth of the middle class was growing quickly in Russia. Concentration and specialization on Russian trade and tourism brought with it considerable vulnerability to geopolitical and geoeconomic events like the Crimean crisis which started in 2014. The Lappeenranta region has suffered from the geopolitical turbulence of the crisis

and the consequent sanctions and cheapening of the Russian rouble, which immediately impacted South Karelian tourism and retail.

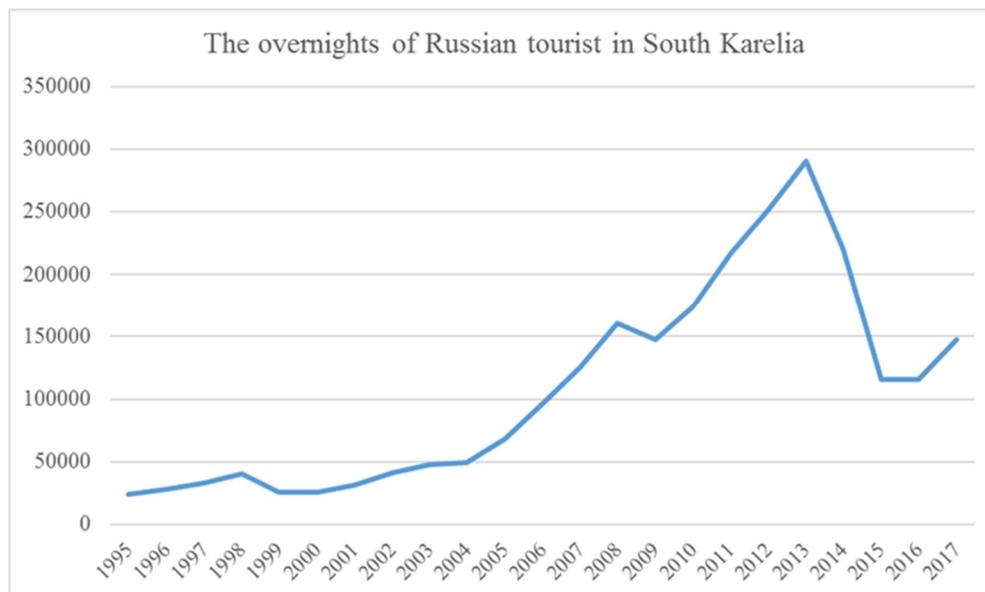


Figure 2. Registered overnights of Russians in hotels of over 20 beds 1995-2017 in South Karelia (Statistics Finland, 2018; the chart is created by the author). The statistics do not include daily shopping tourism and overnights with relatives and family members; thus the actual numbers of cross-border tourism are even higher (Laine, 2017, p. 186; Hannonen, 2016).

High-scale political relations and the regional practical approach

The study pointed out that regional actors and authorities in Lappeenranta region consider the geographical proximity of Lappeenranta and St. Petersburg an advantage from the perspective of the regional economy. Besides this advantage, the high dependence of the regional economy on Russian tourism came out in the interviews, as well as the difficulty of being prepared for irregular cross-border mobilities and immobilities:

The economic situation, the volume of tourism has a considerable impact. It is one of our growth lines, and the most important lines are tourism and commerce. And

simultaneously it is a threat. These international events, they cannot be anticipated.

(LPR, informant 22)

In Lappeenranta, the rapid decrease of cross-border tourism mobilities emptied the city landscape and forced many enterprises to postpone investments. For example, in downtown Lappeenranta the number of empty business premises doubled between 2013 and 2017. Some shops specialized in servicing international tourists closed down. Some were able to adjust their operations and many smaller firms moved their operation to home offices to avoid the expensive rents of the city centre to cope with the downturn (Ylönen, 2014; Kemppainen, 2017):

We had enterprises that based their operational model on Russian customers. When the number of Russians decreased, and those who continued to visit here used less money, so this has had impact here and especially in retail, in specialized retail many shops shut up. (LPR, informant 29)

Regardless of the gradual opening of the border and increased cross-border traffic, the Finnish-Russian border is best described as a geopolitically sensitive security border (Laitinen, 2003). The development of cross-border tourism in this strictly controlled border area is in many ways dependent on wider-scale political decision-making and geopolitics. It emerged from the interviews that local coping mechanisms were understood to be closely interlinked and dependent on wider EU and national policies towards Russia. The sanctions targeting Russia meant that the EU-driven cross-border programmes stagnated or were shelved (Koch, 2018). The earlier optimism regarding less restricted border crossing and even the abolition of obligatory visas between Finland and Russia that would have boosted cross-border tourism has vanished. Many interviewees noted how the opportunity structures available in the region are highly dependent on EU-level decision-making:

The opportunities depend on international, that is, on EU policy decisions. Of course, we are hoping that the atmosphere becomes more positive and we can return to that good growth track where we were before the Ukrainian situation. (LPR, informant 25)

At the regional level, an important way to cope with the wider political tension is to focus on practical issues and maintaining a positive atmosphere of development and to continue cooperation with those Russian regional-scale actors with whom personal connections already exist. The interviewees suggested that the geopolitically sensitive environment is something that locals need to adjust to and be tolerate, and they often embraced a rather practical approach. The regional-level activities were understood to take place within the official politically settled framework:

It has been clear to us from the beginning that regardless of all the crises and issues deriving from state politics, at the grassroots level people and enterprises will continue to collaborate here within the politically settled frameworks. (LPR, informant 29).

Besides the formal geopolitical relations, the well-functioning state institutions and infrastructure were understood to form an important regional resource, and thus a unique regional resilience factor. In Lappeenranta, the regional economy is in very concrete ways linked to the functioning of cross-border infrastructures, and with respect to regional planning and economic and infrastructural investments, it is crucial to acknowledge the development trajectories on the other side of the border. The smooth functioning of Finnish society and institutional stability and reliability were considered an important aspect of the attractiveness of the South Karelia region as a tourist destination for Russians (see also Hannonen, 2016), something that was understood to ensure the continuity of cross-border tourism in the region.

Changing attitudes towards Russian tourist

Besides the formal institutions, informal institutions, trust relations, local attitudes and tolerance are also important factors of regional development and resilience (Boschma, 2015; see also Florida et al., 2008) and should be taken into account in the study of border-regional resilience. With this in mind, it can be argued that – regardless of the regional economic downward trend that followed the disappearance of Russian tourists – not all changes were considered to be negative. Many interviewees explained how the significance of Russian tourism and tourists for regional development, economics and employment has crystallized in people’s minds and how the attitudes towards Russian tourists are more tolerant than before. Previously, local inhabitants commonly complained about Russian tourists, for example during the highest tourist seasons it was reported in the newspapers that Russian’s were taking all the parking spots. :

During the biggest boom, when they (Russian tourists) really were visible here, the locals sometimes behaved very wrongheadedly and the newspapers were full of opinion writings that ‘the long(register)plated’ (Russians) have arrived and it is crowded and thus it is not possible to go to town or to do shopping. And when it stopped, so now it feels that this complaining has stopped. We have realized how enormous an impact it has had on our service sectors and employment. (LPR, informant 24).

Several informants explained that the downward trend has had a positive influence on local attitudes about Russian cross-border shopping. Moreover, they often mentioned “the lessons learned from history” as a way of illustrating how local people cope with geopolitically sensitive situations in the border region. Accordingly, it can be argued that the historical knowledge of the sensitive border, on

the one hand, and the experiences and knowledge of cross-border interaction and tourism, on the other, inform people's attitudes and the particular regional culture of circumspection and adjustment.

New and old business connections in regional tourism

In Lappeenranta, the absence of Russian tourists became a regional misery that also raised the question of particular border-regional vulnerabilities, and responses to them, to the foreground. One outcome has been that cross-border immobilities are now better acknowledged in regional tourism planning, and new marketing strategies have been created to diversify the regional economy. Whereas the 2006 – 2015 South Karelian tourism strategy (2006) emphasized the transport connections between Finland and Russia and the growth potential of cross-border tourism, the new 2015 – 2022 strategy starts from the fact that the volumes of Russian tourists are unpredictable. The renewed tourism strategy can be understood as a means to cope with the changing circumstances and as an attempt to respond to the identified vulnerabilities of tourism and retail industry, and of regional development more generally.

In terms of tourism resilience, the tourism industry is now expected to innovate and discover new growth paths for regional tourism, and by this means increase the sustainability of regional tourism in the long-term (cf. Saarinen & Gill, 2019). In the new South Karelian tourism strategy, the potential of natural attractions, especially the waterways of the region, is underlined and new target groups of tourism marketing are discussed. According to the plan, alongside the potential of domestic and Russian tourism, the marketing should also increasingly target the Central European, Swedish and Asia tourism markets (South Karelian Tourism Strategy, 2015, p. 10). Diversifying the customer base is understood to increase the ability to adapt to particular cross-border immobility shocks. Moreover, cooperation and networking between regional tourism enterprises is seen as a way to strengthen the tourism industry and the development of tourism products. The strategic move from emphasizing the significance of Russians towards wider international cooperation and networking also came out in

the interviews with municipality authorities (LPR, informant 22), yet it was noted that proximity to the border will continue to determine the possibilities and paths of regional development in the future:

Lappeenranta is the only place in the Nordic countries where there are 8 million people and customers within 200 kilometres... Although we are thinking about the new customer groups from Nordic countries and Europe and China, the volume of St Petersburg, its population is so huge... the same development will continue in the future, if we can just cooperate and the border stays open. (LPR, informant 25)

Long-terms trade and successful business and good partnership in that business, it is always based on trust. And trust is based on relationships between people. In this region, we have a very long business tradition in the trade with Russians. (LPR, informant 29)

The relevance of tourism with respect to regional resilience lies in its growth dynamics, the resilience of the tourism industry itself, as well as its links with other regional economy sectors (Bellini et al., 2017, p. 141). It can be argued that, compared with the other important industries of eastern Finland such as the internationalized timber industry (Jutila et al., 2010), in the case of tourism regional stakeholders and entrepreneurs possess more alternatives for developing tourism resilience and thus border-regional resilience. Positive examples would be that regional authorities and the tourism industry have developed new ways to cope with the changing tourism volumes and thus are more prepared for future changes. There is more cooperation in regional tourism planning and more knowledge about how EU-Russian relations may influence local development as well as about how to communicate regional interests on the national and supra-national scale (cf. Koch, 2018). However, besides the new possible directions for developing business, many informants underlined the continuing importance of long-standing, informal cross-border networks and trust relations in the

border regions. The informal social and cultural connections are based on a long history of collaboration, regardless of the sometimes-challenging formal political relations and border closures.

Coping with the migration influx in the border town of Tornio

The EU internal Finnish-Swedish border region represents an integrated border area (see Martinez, 1994) where interaction and cooperation are well institutionalized. The border has been open since World War II and it is often referred to by locals as the most peaceful border in the world. Tornio is located adjacent to the border and the town of Haparanda in Sweden. The two opposing border towns are often referred to as twin towns and they have established bilateral cooperation in planning and services since the 1960s, supported also by the multilateral cooperation within the frameworks of the Nordic North Calotte programme (see Aalbu, 1999). Historically formed cross-border relations and their predictability has enabled the towns to develop an open border brand and attract investments as well as boost their economic development with the help of EU-co-funded cross-border cooperation (Prokkola et al., 2015; Jakola, 2016).

The ‘borderless’ border was put to test in August 2015 when hundreds of asylum-seekers started to arrive daily at the northern Finnish-Swedish border crossing and the town of Tornio. The situation was considered exceptional because historically Finland has not been a destination country for migrants. For many, it was surprising that the migrants wanted to continue to Finland from Sweden, which is considered a more attractive destination. Together Finland saw a tenfold increase in the number of asylum applications compared with previous years (~3000 →32 476 applications) and the number of receptions centres for adults and families increased from 20 to 144 in 2015 (EMN, 2016) (Figure 3).

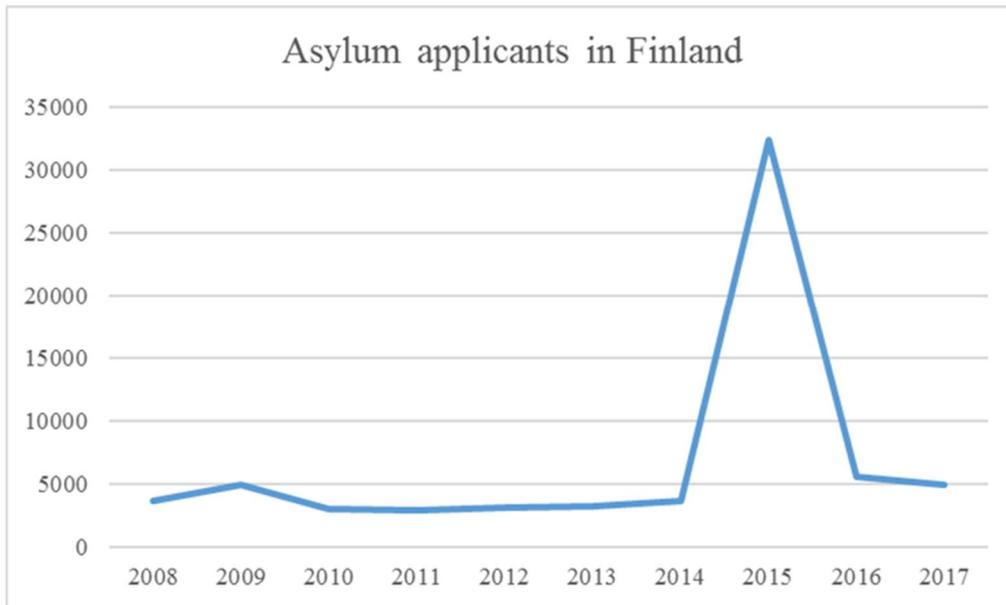


Figure 3. The number of asylum and first time asylum applicants in Finland 2008 – 2017 (Source: Eurostat 2018; asylum and first time asylum applicants)

Mobilization of formal and informal networks of cooperation

The formal state-centric and municipal institutions played a central role in the process of asylum reception in the border town of Tornio. In response to the unexpected regional mobility shock, the Finnish government relocated hundreds of police officers, border guards and servicemen to Tornio to supervise the border crossing and to receive the asylum applications. Alongside the government, security authorities and the municipality, volunteers and nongovernmental organizations also participated in the provision of care and maintenance. The interviews with local stakeholders and authorities pointed out that cooperation was an important factor that helped in coping with and managing the new situation. The informants in Tornio described the rather smooth functioning of interagency cooperation and cited it as crucial factor in the organization of the reception. Cooperation was intersectional within and across the border, and each participating group –governmental and municipality authorities and non-governmental organizations – were able to utilize their existing networks. They gained information from contact persons in Sweden, for example, regarding the volumes, timing and place of the new arrivals. Timely information and smooth communication was

considered crucial for planning the reception and arranging work schedules in Tornio. Accordingly, historically formed extra-regional actors and neighbouring relations can be considered of crucial importance from the perspective of border-regional resilience. The flexibility of cross-border cooperation is illustrated by the facts that Finnish nongovernmental workers were able to take activities on the Swedish side with the Swedish police providing support, for example, when the migrants arrived at the Haparanda-Tornio bus station.

They called from Luleå that the train is full (of migrants), that the train is coming and it is full, so be prepared. It showed that we could handle things. We did not have any politicians talking about the need to build a wall. (Tornio, informant 1)

There was a wide and well-functioning cooperation between the officials: police, customs, border guard and military. And then the immigration unit and the Red Cross organization had an important role, too. Somehow I experienced that there was a common drive among us that this situation needs to be taken into hand. (Tornio, informant 4)

The case of Tornio provides a powerful example of international governance and networks of cooperation from the perspective of border-regional resilience. Furthermore, similarly to the case of Lappeenranta, the organization of the reception activities at the Tornio border crossing point illustrates that regional capacities and strategies are not separable from state institutions and infrastructures, and vice versa. The state and municipal actors were highly dependent on each other. However, the state was seen to hold the final responsibility in matters of border security. Regional capacity to cope with sudden mobility shocks would seem to be high when both one's own state as well as the neighbouring state and society are considered trustworthy and institutionally stable:

The state intervened and it was a good thing. I think that the state did intervene in a practical manner and the establishment of the Register Centre in Tornio is a good example of how these kind of issues can be handled efficiently and deftly. (Tornio, informant 1)

Of course, Sweden is a stable and predictable partner to negotiate with. (Tornio, informant 14)

The success of intersectional cooperation within and across the border as well as the experience of mutual trust was emphasized by the interviewees. The formation of trust relationships and responsibilities between the state authorities and civic organizations has a long history in Finland, where the development of civil society has occurred in a ‘top-down’ manner rather than in opposition to the central governance (Häkli, 2005). Many informants who had a long experience of non-governmental organizational work explained that the institutional trust did not arise out of nowhere but that it was partly based on previous positive experiences and a sense of trust:

I have been working in the Red Cross for decades and became familiar with the officials too... I know how they are operating here. (Tornio, informant 5)

Although the history of the open Finnish-Swedish border was politicized in the national media and by politicians in the course of the 2015 migration influx (see Prokkola, 2018), among the local actors the peaceful history and strong trade relations in the border region were seen as a resource that enabled them to better cope with such changes and stressful situations. This kind of shared practical approach

and trust relations was emphasized also in Lappeenranta as a way of coping with sensitive political and geopolitical events:

In this region, we have had trade since the 15th century and even before that. And everything is based on our personal relationships and networks. (Tornio, informant 12)

Somehow I trust that if these kinds of situations would come in the future, whatever they are, cooperation between us will work. It works for small issues, so why would it not work for bigger issues as well? (Tornio, informant 13)

In Tornio and Lappeenranta alike, an important question from the perspective of border-regional resilience is how institutions at different scales are organized and function in relation to each other (cf. Boschma, 2015, p. 735). This institutional relationship had a significant impact on the capacities and the ways that the municipalities and regional authorities coped with the new situations. In Tornio, the informants emphasized the importance of trust and clearly defined responsibilities between the various actors. It was considered important that the relationship between the state and the civil society was supportive and maintained during the exceptional, stressful situation. In Tornio, however, the politicization of the irregular mobility created stress on the local cross-border relations and increased tensions between Finns and Swedes (see also Prokkola 2018).

A return to the harmonious, 'borderless' border region?

The regional impact of the cross-border mobility and immobility shocks can be evaluated from short- and long-term perspective. In Tornio, it emerged in the interviews with the regional authorities that the reception and maintenance of the asylum-seekers created work and boosted the regional economy in the short term. However, some informants argued that the image of the borderless border, towards

which the towns had been working for more than a decade (see Jakola, 2016), was destroyed by the border security efforts and anti-migration 'close the border' demonstrations. It remains to be seen whether the sudden migration influx and consequent border securitization will have an impact on the development of the borderless border brand and trust relations between the twin towns in the long term. The interviews with regional authorities suggested that inter-regional interaction and cooperation across the border are still well functioning. Similarly, recent studies suggests that the migration influx did not have a considerable long-term impact on people's sense of belonging and safety in the Tornio city-region (XXXX 2017). Experiences of regional safety and trust are closely interlinked, and are regarded as important assets of resilience (e.g. Aldrich & Meyer, 2015).

From the perspective of border-regional resilience, it is important to note that many informants saw that region and society both are now more prepared to respond to sudden mobility shocks and large-scale migration influxes. Many regional authorities, both in Tornio and Lappeenranta, pointed out that anticipatory mechanisms and intersectional cooperation have been developed and that the overall national institutional capacity to handle mobility shocks has increased. Also, the new Registration Centre that was established in Tornio proved to function well, something that was internationally recognized (Ministry of Interior, 2017, p. 51). Some interviewees in Lappeenranta also mentioned that there is now a 'Tornio's model', that is, an institutional preparedness and action model for coping with large-scale migration influxes in Finland. In both Lappeenranta and Tornio, the regional authorities expressed optimism concerning the regional development. However, in these semi-peripheral regions inter-scalar cooperation with and across borders was considered of crucial importance when coping with sudden irregular mobilities.

Conclusions

This paper proposes that border regions have a particular resiliency and sets an agenda for studying border-regional resilience. Empirically, the paper has scrutinized the impact and ways of coping with mobility shocks in two geopolitically and politically different Finnish/EU-Russian and Finnish-Swedish border areas. By doing so, the paper has responded to the call for more politically and socio-culturally sensitive approaches in resilience (Gong & Hassink, 2017; Phelan et al., 2013). The studies of Lappeenranta and Tornio illustrate how economic crisis and geopolitical turbulence often co-evolve, something that creates a complicated stress situation in regions simultaneously coping with irregular mobility shocks.

By studying the implications of two different mobility shocks at two geopolitically different border regions, the paper has underlined the importance of resilience in border regions. The paper supports the argument that open borders and cross-border cooperation constitute a resource (Blatter, 2003; Sohn, 2018) and increases regional resilience in many ways, especially in terms of cross-border networking, information sharing and trust. Yet, the Lappeenranta and Tornio cases show that the border location and border-dependence makes such regions vulnerable in unique ways to external stresses stemming from geopolitical and economic changes. Both cases illustrate how some coping mechanisms and paths of adaptation are available to regional stakeholders but how many others are not, which is partly dependent on the type of the border and spheres of development. The examination of the Lappeenranta and Tornio cases enables us to identify factors that are of crucial importance from the perspective of border-regional resilience: formal political and geopolitical relations, informal networks and socio-cultural connections, and long-standing trade and business relations based on mutual trust.

The difference between the EU internal and external border regions epitomizes the difference that borders make in resilience. In Lappeenranta, the geopolitical tension between the EU and Russia after the Crimea crisis halted regional-scale cross-border cooperation as it hampered the ongoing and planned EU-co-funded cross-border cooperation. The regional stakeholders showed adaptation to the prevailing situation and hoped that the political situation would change for the better. The regional stakeholders and tourism developers were pursuing efforts to diversify the target groups of regional tourism and by this means to make regional tourism more resilient to cross-border mobility fluctuations. Compared to Lappeenranta, in Tornio, and between Finland and Sweden in general, cross-border cooperation intensified at all geographical scales regardless of some political tensions. Established long-standing cross-border networks were considered highly important from the perspective of the asylum reception. In both cases, the high level of trust in Finnish institutions was a significant factor and national institutional stability was seen as providing mechanisms for coping with the changes on the regional scale.

In the border regions, attitudes and mental boundaries among the population can be regarded as an important facet of regional resilience. In Lappeenranta, the attitudes towards Russian tourism were somewhat contrary because of its vulnerability and previous experiences of overtourism. However, it was commonly expressed that Russian tourists are now appreciated more than previously. Whereas in Tornio the regional stakeholders were immediately contacted by and contacting the other side as well as had direct communication and information sharing about both positively and negatively experienced matters, in Lappeenranta the border-related sensitive events (i.e the Crimea crisis) was a matter that was generally not talked out. In Tornio, the temporal border securitization influenced the attitudes at the local scale and some informants estimated that the border closure has damaged the image of the twin towns and 'borderless' border as well as strengthened national and societal divisions in both countries. Border-regional resilience may have increased in Tornio in terms of networking

and preparedness, yet the general societal polarization has created more internal stress and may affect the capacity to adapt to new external stresses on the region in future.

In future studies, border regional resilience could be evaluated and compared between several similar open border locations and in the context of specific types of mobility shocks. The resilience approach enables us to direct attention to local coping mechanisms and strategies in border regions, and to consider how they are connected with policy-making. However, the concept provides less guidance with respect to addressing regional economic polarization (Gong & Hassink, 2017) and sustainable development of border regions, for example. Border-regional resilience is connected with formal and informal cross-border institutions and relations, many of which have developed in the long term and were easily here mobilized to cope with irregular cross-border mobilities. In practice, the adaptation and mechanism of coping often entails collaboration of formal and informal regional institutions and inter-scalar connections. Border-regional resilience has its own logic that is different from the national logic. For example, while the tension between Finnish/EU and Russian high policy makes increased, the attitudes towards Russian tourists in Lappeenranta became more tolerating.

The focus of this paper has been on particular irregular cross-border mobilities. However, in both Lappeenranta and Tornio regional development is dependent on many different factors and industries. In Tornio, border-regional resilience is supported by the openness of the border and institutionalized cross-border cooperation. In Lappeenranta there are many educational institutions and biotechnology-related firms that bring economic growth to the region. Yet many industries in the eastern border area, such as the forest industry, have also suffered from the vulnerabilities that unpredicted border regulations entail (Honkatukia et al., 2008). Vulnerability to geopolitical events and consequent transitions is relatively high in the region. Finally, from the perspective of border-regional resilience it is also important to take note of possible contradictions in the 'success stories' of adapting (Phelan et al., 2013). Industrial resilience and environmental sustainability may not always mean the same

things, for example if cross-border tourism from St Petersburg and other nearby Russian areas was to be replaced by air travel from Asia and Central Europe. More theoretical and empirical research is needed on border-regional resilience and on how irregular cross-border mobilities can be better incorporated in regional planning strategies in order to strengthen the sustainable development of border towns and regions.

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