

THE FINNISH COMMUNITY IN POSTWAR SORTAVALA

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ФІНСЬКА ЕТНІЧНА МЕНШИНА В ПІСЛЯВОЄННІЙ СОРТАВАЛІ

Історію післявоєнної Сортавали, певною мірою, можна порівняти з долею Калінінграда. Суттєва ж різниця полягає у тому, що територія, на якому розташована Сортавала, увійшла до складу Автономної Республіки Карелія. Статус республіки робить важливим погляд на життя фінів(фіни-емігранти або біженці, північноамериканські фіни, інгри), які переїхали до Сортавали, а також на інших людей, які прибули сюди, в основному, з Білорусі та інших внутрішніх регіонів СРСР. У статті проаналізована проблема збереження національної ідентичності малих етнічних груп в умовах формування монокультурного соціального середовища. Головна увага звернута на перші дві групи фінських жителів. Об'єктом дослідження повсякденного життя стали близько 30 родин. Важливим джерелом інформації є також місцеві газети та інтерв'ю з місцевими жителями. Автор припускає, що фінська діаспора зберегла рідну мову, особливо у повсякденному житті. Хоча фіни складають абсолютну меншість населення міста (близько 4 – 5 %), вони впливають на соціальне, культурне, музичне, спортивне життя міста. Проте, формування нового монокультурного радянського суспільства, що базувалося на російській мові і традиціях, вплинуло також і на фінську діаспору. Цей вплив був особливо значним для наступних поколінь фінських родин.

Globalization and challenges of Russia's integration into European Community make us take a closer look at the several hundred years' long history of relations between immigrants and the Russian state. Quite a few modern economists believe that it may be useful today to study the existing experience of the imperial Russia in contracting foreign advisers and experts. It is also worth mentioning that in the Soviet era certain attempts were made to employ foreigners in order to solve social and economic problems facing the Soviet state. For example, foreign engineers were invited to assist in building first Soviet car factories. Finns, who immigrated to Russia from Finland, USA and Canada, have also contributed to economic and cultural development of Soviet Karelia with their expertise and professional skills. A number of them came to live in Sortavala after WWII. The present report also gives an account of their role in the city life.

Besides its focus on local history studies per se, the report also touches upon the problems that representatives of an ethnic minority may face while adapting to a new cultural environment and, at the same time, attempting to preserve their own national identity. The history of Finnish defectors and, in broader sense, of Finnish immigrants has recently gained a special significance in the view of increasing influx of refugees and illegal working force from former Soviet republics into to Russian Federation (according to the data of Federal Immigration Service of Russian Federation in 2004, the number of refugees to Russia reached 293 000).

The example of Finnish expatriates in postwar Sortavala requires a more comprehensive overview of their role in the social environment of the city. Did this community help to preserve coexistence of the Russian and Finnish cultures with their (respectively) Orthodox and Lutheran backgrounds that historically had been a distinctive feature of Sortavala? After all indigenous Finns had left the city the new Finnish settlers became a unique part of the population to preserve, in a sense, the area's inherent language and culture.

Acknowledging their own national and cultural identity, the Finnish immigrants in Sortavala had to be aware of and create virtual borders between themselves and other nationals while consciously or subconsciously positioning their mentality and identity in opposition to the dominant culture, language and customs. Studying national identity of minorities requires analysis of its various constituents and features that create these virtual borders¹.

In this respect, unlike the Baltic States, it is more difficult to identify the demarcation line between insiders and outsiders, natives and newcomers. As we try to demonstrate further on in this report, the city population was comprised of migrants of wide ethnic and cultural diversity. That part of the city community was also bound to get into a gigantic melting pot that would produce a unique social phenomenon named the Soviet People.

It is also important to track the role and the change of this role for the state border in the worldview of the population of the "closed" city of Sortavala from 1940's until 1980's and further, in the situation of unrestricted border crossing for all in late 1980's and early 2000's. The Russian speaking population of the city, which is located, a stone's throw away to Finland knew next to nothing about the inhabitants of the neighboring country. Only the Finnish immigrants most of which had been born and grown up in Finland knew what kind of country it was. For the other part of Sortavala's multinational community, Finnish culture per se was associated with the local Finns' lifestyle. Changes in the opposition "WE VS. THEY" in the worldview of the Russian speaking population of Sortavala after the border opening should be a topic for another research.

The present research is based on the analysis of the local media (Karsnoye Znamya (Red Banner) newspaper, later renamed "Ladoga"), interviews with Sortavala citizens and the author's personal memories. During the last few years, under the influence of new historicism ideas the humanities now focus more on everyday life. Individual life stories, personal details and reminiscences allow a historian to reconstruct the past with higher precision. The input data, interpretation and methodology generate a complex whole. Generalization and conceptualization are equal in significance to an analyzed newspaper article, which is not just a source but also a fragment of history itself. The author is aware of the fact that his interpretation of the historical reality is one of many possible. The reader, being free from any ideological solicitation, becomes the active participant of the research. Without trying to exaggerate the value of this approach, we will try to make use of it to the extent possible.

Now we will look at the city of Sortavala half a century ago. As the population of the city was exclusively comprised of newcomers, the traditions of the Finnish period had been forgotten for many years. Many of the migrants were first generation city dwellers being born in undeveloped rural areas. They had to adapt to a new urban environment.

People of different nationalities, who had come to live in Sortavala, created the city's linguistic and cultural diversity, which in 1940's – 1950's was much more noticeable than now. The city's ethnicity was getting homogeneous with each new generation. The Russian language and culture became dominant just as the Soviet traditions. Russian culture and language were not something completely new for many of the Finns. An essential part of those of 2,6 %, which made up the Finnish community on the northern Ladoga shores during that period² were Ingermanlanders, Russian Finns, whose ancestors had already lived in Russia for a few centuries. However for the majority of Finnish immigrants, both legal and illegal (*loikkaarit* or *defectors*), who came to the USSR either for political or economic reasons, adaptation to the realities of the new homeland began only in 1920's – 1930's. The same is true about the third wave of Finnish immigrants, North American Finns, who arrived to the Republic upon the invitation of the Soviet government to be employed, first of all, in timber industry and building construction as well as in other areas.

Each group of the Finns came to settle down in Sortavala by its own way. Finnish immigrants, in most cases, moved to Sortavala from other parts of Karelia. Ingermanlanders were returning from

the eastern regions of Russia where they had been deported to before the war. Their resettlement to the city too was a drama. As old Sortavala residents recollect, the Ingermanlanders had been ordered to leave the city some time after WWII. Subsequently, the majority of them came back. S.G. Verigin and L.V. Suni in their research showed that Soviet Karelia's leader, G. Kuprijanov, supported the idea of resettling Ingermanlanders, historically the natives of Leningrad region, in Karelia. Many of them had lived in different regions of Russia after their deportation. A few families were allowed to settle down in Karelia followed by many others who probably arrived on their own, without the official permission. Similarly, Ingermanlanders were returning to their homes in Leningrad region. Verigin and Suni report on the conflict between Kuprijanov and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of KFSSR over Ingermanlanders coming to settle down in Karelia. The Ministry was opposed to the resettlement calling it "contamination of the Republic's border regions with untrustworthy elements"³. Because of this in-office conflict, Ingermanlanders were driven away, this time, to remote areas of the KFSSR. The other abovementioned groups of Finns were left in peace.

Finnish immigrants from Finland and North America, as a rule, were well-educated and well-qualified professionals. Some of them, as an editor Eira Haahti, Aune Kivikäs, Tyne Lahti and Anna Sunell, got jobs at State Publishing House of the KFSSR. Before WWII many of them lived in Petrozavodsk, the capital of Karelia, and worked at the Anokhin printing house and State Publishing House (Gosizdat). Some data on them one can find in "Vaeltajat", a book by Mayme Sevander, a North American Finn herself⁴. Vouokko Ahvinen must also be added to this list of North American Finns. She was an editor of Gosizdat in Petrozavodsk and worked in Sortavala after the war. Stories about the Stalin's era told by the publishing house employees remind of the scenes from Andrei Tarkovskiy's infamous film, "The Mirror" about the days when any misspelled word could have very serious consequences.

Many of the Finns lived tragic lives. Born in the USA in 1910, Tyne Lahti⁵ moved the USSR together with her parents when she was 23. Aune Kivekäs was born in Finland. Punalippu magazine (July 1970) and Carelia magazine (September 2001)⁶ tell the life story of her brother, Aarne Kivekäs, an athlete, a runner from Petrozavodsk well known in Karelia. There were whole families working at the Sortavala printing house, two generations running such as in the Laurila family. Eila Laurila had moved to Helsinki in 1990's where she soon died. Another example is the Peippo family. Both Vilho Peippo and his wife, Helen were working at the printing house.

Another Finnish woman of the North American origin, Dora Nordling, having lost her daughters and husband during the Stalinist purges, lived the rest of her life alone. When in 1938 the authorities closed down the Finnish Theatre in Petrozavodsk, the man Tyne Lahti had called her husband was arrested. A similar fate awaited Bertha Kortes (Lähdeskorpi) who had come to Petrozavodsk with her parents from Illinois, USA in 1931. Her father, a miner, came to Karelia on contract. Berty's husband worked in Karelia as a builder and her father was a mechanic. Her father was arrested in 1937 and the next year they took her husband. She never saw them again. In 1945, she moved to Sortavala where she first worked at the printing house and then as a florist. Berty's second husband, Eino Lähdeskorpi, was a carpenter in the printing house.

E. Haahti's husband was arrested in 1930s and never came back. She was left with two sons on her hands. One of her sons, Antero Lehmus is a well-known Karelian artist. He now lives in Helsinki. Anna Sunell's husband, Paavo Sunell worked as a builder. According to his wife, just because Paavo had before been seriously injured in an industrial accident, he escaped the arrest in the deadly purges of 1937⁷.

Natives of Finland had other professions too. There were railway workers and builders. Before her retirement Edith-Ellen Lehtinen worked at the local community service center since 1945. In 1960s she was a tailor in the ladies dress department⁸. Vilye Linnala (Linberg), born in Finland in 1912, worked as a driver in a local ORS, a wholesale supplier for organizations, and as a railway depot worker. He got to Russia through Sweden. Vilye was a gifted sportsman in his youth and won several boxing competition awards. His wife, Sirkka Ingström, was born in 1915 in the US and before WWII lived in Petrozavodsk with her parents. Their son, Bernhard Linnala, born in 1948, has recently died in Sortavala. His maternal uncle, Gunnar Ingström, lives in Chalna near Petrozavodsk. Along with many other Finns he was sent into exile to the Urals, to Chelyabinsk during WWII⁹.

Many Finns worked in the local power supply and electrical companies. Among them there was

Valfred Anderson, a North American Finn, who now lives in near Oulu. Not long ago one could have seen a Finnish television documentary film (*Vapauden kaiho*) about his life and his trip home, to the USA where he was born in 1918 in the state of Oregon. As Valfred told me his father decided to move to Soviet Karelia because in 1930 he found himself unemployed. Besides, he, as many working class Finns, had leftist, socialist views¹⁰.

They arrived to Karelia in 1931. Carpenter by a trade, his father worked in building construction and his mother was employed at a bakery. In 1930s they lived in Kondopoga. One of Valfred's friend in those years was a well known in Karelia jazz musician, a trumpeter, Allan Sihvola¹¹. He has recently moved to Helsinki. Anderson's father was arrested and, presumably, executed in 1938. V. Alfred himself was evacuation to the Urals, to Sverdlovsk area during WWII and then found himself in Sortavala, where he worked as an electrician.

Arne Leinonen worked for ZKES for many years (Ladoga, December 19, 1998). Karl Kauppinen's career was connected to the electrical company KarelEnergo. As many of his kin he served 10 years in Stalin's camps. Karl died in Helsinki not long ago. A younger generation of Sortavala electricians is represented by Jury Suomela, whose father was Finnish, and Olavi Korpi, the chief of the local electrical network division¹². Tauno Kujansuu was a former sales manager of KarelEnergo, his father, Reino Kujansuu came to Russia from Canada in 1931, his mother defected from Finland to the USSR (*a loikkari*). Olavi Heinonen was an electrical substation manager. Kimmo Mäkelä was an engineer.

Finns of Sortavala always showed special affection and devotion to culture and sports. If these kinds of occupation would not be their profession, they would devote to arts and sports their free time. Electrician Vjajno Friman, for example, sang almost all his life in a local Finnish choir; and in the last few years, his voice can be heard in the local veterans choir. Among old Sortavala residents and celebrities of the city one can name William Wickman who came to Soviet Karelia from America with his parents in 1932¹³. He and his wife Annikki worked in secondary school as PT teachers. A famous football player and a referee, Reino Salonen, now lives in Joensuu.

Ulyas Autio (a school principal in 1960s) and American born Raymond Leino have been teachers of children's musical school and well known musicians. Impi Toikka (known to Sortavala townspeople as Elina Ermolayeva) was a conductor of the local Finnish folk choir¹⁴.

Many chose a teaching career. Veikko Antilla was a teacher of mathematics and at times a principal of school № 1 in Sortavala. An American born, Edna Rajala, had been teaching English at school for many years.

Artistic talents were not limited to music. Ilmari Saarinen, a talented Finnish-speaking poet, came to Karelia from Canada in 1932 at the age of 14. Since 1970, he has been a member of the USSR Writers Union¹⁵. Many of his poems were dedicated to Sortavala. Pauli Rinne, a well-known theatrical personality, an actor and the director of the Finnish theatre in Petrozavodsk also lived in Sortavala. Before his career on the stage he went to school in Sortavala and also managed to complete the course of studies at the agricultural technical school in Sortavala. Before retired he lived and worked in Joensuu.

Some older generation Finns hardly spoke Russian, others had an conspicuous accent. Usually the level of language skills depended on person's professional field. Those of the Finns, whose work would require language interaction with Russians, as rule knew the local language better. The native language was preserved in the family. The majority of the Finnish emigrants' marriages were mono ethnic so the communication was conducted in Finnish, less frequently in English.

Many families were close friends; they kept company and often came to each other for a traditional "cup of Finnish coffee". Grain coffee was available for sale, and coffee grinders were either self-made or brought from abroad. In the beginning of 1960s, many of them had an opportunity to visit their homeland and relatives abroad. However, their communication with Finland was mainly kept up via mail. To arrange a visit of relatives from abroad to Sortavala was impossible, however it could be done in Leningrad where foreigners were allowed to come.

The important information channel was the medium-waves Finnish radio stations, whose programs could be received without any particular interference. There was also a Finnish newspaper "Kansan Uutiset", which was generally for sale at local newsstands. "Apu", "Seura" and other magazines were passed around when sent over by relatives in Finland. The city library has a

section of literature in the Finnish language as well books were also brought from Finland and passed around. Despite of the very modest means and the objective circumstances, the household culture of the Finnish community had an authentically traditional character.

All mentioned above facts prove that despite the long-term exposure to the foreign social and cultural environment, the community in question retained a quality that in the today's sociology called a "we-vs.-them" border. Despite the long-term separation from their homeland for many of them communication with Finland was as important as the current Soviet realities.

Among the identity categories facilitating the survival of Finnish national consciousness in the expatriate community of Sortavala, their strong community ties and self-recognition in the social environment, one must first name their common language and culture. Political homogeneity of this community could hardly be considered a unifying factor and economic reasons are not relevant at all.

According to numerous research data, the majority of Finnish immigrants were atheistic and politically nonpartisan. Contrary to the general opinion, not all Finns, who had arrived from North America, were communists and politically active. By Irina Takala's estimation, "the Red Finns" were in minority, they made about 15 % of the immigrants¹⁶. The others, according to a Finnish researcher, Rejno Kero, were "fellow travelers"¹⁷. Many of them just expected to find jobs in Soviet Union or came along with their parents. They also believed that in Karelia they would find culture similar to their own.

Therefore, the homogeneity of political views cannot be an element of the Finnish émigré national identity. Their personal reaction to such negative phenomena as bureaucracy, mismanagement, system malfunction, probably, was more straightforward and unambiguous in comparison to the others. Probably, this was also amplified by the Finnish traditional respect to order and justice. This criticism was usually concealed by their northern reserve. Despite of their traditionally leftist politics, one, as a rule, failed to use ideology as a persuasion tool on them.

The city Communist party leaders and city administration authorities were interested in organizing meetings of the Finnish community more as public but not private social events. The city authorities used to organize various events in the so-called Party room where one could have access to the Finnish communist periodicals and get to know new books in their native tongue, the books that were officially authorized for use in the city. A well known Karelian writer, Raisa Mustonen told the author in her recent interview that as a little girl living in Sortavala she attended these meetings with the senior family members¹⁸. Some Sortavala Finns were employed by the authorities to organize these meetings and keep the Finnish émigré under surveillance. As some old residents remember, Toivo Hakkarainen, a person well known for his various cultural projects and his activities in local history studies, used to play this role in the city.

Characterizing national consciousness of the Sortavala Finns, alongside with the elements separating them from the Russian speaking community, one must also mention those factors, which implemented their interaction and contacts with the Russian-speaking majority. Here one must mention their direct involvement in everyday life of the city, their working environment and immediate neighborhoods. Features as age, profession, language skills were primary elements. The involvement in community life, consumption of mass media products and exposure to propaganda did their job. Invariable interest of the Finnish intellectuals to Russian classical culture should not be overlooked either. At times, some educated Finns could know the Russian literature better, than native speakers.

Analyzing ethnic relations in the former USSR one realize the difference between Russian and Soviet cultures. Within the framework of the present report, there is no time and space to give an extensive account of this issue. It must be just pointed out that many of social changes classified by many researchers as "Russification of national minorities", in reality would be the official inculcation of the Soviet cultural social patterns, but originally Russian ones. Even the Russian language underwent serious transformations. This, ideologically impregnated cultural environment exerted strong influence on national consciousness and customs of the Finnish émigré. Largely, it became obvious in their descendants, for many of them lost their native Finnish for good¹⁹. Mixed marriages also accelerated the erosion of national identity among the Finnish immigrants. Besides, the Finnish population in Sortavala dropped dramatically. In 1989 only a modest number of 333 Finns (1883 in 1959, 881 in 1970, 622 in 1979 – see the Internet source²⁰) were reported to be living in the city of 23 000 people²¹.

The Finnish community in Sortavala was too small to exert a serious influence on the city life. The conditions for Finnish culture and language development were far from being favorable compared to the situation in early 1930's. Still this small community represented a unique hue on the national palette of post-war Sortavala.

Today the city became open to both Russians and foreigners, many of the city inhabitants are frequent visitors in the neighboring Finland. All this helps to develop cultural exchange between the two countries. Being kept alive by a small group of people in post-war years, today the Finnish language and culture enjoy a steady interest among many of Sortavala citizens. People are getting interested in pre-war Sortavala history too, the old tradition song festivals are being revived and there is an aspiration to preserve the remarkable Finnish architecture. All this shows that the old Sortavala tradition of the two cultures coexistence is alive.

¹ Vihalemm, T., Masso A. (2003) Identity Dynamics of Russian-speakers in Transition Period. Journal of Baltic Studies, Volume 34. – 1 1.

² Filimonchik S.N., City Population of Northern Ladoga Areas in 1945–1950 // Sortavala: Pages of history (to the 370th anniversary of the city) Proceedings of the International Scientific-Educational and Local History Conference (June 20–21, 2002, Sortavala). – Petrozavodsk, 2002. – P. 40.

³ Verigin S.G. & Suni L.V. Resettlement of Ingermanlanders to Karelia in late 1940s // Karelians. Finns. Problems of Ethnic History (Collection of Articles and Reports). – Moscow: the Russian Academy of Science, 1992 – P. 200–216.

⁴ Sevander Mayme. Vaeltajat. Turku: Siirtolaisuusinstituutti, 2000. – S. 82.

⁵ Hyttinen Hannu. Karjalaa vallataan jo // Aamulehti, 5 huhtikuuta 1992.

⁶ Vuotilainen Paavo. Aarne Kivekäs jatkaa juoksuaan "Careliassa" // Karjalan Sanomat, 3 lokakuuta 2001.

⁷ Izotov, A. (2001) Terra incognita: suljettu kaupunki ja sen asukkaat. Sortavala-rajakaupunki (P. Hakamies ja muut toim.). Joensuu. – S. 100).

⁸ Krasnoye Znamya (Red Banner), 1965, February, 25.

⁹ The Author's Interview with Bernhard Linnala. Sortavala 09.10.2001.

¹⁰ The Author's Interview with Walfred Anderson. Joensuu, 10.11.2000.

¹¹ Pukhov Vladimir. The jazz overture of Karelia. Severnyi Kurier (Northern Courier). August 2, 2000.

¹² The Chief of the Substations Division V.I. Korpi // Krasnoye Znamya (Red Banner), September 27, 1979.

¹³ Ulla Vesander. Suuri koitos Sortavalan. Maailma ja me. 1 6, 1990 – S. 91.

¹⁴ Vlasov P. and Stafeev B. Sortavala. Petrozavodsk: Karelia, 1978; Musatova T. We remember the Finnish choir // Ladoga, January 19, 2001.

¹⁵ See more about him in Directory of Karelian Writers published "Karelia", Petrozavodsk, 1971, p. 103; Guda N. He loved and sang to our land // Krasnoye Znamya, October 2, 1979.

¹⁶ Takala I. R. In Search of Eldorado. North American Finns in Pre-war Karelia // Questions of History of the European North. – Petrozavodsk State University, 1993 – P. 97.

¹⁷ Kero, Reino. The Role of Finnish Settlers from North America in the Nationality Question in Karelia in the 1930's. In: Scandinavian Journal, 1981.

¹⁸ The Author's Interview with Raisa Mustonen. Petrozavodsk, 07.02.2005.

¹⁹ Klementyev E. Finns in the mirror of the 1989 Census. In.: Karelians. Finns. Problems of Ethnic History. – P. 221; Laine Antti, Where East meets West: The last stand of Finns and Karelians in contemporary Karelia? In: Nationalities Papers, Vol. 29, 2001. – Pp. 61–62.

²⁰ <http://gis.karelia.ru/atlas/eapfnrk/index.htm>

²¹ Klementyev, 1992. – P. 218; Aamulehti, 04.05.2002.