



SFPFA
Slovak Foreign Policy Association



Local Border Traffic (LBT) - a new era in the Norwegian-Russian Arctic Schengen Borderland

Peter Haugseth



Policy paper is published within the project Sharing know-how for better management of the Schengen Border between Slovakia and Ukraine as well as Norway and Russia, CBC 01018

Publishers:



SFPA
Slovak Foreign Policy Association



Co-financing:



Policy paper is published within the project “Sharing know-how for better management of the Schengen Border between Slovakia and Ukraine as well as Norway and Russia,” CBC 01018

The amount of the grant: 619 454,- EUR.

www.norwaygrants.org

The project is co-financed by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the State budget of the Slovak Republic. Program SK08 – Cross-Border Cooperation: “Slovakia – Ukraine: Cooperation across the Border.”

This text is a revised and updated version of the articles “Opening for local policy-making in the Norwegian–Russian borderland. Reflections from authorities in Pechenga District, Northwest Russia,” in G. Zhigunova, ed., *Social'noe razvitie severnykh territorij Rossii i zarubežnykh stran: opyt, problemy, perspektivy: materialy meždunarodnoj konferencii 20-21 nojabrja 2014 goda*. Murmansk: Murmansk State Humanities University, 2015, pp. 251–6 and “Interaction in the borderland after the implementation of the local border traffic permit: perspectives from the Russian town Nickel, Pechenga District,” in N.I. Kurganova, S.A. Vinogradova, E.A. Tyurkan, eds, *Languages and cultures in the Arctic Region*. Murmansk: Murmansk State Humanities University, 2014, pp. 154–61 both written by the author of this policy paper.



The project is co-financed by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism
and the State budget of the Slovak Republic.
Program SK08 – Cross-Border Cooperation:
“Slovakia – Ukraine: Cooperation across the Border.”

Local Border Traffic (LBT) - a new era in the Norwegian-Russian Arctic Schengen Borderland

Peter Haugseth

- © Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association
- © UiT- The Arctic University of Norway, Campus Kirkenes

Published by:

UiT- The Arctic University of Norway, Campus Kirkenes
Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association
Staromestská 6/D, 811 03 Bratislava
Prešov-office: Hlavná 11, 080 01 Prešov, Slovakia
www.sfpa.sk

Author: Peter Haugseth
Reviewers: Peter Brezáni, Vladimír Benč
Printed by: ADIN s.r.o., Prešov

The policy paper has not been proofread.

ISBN 978-80-89356-54-6

Contents

Introduction.....	4
The backdrop to LBT (Twin City): friendship and the Cold War.....	5
2009: the people of Nikel, Pechenga district.....	8
LBT and Schengen visa.....	10
2011: Pechenga district and the Regional level in Murmansk oblast	15
Conclusion	17

Introduction

The Norwegian government increased its political attention regarding the development of European Arctic in its all-inclusive approach towards the High North emphasized in the 2006 Norwegian Government's High North Strategy.¹ The strategy gained official recognition and did pretense a collaborative tone between different levels of Norwegian society and the local and national political level.² The national political ambitions and the broad discursive mobilization would soon stretch out to the local level of the Norwegian–Russian borderland attempting to integrate small-scale cross-border initiatives with large scale ambitions and long-term political perspectives.³ An interest in more functional industrial economic forms of cooperation with regards to the European Arctic was seen in the Norwegian Pomorzone idea launched as a joint Norwegian–Russian Special Economic Zone.⁴ This Norwegian–Russian raise in transnational political ambitions was addressed stepwise. Downscaled and decentralized to the geographical peripheries of the two countries neighboring political districts; the towns Nikel and Kirkenes and its political leadership became actors in the making of a new local foreign policy. A new regional building approach through City–Twinning and a new border zone visa (Local

¹ “The Norwegian Government's High North Strategy,” Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006.

² G. Hønneland, L.F. Jensen, *Den Nye Nordområdepolitikken. Barentsbilder etter årtusenårsskiftet*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2008.

³ It has been argued that Russia's foreign policy is rather unpredictable (M. Müller, “Situating identities: Enacting and studying Europe at a Russian Elite University,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* Vol. 37, 2008, pp. 3–25) and the political emphasis on the European Arctic relevant for the discussion in this paper has been viewed as “fragmented” (see L. C. Jensen, P.A. Skedsmo, “Approaching the North: Norwegian and Russian foreign policy discourses on the European Arctic,” *Polar Research* Vol. 29 2010, pp. 439–50). Russian scepticism concerning region-building projects has also been part of the post Cold War political processes (see C. Browning, “The region-building approach revisited: the continued othering of Russia in discourses of region-building in the European north,” *Geopolitics* Vol. 8, No. 1, 2003, pp. 45–71).

⁴ U. Wråkberg, “Pomorzone: a cross-border initiative to further regional development in the Northern Norway and Northwest Russia,” in *Transborder Cooperation of Russia with Northern Countries: Conditions and Perspectives on the Development: Proceedings of V Northern Social and Ecological Congress, Moscow, 21-22 April, 2009*. Moscow: Publishing house Galleria, 2009, pp. 19–29; P. Joenniemi, A. Sergunin, “Laboratories of European integration: city-twinning in Northern Europe,” *EUBORDERREGIONS. Working Papers*, Series 1, 2012. Available online: <http://www.hse.ru/data/2012/04/11/1251652090/Peipsi%20Koost%C3%B6%20Keskus%20WP1-sisu.pdf> (accessed on May 15, 2014); G. Hønneland, L.F. Jensen, op. cit.

Border Traffic) had been initiated and the process was linked to post-Cold War discourses of geopolitical modernism and experiments with twin town cross-border partnerships elsewhere in central Europe related to the EU's enlargement. Bordertowns at the European border peripheries had for some years been addressed as international actors on behalf of transnational functional cooperation.⁵ Intensified focus on twinning new relations between territory and identity had been part of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region over 15 year long history⁶ and from May 29, 2012 the inhabitants in the Norwegian–Russian borderland could continue along this path of understanding as they were allowed to apply for what has been called the LBT. LBT would allow the people residing in the borderland to make use of, and visit the neighboring borderland in totally new ways due to an arrangement opening the borders between the two districts.

The following policy paper gives a partial perspective on how narratives and discourses were shaped following the new emerging High North local foreign policy strategy. We are going to look more closely at the response from regional and local political level, as well as the peoples of Pechenga district as the intensified region building became launched in 2008 as political visions and possibilities, and how the response locally was seen after ideas and visions became reality in 2012 and the new LBT visa regime would restructure the political- administrative borderland space. In what way are the local inhabitants in Pechenga district affected by the recent changes and how is the transformation seen in the populations expressions of the borderland life?

The backdrop to LBT (Twin City): friendship and the Cold War

The basis of the cooperation back then between Pechenga district and Sør-Varanger municipality was the Friendship agreement from 1972/1973. This case of City-Twinning was set in a complex historical backdrop of the Cold War years where communication and relationships across national

⁵ P. Joenniemi, A. Sergunin, "When two aspire to become one: city-twinning in Northern Europe," *Journal of Borderland studies* Vol. 26, No. 2, 2011, pp. 232–42.

⁶ O. Tunander, "Geopolitics of the North: Geopolitik of the weak: a post-Cold War return to Rudolf Kjellèn," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 43 (2), 2008, pp. 164–84.

borders was challenged by the East West conflict and the fact that NATO member Norway and Russian borderland was part of a military-politically tensed area.⁷ Due to practical political reasons the softening approach was not boosted before the Iron Curtain was abolished and replaced by regional identity building initiatives like the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (1993). The Russian borderland was opened for cross-border relations on an increased scale turning Kola Peninsula into Russia's gateway to Scandinavia and EU. Seen from the Russian–Norwegian borderland the initial enthusiasm peaked in the early 1990s and then gradually became less attractive. In general, it was a rather bureaucratic arrangement coordinated by official municipality authorities involving each side of the borderland in formal exchange between e.g. primary schools and kindergartens with their teachers and pupils; it was and is important in sports and other forms of cultural exchange at a general level. In interviews with former mayor of Pechenga district, Victor Mavrin, four years after his first practical encounters with the new visions for the Norwegian and Russian borderland he claimed that the Pechenga district administration was ready for the intensification of cross-border cooperation from 2008 and onwards.⁸ “We were thinking in this line of cooperation two years before it was mentioned [by the Norwegian side].” Pechenga district was in 2006 developing its own strategy of revitalizing initiatives of cross border cooperation with their Norwegian partners.⁹ The Pechenga district mayor looked at the Friendship agreement again and were ready to discuss the topic and look at the history of the Friendship cooperation. The local level he found to have the best assumptions and background for addressing the correct questions regarding benefits of future collaboration.

“We are discussing two municipalities with differing environments and the inhabitants know what the task is about, what can be interesting, what to go for, what to search for in the future and what should be left for others [region or federal level] to take care of” (Interview with the former Pechenga Mayor of Pechenga district, Victor Mavrin in 2012)

⁷ G. Hønneland, A.K. Jørgensen, “Kolas lukkede byer: Fra autonomi til integrasjon. *Internasjonal politikk* Vol. 56, No. 3, 1998, pp. 445–67.

⁸ Victor Mavrin was Mayor of Pechenga district in the period of 2005–2010.

⁹ Methodological considerations. Field research on the LBT/Twin City process in the Norwegian-Russian borderland have been conducted by the author on and off since 2008. In spring and autumn 2012 research was continued and several interviews were carried out in the Russian borderland. One of the interviews was with the former Mayor of Pechenga district, Victor Mavrin. Updates in 2013, 2014 and 2016 was made possible by a grant from Regional Research Foundation in Norway. All the interviews conducted have been semi structured and open-ended.

Mavrin emphasized the all-inclusive approach in the new policy towards developing the High North of 2006 and later became himself as a Mayor of Pechenga district an active promoter of the new positive visions on behalf of the border cooperation. He himself was stressing the strategy's open and collaborative tone between the society's different public political levels: "I liked especially the fact that one expected more active participation from both Norwegian and Russian side" thus opening for greater interplay between local and national political level. "Cooperation on municipality level can also develop into something large scale – but where to begin? One has to start with the small nuances [...] the peoples who work at both sides of the border." Pechenga district and the Mayor was ready to talk with the Norwegian partner when they were contacted by Sør-Varanger municipality and his colleague across the border to Norway, Mayor of Sør-Varanger municipality Linda B. Randal in early 2008. The Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre then opened for transnational cooperation between municipalities and towns in the Norwegian-Russian borderland. Moreover, the correspondence that occurred at the time did also inform the municipal Norwegian and Russian executive levels that the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov and Governor Yuri Yevdokimov of Murmansk oblast were informed about the idea of a Twin City project, proposing it as a stepwise element in an even larger joint Russian-Norwegian industrial-economic platform called the Pomor Zone. Both the federal and regional Russian political levels were showing initial positive interest for the Twin City idea.

Later in 2008 the local political level in the Norwegian–Russian borderland gained extended political momentum by contributing to the country's Foreign ministers bilateral meeting in Kirkenes. The Mayors were participating in person at the meeting between foreign ministers Lavrov and Støre in Kirkenes June 9, 2008; they presented their perspectives on City–Twinning and handed over the formal Twin City declaration to the ministers. Lavrov was according to Mavrin considering the Twin City document very important.¹⁰ The interests of the local borderland politicians and the central authorities of the two countries were interlinked regarding the foreseen development in the Norwegian–Russian borderland this particular day. Two local official representatives from differing countries would on behalf of the two states address issues of relevance for developing new borderland perspectives that would later become elements in the process of reorganizing the Norwegian and Russian borderland realities. The local political reasons for this top down/ bottom up process that

¹⁰ See P. Haugseth, "Tvillingbysamarbeid i det norsk-russiske grensesonen," in A. Viken, B.S. Fors, eds, *Grenseliv*. Stamsund: Orkana Forlag. 2014, pp. 21–37 for a more elaborate discussion.

would make local and national political visions materialize in Kirkenes that particular day in June 2008 was stressed by Mavrin. He emphasized the importance of two local politicians' interest and wish to collaborate on similar topics. They had a common goal on behalf of the development of the borderland and the region. The meeting in June 9, 2008 in Kirkenes was the first time the former Mayor of Pechenga received official approval from Russian top leaders on the collaboration with the neighboring municipality in Norway. For the Pechenga Mayor Twin City collaboration was considered to be the starting point for new borderland relations. The bullet points in the declaration were building on the former Friendship agreement. One point was also about the fact that Twin City cooperation should also contribute to new border zone visa between Sør-Varanger and Pechenga district. Later in 2008 Mavrin had contact with the Embassy of the Russian federation and the ambassador in Oslo. The ambassador told him that: "The process have now started."

2009: the people of Nikel, Pechenga district

Soon after the High North visions on behalf of the Norwegian–Russian borderland became institutionalized in increased focus on Twin City cooperation and the new borderzone visa LBT we decided to conduct cross sectorial interviews with peoples in Pechenga district. As we have already discussed the local politicians/administration of Pechenga district was quite optimistic and prepared for increased cooperation with the counterpart in Norway. But what was the ambitions and aspirations of the population in the Pechenga district bordertown Nikel in 2009 one year after the raising ambitions of the Norwegian- Russian authorities was becoming part of the local political borderland discourse? Some of our informants whom had worked at the local factory would in 2009 state that it was difficult for them to imagine crossing the border to Norway and answered: "we do not have any thoughts of crossing it and "there are instructions for all kinds of openness [...] we were proud citizens of Soviet Union" speaking as if the past was still in the present. The group that could cross borders and travel abroad to the "West" was basically veterans. It is important to notice that the municipal arrangements were scheduled and arranged by the international municipality departments. Even though the border was opened from the 1990s, visa regulations still prevailed and the participants needed invitation and visa in order to cooperate. Cooperation

arrangements often needed long term planning and the bureaucratic arrangement was often considered a setback. For the Russians it was often the leaders of the different departments as well as local politicians that would participate in cross- border cooperation. However, extensive contact did develop between municipality departments throughout the years. Cooperation between businesses was more difficult. It is also worth noting that surrounding the friendship cooperation arrangements the political tensions and security aspect was in the 70ies and 80ies a part of the picture; information regarding the “West” was controlled and it is easy to discover its consequences for communication in many of the interviews made in the Russian borderland.

From a general viewpoint one can state that those Nikel citizens who did sign up for cross border cultural events did so because they were curious about the neighboring society, not because they were particularly interested in the activity they had signed up for. They were told how to behave in the dangerous capitalistic country and were not supposed to exchange any goods with the Norwegians; food or beverages was even said to be poisonous. While in Norway they had to stay close to the group they were traveling with and never leave the buss. Friendship arrangements was coordinated by the municipality level and many residing in the borderland would take part in school and nursery school exchange, sports and other kinds of cultural exchange with their neighbors. Some would address the importance of learning about Norwegian society, law and regulations. The information was exchanged with friends and family. Visiting Norway once a year was considered “many times” and by directing the attention to the descriptions they gave of Norway and Kirkenes one is observing the most detailed account of a particular event happening. “The bus driver was very polite” or “I was once in Kirkenes celebrating the May 17th and was very impressed by how the Norwegians celebrated their culture and their unique national dress was beautiful.” In general traveling to Norway was a very nice experience. Norwegians were interpreted as very kind and nice smiling all the time: “even greeting you at the grocery shop,” one said. Few would in 2009 associate anything negative with Norwegian people. The context of the border narratives of 2009 were in general a romantic vision of the Norwegian neighbors. The first account presentations disclose viewpoints of the neighbor being “far away” from themselves physically, and underlined by very positive attitudes of the neighbor. It is indicated by the general interpretations and details of the “Other” Norwegian, portraying the neighbor as it is first account experiences and an exotic “touristic” representations of the “other.”

The interviews in 2009 would in general uncover experiences and understandings associated with a political history that underscored a quite closed border. Their assumptions was given meaning by linking it up to the

Cold War period and Russia in the 1990s; a period of great transition and an unpredictable life. Nostalgic eyes would present the current situation in Nikel. The state did invest in Pechenga district in the 1970s and 1980s but today the present situation was considered a great contrast: “today we only see destruction,” one said. We asked if not the Russian government would consider investing in Nikel in the future? “Ohh, then we have to wait for a long time...” one responded. The bordertown Nikel was considered located at “the end of big Russia” and was one of those forgotten towns facing the same destiny as many of the other rural monotowns far away from the national state centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Pechenga district was also one of those municipalities hosting several mono industrial towns that was being totally dependent on the local factory and mining industry.

Very few of our informants did in 2009 believe in the realization of the border zone visa LBT even though it had been one of the bullet points in the Twin City municipality declaration sign by local authorities and approved by the two counties Foreign ministers, Sergey Lavrov and Jonas Gahr Støre in 2008. Many did respond positively to the idea of open borders to Norway though. A Russian informant living in Kirkenes addressed Nikel in 2010 – right after the Norwegian and Russian authorities had agreed upon the implementation of LBT the following way: “It is a sleepy town which needs more air” indicating that the place needed more international external influences. Thus, the informant was also receiving feedback from locals being very curious of the new borderzone visa: “Was it really true?!”

LBT and Schengen visa

In 2010 the Norwegian authorities as part of a larger Norwegian Strategy of developing the High North, also addressed an increased focus on developing the relationship to Russia. In line with the development of stronger industrial – economic ties with Russia addressed in the Government’s High North Strategy issued in 2006 and onwards increased emphasis on cross- border communicating with the regional and local level was also prioritized. A multi entry visa, “Pomor visa”/Schengen visa, was from 2008 issued to Russian citizens living in Murmansk Oblast, Arkhangelsk Oblast and the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. In 2008, approximately 104,500 border crossings was registered at the border crossing point Storskog–Borisoglebsk. From 2010 Russian citizens would seriously discover that it was quite easy to obtain and 141,000 border crossings was recorded. Due to this the Norway’s Consulate General in

Murmansk was issuing an increasing amount of Pomor visas from 2010 and onwards. This resulted in a dramatic rise of Russian visitors to the Norwegian borderland and the town Kirkenes in particular. Peoples from the arctic Russian city of Murmansk with around 300,000 inhabitants was the most active in using the Schengen visa and the amount of border crossings peaked in 2013 (320,000 border crossings). The two countries, Norway and Russia (and Schengen) did also November 2, 2010 come to an agreement on LBT.¹¹ In May 29, 2012 LBT was implemented and in 2012 it was assumed that it was a visa regime the eventually marked a new step in the direction of total abolition of visa between Russia and the rest of Europe. At regional cross-border forums in the Norwegian borderland, Kaliningrad and Poland was often used as an example of the next step indicating that the whole of Finnmark and Murmansk region could in some years be open for LBT holders. The issue is complex though and not practically viable if one considers the general EU–Russia discussions concerning LBT.¹² It is worth noting though that the 30 km LBT zone in 2017 was extended to also include the local population of Neiden at the Norwegian side that was cut in two by the previous LBT enforcement in 2010. In June 1st the first border crossing with the quite cheap border zone visa was registered (free for infants, students and those over 60 years). LBT has made it far more easy to people living in Sør-Varanger to get access to the Russian borderland. However, it is not a work- or residence permit, but the visa bureaucracy associated with traveling has been simplified. No invitations needed.

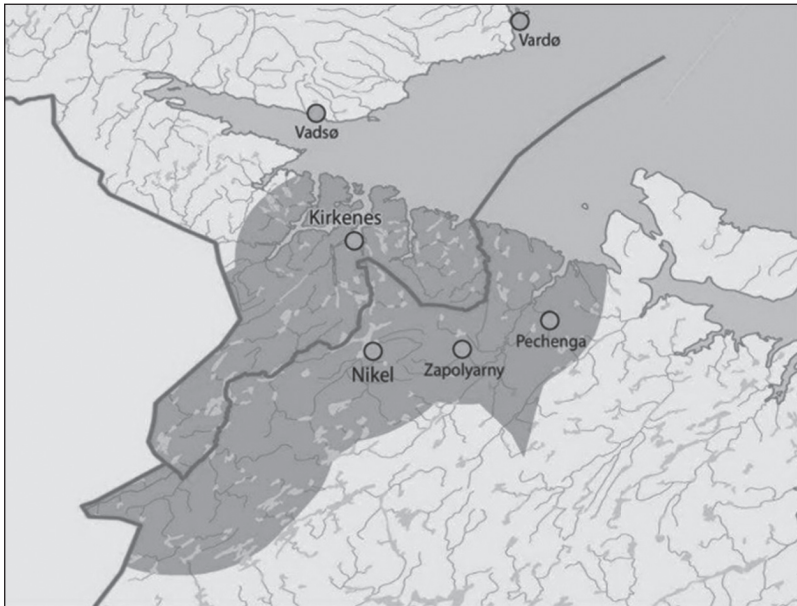
LBT made it possible to enter the Norwegian neighboring territory 30 kilometers from the border, and 30 to 50 kilometers at the Russian territory. The inhabitants in this zone can apply for the LBT and can be issued an ID card valid for three year as long as the citizen had lived in the zone for more than three years. It is not only issued to Norwegian and Russian citizens but also to third country inhabitants as long as they have stayed at least 3 years in the LBT zone. By holding the ID card one can access the neighboring country with easier procedures at the border crossing point and one is allowed to stay in the neighboring area up to 15 days before returning. Approximately 9,000 inhabitants at the Norwegian side can apply for the permit and 45,000 at the Russian side (in practice less people can obtain LBT in Russia because of their workplace and restrictions because of borderland security zone. Some only have national passports due to this). To Russian visitors the Norwegian land area is

¹¹ “Det kongelige utenriksdepartement,” *Nordområdene: Visjon og virkemidler*. Oslo: Det kongelige utenriksdepartement, 2011.

¹² A. Yliseyeu, *Keeping the door ajar: local border traffic regimes on the EU’s Eastern borders*. Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2014.

quite available to Russian visitors, but for the Norwegian population it is mainly the Russian borderland cities (Nikel and Zapolyarny) that is open to Norwegian visitors. Two years after LBT was made available around 3,500 inhabitants at the Norwegian side had applied for the ID card and approximately 1300 at the Russian side.¹³ In the beginning of 2017 close to 6,300, and over half of the Norwegian population, have the LBT. In 2016 around 2,000–3,000 (40 per cent) Norwegians use LBT to enter the neighboring territory regularly.

Figure 1. LBT zone in 2010



In 2009 Norwegians was rarely seen in Pechenga district. In 2013 there was approximately 36 000 Norwegian border crossings at Storskog–Boris Gleb with LBT. The increased interest for Norwegians to visit their

¹³ Group and individual interviews was conducted with peoples in Pechenga district (Nikel) from 2009–2016 as well as information derived from seminars and conferences in the borderland taking place in the same period. Out of 50 inhabitants in Nickel that was interviewed in spring 2014 half of them would hold a Pomor visa, only a few of them was the owner of LBT. The most frequent answer by those not holding visa or LBT was that they did not have time to visit Norway's Consulate General in Murmansk because they had to prioritize work. Most Russians apply for Schengen visa, not LBT because it allows them to visit other European countries.

neighbor did after a while affect Pechenga district politically and business wise. In September 2012 the representative of local businesses and entrepreneurs in Pechenga district, Sizov, confirmed that the Pechenga municipality (Mayor of Pechenga district was also present) had not engaged much in the strategic development/marketing, even though it was affirmed that Norwegians would come as visitors and customers. Even though LBT was introduced in spring 2012, they did not in September the same year consider many opportunities and possible outcomes of LBT and cross-border cooperation.¹⁴ However, this would gradually change in the following years. In November 2013 for instance, the same Sizov assumed after a brief encounter with the local businesses in Nikel, that 10 per cent of the income was from Norwegian customers.¹⁵ In 2014 the border crossings from Norway would continue to raise, being approx. 46,000, eventually a small decrease was seen from 2014 and onwards. It is difficult to say what the factors on the Norwegian side are to the reasons of less cross-border traveling. The tensions due to the situation in Eastern Ukraine has been mentioned, sanctions became a reality from autumn 2014 and the response from Europe and the international society's is well known. Local factors being mentioned also include that roads/infrastructure connecting the countries were under considerable reconstruction. For the Russians the decreasing value of the rubel currency should be mentioned, and has been counted as the main reason why less Russians visited Norway from the end of 2014 and onwards, but political reasons as well as infrastructure mentioned above are all part of the picture. It is worth noting that the migration crisis in autumn 2015 when 5,500 people crossed the Borisoglebs–Storskog border crossing point on bicycles seem not to have prevented LBT holders from visiting the neighbor. From the beginning of 2017, there are again a raise in border crossings (around 20 per cent) compared to the previous years.

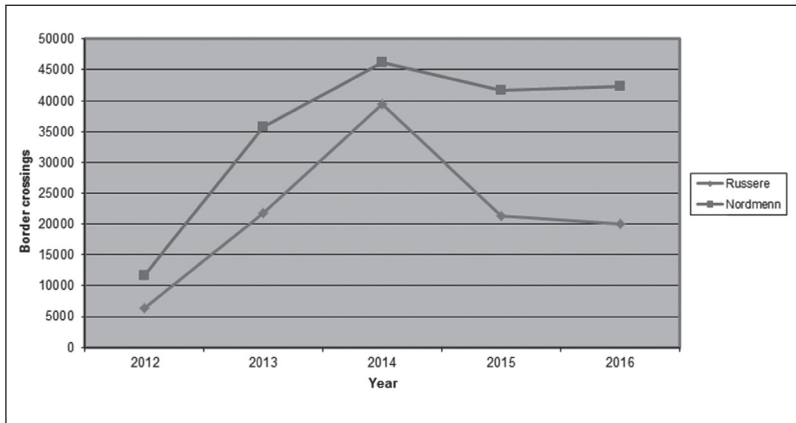
In 2013 visiting the local petrol station in Nikel on Saturdays was considered difficult for local peoples because of all the customers coming from Norway. The Norwegians are finding Pechenga district attractive for many reasons. In addition to filling petrol, they make use of different services ranging from making appointment with hairdressers, auto shop, the local dentist or general shopping and relaxing at local restaurants. Following the discussions in Norwegian online forums there is a general positive attitude in the Norwegian interest in the different services at the Russian side. It is considered exotic to visit the neighbor and the reasons

¹⁴ Expressed at the Living in the Centre-Periphery seminar in Nikel, September 2012. Arranged by Finnmark University College, Murmansk State Humanities University, Sør-Varanger Municipality and Pechenga district.

¹⁵ Stated at the conference "Russian-Norwegian Border Cooperation Days" in Nikel, October/November 2013.

why this is considered so are many, some highlight the Soviet architecture, organization of the towns, language and culture. One local tourist operator in Kirkenes would even arrange several “LBT” trips for local Norwegians who wished touring Pechenga district and getting to know the area. In 2013 it was assumed that Norwegians with LBT would spend around 12.5 million NOK in 2013.¹⁶ A systematic general survey illustrating the economic consequences of the borderland traffic from Norway has not yet thus been carried out on the Russian side of the border. A pilot study has been conducted by Akvaplan–Niva (supported economically by Norway’s Consulate General in Murmansk) in fall 2015.¹⁷ According to the rapport, the Norwegian borderland is not that much affected by the Russian visitors but several of the businesses in Kirkenes are. Especially the maritime sector.

Figure 2. Border Crossings with LBT.



Source: Norwegian Police (Police), 2016

¹⁶ H. Sørensen, E. Tvedt, *Grensehandel ved den norskrossiske grensen. En studie av grensehandel mellom Sør-Varanger Kommune og Pechenga Rayon*. Master Thesis. Bodø: Universitetet i Nordland, 2013.

¹⁷ R. Rautio, “Russisk verdiskapning i Sør-Varanger kommune. Betydningen av næringsssamarbeid og grensetrafikk for økonomi og sysselsetting,” *AS Rapport* 7817, Akvaplan-Niva, 2015.

2011: Pechenga district and the Regional level in Murmansk oblast.

Increased interest in Nikel and the borderland is also seen from Murmansk Oblast and the regional authorities emphasis on cross-border cooperation. If we take into account the Russian response to the new borderland discussion on the Norwegian side from 2008 and onwards it was answered rather dynamically from 2011 and onwards. The bilateral discussions in Kirkenes from 2008 addressing increased transnational cooperation in the Norwegian Russian borderzone was obviously supported by the Russian Ministry of Regional development, the Government of Murmansk Oblast, the Ministry of Economic development of the Murmansk region and the administration of the Pechenga District as a new platform of Russian–Norwegian border cooperation days was established in 2011 emphasizing “people-to-people” cooperation. Some surprise on the Norwegian side was connected to the fact that authorities in Murmansk (supported by the Russian federation) would work for its peripheral local district turning “dying towns” in the border areas associated with post-Soviet industrial decay, heavy pollution and environmental challenges into places and a natural bridgehead to the West. At the first Russian–Norwegian border cooperation days in Nikel in 2011, the former governor of Murmansk Oblast, Dimitrij V. Dimitrienko wrote the town Nikel and the Russian borderland into history of the the Barents Euro-Arctic Region by naming the Russian–Norwegian bordercooperation days the “Nikel initiative” inspired by the fact that the name “Kirkenes” in 1993 was given to the declaration announcing the establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. At the same arrangement two years later the new governor Marina Kovtun, addressed the development of the European North as “impossible without international cooperation” and the bilateral cooperation with neighboring Norway was a comparative asset. She embraced the continuance of the Twin City cooperation Nikel and Pechenga district has with Kirkenes and Sør-Varanger Municipality, and stressed the importance of sustainable development for people residing in the borderland. This is a framework that would institutionalize the two towns in a bilateral regional/national context and moreover larger European context of transnational City–Twinning cooperation.¹⁸ In both speeches, the governors downplayed the

¹⁸ P. Joenniemi, A. Sergunin, 2011, op. cit.; P. Joenniemi, “City-twinning as local

division between state/regional (local) political sphere in their approach to Nickel and the development of the Norwegian- Russian borderland space. They both engaged in transnational region-building on behalf of the borderland. If increased activity and cooperation across the Norwegian-Russian borders was the consequence it might become a unique model of cooperation between the countries on a national scale Dimitrienko stated in 2011.

The political agenda above is also seen in the recent development of the town and in the narratives from some of the locals. The general internationalization focus often being associated with the politicized nature of East and West/ national state borders would soon co-exist with tourism development visions and strategies. From 2013 intensified local planning was being presented from local authorities of Pechenga district. Local government and the local businesses/shops are taking numerous measures to welcome the neighbors from Norway. In 2012 maps over the Pechenga towns was designed and information even translated into Norwegian welcoming Norwegians to Petsamo (Pechenga). Since then several information sites are i.e. elevated in the town Nickel and new signposts in the center of Nickel has been made containing information in both Russian and English languages. At one point Norwegian - Russian bilingual posters were put in front of local stores welcoming Norwegian customers. Local restaurants have even translated their menu into Norwegian and in one restaurant the main courses are named after Norwegian and Russian towns and cities (Kirkenes, Moscow, Bergen and Sochy). All this illustrates that Nickel has today taken advantage of it as one of the centers of the Norwegian-Russian borderland, being influenced by what has been during the “age of globalization” called the porous nature of the border, and thus challenging the industrialized image of “Soviet” town with monotown architecture dominating the place now also being shaped by new signs and symbols: indicating the towns international border context.

Deterritorialization has its consequences and the transformation process from being a quite closed borderland to a more open one has affected the population in Nickel that we spoke to in the years 2012 and onwards. Norway and Kirkenes are of course not that exotic anymore. Thousands of Norwegians do visits Pechenga district frequently and half of the group we spoke to in 2014 had either Schengen visa/LBT. As one informant responded; “Kirkenes is more like a second home to me now.” Shopping as well as a wide range of other activities can today form a picture of the motivation for crossing the border to Norway. Some even suggested

foreign policy: the case of Kirkenes-Nickel,” *CEURUS EU-RUSSIA papers*, 2013. Available online: http://ceurus.ut.ee/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/EU-Russian-paper-15_Joenniemi.pdf. (accessed on December 12, 2013); P. Haugseth, op. cit.

dropping by Norwegian colleagues but recreation also emphasized by quite a few of the informants. Other suggestions have been spending time at the harbor, looking at the fjord, visiting local attractions/museum/snow hotel and even renting a bicycle in order to move around and look at the neighboring areas. The fact that Kirkenes is also a transportation point to other parts of Europe because of the airport was also an important point. “We who live in the Barents region with Schengen visa have fantastic opportunities.” That particular informant was of course more optimistic about the future because of the new opportunities in the Norwegian-Russian borderland. Some had redefined their perception of Nikel and Pechenga district in the recent years because of the transformation of the Russian- Norwegian borderland space. Before it was considered rather negatively, of being a town in the “end of big Russia.” Now it had turned into a proactive vision of a town that was “the beginning of Russia.” The geographical location of the place was now linking it to the West, actually making it into a bridgehead to the West.

Conclusion

The physical and social space of the town today are gradually replacing the geopolitical worldview associated with static national borders. Flexible worldviews and openness indicate “space of flows” and are seen in the urban space as well as in the local border narratives of my informants.¹⁹ This of course does not mean that there are no static “old time” borderland identity perspectives in Pechenga district today mirroring that of 2009, and that the new public and private transnational images are not contested among the population. We only have to bear in mind that the local political optimism in Pechenga district from 2008 and 2009 was clearly different when encountering the rest of the population seen in the interviews from 2009. But from June 2012, and onwards the new border zone visa succeeded in facilitating everyday borderland interaction and new initiatives from regional and local authorities. Eventually also gradually changing the local and public image of Pechenga into a vital border district, particularly in the town of Nikel. This can be said to affect the self -identity of the general population also seen in the interviews conducted in 2014. There are therefore reasons to say, even though it is not a big population living in Sør-Varanger municipality, that the flow

¹⁹ E. Castells, *The informational city. Information technology, economic restructuring, and the urban regional process*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

of peoples coming from Norway to visit the neighboring Russian district has affected the Russian borderland population. In Norway, the Pechenga district had up to then mainly been associated with pollution, old industry and decades of post-Soviet decay.²⁰ As from 2011 onwards local political authorities have addressed the Russian borderland as a transnational area in line with the regional building approach of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.²¹ The outlook and self-branding has been endorsed further in new public symbols uniting the Russian borderland area with its Scandinavian geographical counterparts. The local political visions and aspirations on behalf of the two countries have gained new meaning in the last few years, and being a direct response to the mutual interest of developing their areas in the European North. Borderland place identity²² is being illustrated by a local planning emphasizing hybrid nature/ transition space where “frontier/transition world between, and across, the more rigid lines that separated us in the past.”²³ More people in Nikel today are taking advantage of the possibilities of the crossing of “here” and “there”, physically and socially. The distinctions made in the borderland narratives of 2014 is thus far more flexible and diverse than in 2009 and the life in Pechenga district is therefore to a stronger degree connected to the “outside world”. The opening up of territories ideologically by the use of city twinning and the use of LBT, new administrative and political tools, are therefore redefining interaction in small places in the periphery of the nation states of Norway and Russia. This is the conclusion almost five years after LBT was made available to citizens in the Russian – Norwegian borderland.

²⁰ G. Hønneland, *Borderland Russians. Identity, narrative and international relations*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2010; V. Rautio, *The potential for community restructuring. Mining towns in Pechenga*. Saarijärvi: Kikimora Publications, 2003.

²¹ P. Haugseth, “Interaction in the borderland after the implementation of the local border traffic permit: perspectives from the Russian town Nikel, Pechenga district,” in N.I. Kurganova, S.A. Vinogradova, E.A. Tyurkan, eds, *Languages and cultures in the Arctic Region*. Murmansk: Murmansk State Humanities University, 2014, pp. 154–60.

²² B. J. Morehouse, “Theoretical approaches to border spaces and identities,” in V. Pavlakovich-Kochi, B.J. Morehouse, D. Wastl-Walter, eds, *Challenged borderlands: transcending political and cultural boundaries*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, pp.19–39.

²³ D. Newman, “The lines that continue to separate us: Borders in our ‘borderless’ world,” *Progress in Human Geography* Vol. 30, 2006, pp. 143–61 (p. 152).

ISBN 978-80-89356-54-6