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# Boundaries of Trust: Building a Transnational Space in Haparanda-Tornio

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## Introduction

The Tornio River, running through what was once the northernmost part of the Kingdom of Sweden, is a waterway whose meaning changed dramatically in 1809 when Sweden lost its 'eastern provinces' to Russia in the Finnish War. Up to that point the river had been a 410-kilometer-long inland watercourse that provided means for mobility and a livelihood for the predominantly Finnish speaking inhabitants of the Tornio River valley. In 1809 the river gained a new function as an international boundary, first between Sweden and the Russian Empire and then, after 1917, between Sweden and the independent Republic of Finland (Lundén and Zalamans 2001).

In the delta where the Tornio River meets the Baltic Sea, a town was founded in 1621 by Gustav II Adolf of Sweden and named after the river. The location was an age-old marketplace where trade routes met and goods from the Northern wilderness, mainly salmon and fur, were transported and exchanged. The town was officially founded on the island Suensaari in the Tornio River delta, but in the 1809 demarcation of the state boundary the Czar Alexander I specifically demanded that Tornio be annexed to the Russian Grand Duchy of Finland. Consequently, the Swedish side of the river was left without a population center. To compensate for the loss, Sweden started to build a new town (originally named Carl-Johan stad) by the Tornio River and in 1821 Haaparanta village (present day Haparanda) was established as a market place on the Swedish side. The village received town charter in 1842 and thus the gradual development of the twin towns of Haparanda and Tornio began (see figure 5.1).

Northern trade started to decline in the 18th century as the state boundary increasingly cut Tornio off from the position of trade hub, and the town descended from a lively merchant town into a border settlement with substantial military presence by the czar's army. However, the bridges connecting the western and eastern riverbanks were never demolished, and during the First World War Tornio and Haparanda experienced a short-lived renaissance as a border crossing point for goods and people. By this time the Tornio River had already gained all the three distinctive socio-cultural and material dimensions that characterize it today: a dividing boundary, a linking meeting point, and a "more-than-human" actor as a watercourse (cf. Whatmore 2005).

Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917, and the country's subsequent modernization, industrialization and general urbanization pushed Tornio into further decline despite steady population growth. The bulk of industrial growth related to wood processing concentrated in Kemi, a town located at the mouth of the Kemi river only 25 kilometers southwest from Tornio. Similar relative marginalization occurred on the Swedish side of the Tornio River where Haparanda was struggling for economic survival in the face of growing depopulation of Northern Sweden.

The border formalities between Sweden and Finland became increasingly relaxed after the Second World War, a process that culminated in 1996 when both countries became part of the European 'Shengenlandia'<sup>1</sup>. Under these circumstances, both challenging and enabling, it is understandable that the towns of Haparanda and Tornio have sought to join forces in their regional and local development efforts. It is such development efforts, deriving from local history and utilizing physical, social and cultural resources that this chapter sets out to explore.

Attempts to explain governmental and economic development with social and cultural reasons have a long history in social thought. Authors such as Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) and Max Weber (1930) are widely regarded as forerunners in the study of the cultural roots of Western political and economic history. Their mode of thinking has encouraged generations of scholars to study the role of cultural context and social life in the functioning of political and governmental institutions. A recent upsurge of this research occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the context of the concept of social capital (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993; see Cannone in this volume).

Given the prominence of Putnam's (2000) idea of "bridging" in social capital research, and the deep resonance of the metaphor of 'bridge' in border research (e.g. Sidaway 2004; Häkli 2004), it is surprising how little scholarship exists on transnational networks of trust (for exception, see Tilly 2007). In some research on international cross-border co-operation the significance of trust is noted but not analyzed in depth (e.g. Church & Reid 1999; Krätke 1999; Grix & Knowles 2002). Trust is typically seen in broad terms as a factor that influences the willingness of actors to engage in institutional or semi-institutional forms of co-operation. Much less attention has been paid to the role of trust as conditioning social interactions across international boundaries. It seems almost as if the connection between (dis)trust and (the lack of) interaction across national boundaries was too obvious to merit explicit analysis.

This chapter explores the question of transnational trust in the context of an extraordinary and challenging project that aims at physically uniting the centers of two towns located in two different countries (Finland and Sweden). With conceptual tools from actor-network theory I seek to address in a novel way the manner in which trust is related to the boundary that acts both as a force of divergence and a point of contact in international networks related to cross-border cooperation. I begin by outlining the idea of trust and then move on to discussing (international) boundaries and boundary objects as factors that may be consequential for trust-building related to successful international cooperation as

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<sup>1</sup> The area covered by the Schengen agreement is a group of countries between which there is no security check given to people or goods crossing the borders between them.

exemplified by the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project. I then explore the historical development of cross-border co-operation between Haparanda and Tornio at the Swedish-Finnish borderland in the southern end of the Tornio River Valley. I read this history focusing particularly on the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project and seeking traces of the Tornio River as a boundary object that helps build trust among the participants of networks of cross-border cooperation as well as the broader population. In conclusion I discuss the three meanings of the Tornio River/boundary/object in light of transnational trust.

### **River as a boundary as a boundary object**

The concept of trust is routinely used in everyday language, which makes it appear deceptively simple. As a theoretical concept, however, it is complex and elusive. In social capital literature, trust is seen as a resource for social action based on its capacity for making things run smoothly because of lower “social transaction costs” (e.g. Trigilia 2001; Veenstra 2002). In other words, where trust prevails there is less need for complicated institutional measures and procedures in order to secure the interaction between parties that ultimately are vulnerable in regard to each other. Trust is a condition that lubricates social interaction by making it easier and less mediated by pre-set institutional norms (Newton 2004).

There is now an extensive body of multi-disciplinary literature discussing how best to conceptualize trust. Definitions of trust abound and there seems to be little hope for a theoretical consensus about its meaning. An extensive survey of the various uses and definitions of trust is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter (for a broader discussion on trust, see chapter 1 in this volume). However it is possible to limit the scope of the concept by defining it on the basis of the case in which it is to be applied. First, I am mainly interested in trust as emerging in contextual social interaction, and not as an innate psychological trait of an individual. Second, I am interested in trust as an aspect of interaction in networks between actors who have a mutual interest.

In the context of these conceptual limitations I adopt a relatively widespread working definition of trust as an actor's acceptance of vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or actions of another person, group or institution (e.g. Rousseau et al. 1998). As is evident from this definition, the possible targets of interpersonal trust range from family members to persons of a different nationality. Empirical studies on trust have shown almost unequivocally that, when asked, people report diminishing degrees of trust when social distance between the trusting person and the target of trust grows (e.g. Buchan & Croson 2004). This, of course, has clear implications for the analysis of trust in the context of international borderlands. In addition to experience gathered from concrete interaction related to cross-border cooperation, the cultural and social milieu within which this interaction takes place is pertinent to interpersonal trust. Place-bound cultural discourses concerning inclination toward trusting, such as local ‘identity talk’ and national stereotypes, may strongly condition actors' dispositions toward trusting, as well as reciprocating trust (Hudson 1998; Mohan & Mohan 2002; Entrikin 2003).

Theories of trust remain obscure on the issue of what gives rise to trust (e.g. Fukuyama 1995; Sztompka 1999; Veenstra 2002; Brewer et al. 2004). While the

concept of a 'boundary object' certainly cannot provide a once-for-all solution, it may turn out useful because it enables both social and material realities to be included in the analysis. The dualism between nature and society has, of course, been a recurrent theme in attempts by actor-network theory scholars to decenter established understandings of what counts as 'the natural' (e.g. Callon 1986; Latour 1993). From this point of view natural entities can not be reduced to social constructs established through practices of cultural signification because they may acquire agency that is as consequential as that of social human beings (Latour 1993). Natural elements, such as rivers, may become 'agents' as part of complex and heterogeneous networks or assemblages that bring together various human and more-than-human actors, meanings, spaces, objects and materials. This agency may be unpredictable from a human point of view, and it is certainly often misrecognized as a form of agency (Kortelainen 1999).

In assessing the multiple roles of the Tornio River simultaneously as an ecosystem, as a socio-material divider, and an interface between two socio-cultural systems, I adopt the concept of boundary objects from actor-network theory (Star & Griesemer 1989). Developed as a tool for understanding how different "communities of practice" with specific systems of meaning and ways of doing things can cooperate under circumstances of heterogeneity and diversity, the concept serves well the present analysis. It facilitates an approach where cross-border cooperation is understood as a place-bound, socio-material accomplishment that not only seeks to bridge the two sides of the boundary, but also makes use of the Tornio River as a boundary object.

Star & Griesemer (1989, 389) set forth the concept of boundary objects as an attempt to develop further the model of translations as developed by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law. They argue that the latter authors have overemphasized the perspective of the aspiring scientist or other entrepreneur who attempts to enroll allies by re-interpreting their concerns to fit their own programmatic goals (cf. Poutiainen & Häkli in this volume). Instead of such mono-perspectival accounts of translation Star and Griesemer propose the idea of boundary objects as a means for creating coherence needed for cooperation in the face of "very different visions stemming from the intersection of participating social worlds" (Star & Griesemer 1989, 396).

According to Star (2002) boundary object is any concrete or abstract element that people can use as a point of reference in their interactions. This sets two simultaneous demands for boundary objects. First, in order to enable common practice they have to be loosely structured and flexible so as to accommodate differences. Second, in order to retain significance and attractiveness they have to be specifiable through refinements in the context of particular locations and practices without altering the underlying consensus. Boundary objects are, thus, "both ambiguous and clear, at different moments, for different purposes" (Star 2002, 118).

Boundary objects are [...] both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. They are weakly structured in common use, and become strongly structured in individual-site use. These objects may be abstract or concrete. They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation. The creation and management of boundary

objects is a key process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds (Star & Griesemer 1989, 393).

To suggest that the Tornio River can be seen as a boundary object in the context of cross-border cooperation requires some clarification. First, what I am proposing is that the concept of boundary object may help in understanding the successes and failures of ambitious cross-border cooperation, such as the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project, and moreover, in pinpointing a mechanism that fosters interpersonal trust in transnational cooperative networks. To this end I draw parallel from Star & Griesemer's (1989) study of scientific work involving the social worlds of different professionals and amateurs, thus requiring cooperation beset by the challenging heterogeneity. I am not suggesting that cross-border cooperation between two cities is similar to scientific work in regard to the establishment of natural historical facts in the context of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (Star & Griesemer 1989). However, there is ample evidence of the fact that efforts to establish and carry out cross-border cooperation involve heterogeneous work bringing together many different actors and viewpoints, and that this form of cooperation is equally challenged by the need to generate common understandings and manage tensions caused by the participants' diverse social worlds (Häkli & Kaplan 2002; Perkmann 2003; Kramsch & Hooper 2004).

Second, heterogeneity in cross-border cooperation is redoubled by the fact that it brings together actors from two (or more) nation-states that for decades and centuries have been socio-spatially constructed as connected, yet unconformable, socio-cultural systems separated by international boundaries. Hence, the communities of practice that face the challenge of being able to communicate and reconcile divergent meanings of the objects of cooperation include not only groups of professionals, administrators, planners, stakeholders and lay people, but also actors inhabiting two dissimilar socio-cultural systems. It is within this social landscape of (mis)trust that different boundary objects may function as intermediaries between distinct social worlds that should be able to communicate, trust, stay committed and cooperate. Arguably, like scientific work, successful cross-border cooperation depends on trust-building boundary objects that help in negotiating and resolving potentially conflicting sets of concerns that arise from the intersection of the multiple communities of practice involved.

Third, while there certainly are several items that fulfill the properties of boundary objects in cross-border cooperation between Tornio and Haparanda, the Tornio River stands out as a particularly interesting and important one. The specific role of the river is related to its (literally) central position in the social, cultural, institutional and material setting of the cross-border cooperation and particularly the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project. Performing at once three interrelated but distinct functions, the Tornio River is, first of all, one of the two remaining large free-flowing rivers in the European North. This has not only prompted the inclusion of the river in the European Union *Natura 2000* program, but it also explains the river's peculiar agency in relation to its second function as an international boundary.

The treaty of Hamina in 1809 declared that the boundary between Sweden and the Russian Grand Duchy of Finland run along a succession of the deepest points in the riverbed of the Tornio River. Seemingly stable and objective as a "natural boundary," the riverbed is actually a rather volatile and shifting ground

for a borderline. This may be due to gradual erosion or sudden changes in the riverbed caused by floods (Biger 1988, 344). Hence, the free-flowing river acquires a peculiar geopolitical agency when its alterations lead to boundary adjustments and flood protection schemes that mobilize a complex set of regulations, measurements, mapping techniques, commissioners, vessels and technologies of construction necessary for boundary demarcation and flood regulation.

The status of the Tornio River as a seemingly natural international boundary conceals the fact that it is also a socio-material accomplishment requiring considerable effort by both human and non-human actors. This work is not delimited to the periodic adjustments of the borderline, carried out at 25-year intervals by a specific Swedish-Finnish commission, but extends to myriad practices in the socio-cultural systems ongoing in the immediate vicinity of the river and beyond. This is the third function of the Tornio River. Besides being a watercourse transporting some 350 cubic meters of water per second on average, as well as a “natural boundary” marking the edge between two societies, the river is also an intersection of multiple heterogeneous actors, objects and meanings – a liminal space at the interface of two relatively distinct socio-cultural systems: the towns of Haparanda in Sweden and Tornio in Finland.

Practices of cross-border cooperation are among the most visible and organized attempts to introduce a degree of coherence and consensus to this liminal landscape with the help of boundary objects (Star 2002). In what follows I analyze the role of the Tornio River as a boundary object in the development of cross-border cooperation in the twin towns of Haparanda and Tornio, with particular emphasis on the ambitious *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project. I begin by outlining the progressive nationalization of the two towns into a Swedish one and Finnish one, and then move on to looking at how communities of practice have pursued cross-border cooperation so as to bridge the social worlds created through nationalizing discourses and practices. From documents and publications related to the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project I trace the ways in which the Tornio River has been crafted as a boundary object, and assess its significance for trust-building as an asset in international cooperative networks.

### **The Tornio River at the ‘edge of society’**

International borderlands are landscapes where establishing relationships of trust is particularly challenging. The twin towns of Haparanda and Tornio, however, belong to the more amicable European borderlands characterized by a socio-cultural milieu with a long history of informal ties across the boundary. Indeed, before nation-state building in the Scandinavian North, the Tornio River Valley was a predominantly Finnish-speaking region with strong cultural and linguistic unity. This unity was put under strain in 1809 when the Tornio River became an international boundary, but nevertheless there is still some linguistic and cultural affinity across the boundary. The border has always been very open except for unusual conditions, such as war, and today a substantial share of the population of Haparanda has Finnish citizenship. Moreover, some two thirds of the population in Haparanda speak either Finnish or ‘Meänkieli’ (a Finnish dialect spoken on the

Swedish side of the Tornio River Valley), and the inhabitants of Tornio have all learned Swedish at school (Zalamans 2002).

However, despite the long history of interaction across the Tornio River, and the existence of a distinctive Tornio River Valley identity (Tornionlaakso/Tornedal identity), people in Tornio and Haparanda also tend to identify strongly with their respective national communities (Lundén & Zalamans 2001; Jukarainen 2003). Since 1809 a growing number of institutional and popular practices of distinction have worked to divide the region into Swedish and Finnish sides, and today national stereotypes concerning life and culture on the other side are commonly resorted to when depicting each other's habits, collective character, values and the national(ized) landscapes (Prokkola 2005). The two national master narratives, Swedish and Finnish, have thus created an order that people both in Haparanda and Tornio tend to view as natural. It is this socio-cultural landscape of (mis)trust, embodied by the Tornio River as a "natural boundary," that various practices of formal cross-border cooperation have sought to accommodate and bridge.

While informal ties first dominated cross-border activities between the citizens of Haparanda and Tornio, after the 1960s the official relationships between the two towns started to warm up considerably. This development was initiated by public sector actors who saw the possibilities for synergy in some areas of public service provision. The process also reflected the relaxation of the Swedish and Finnish states' grip on this peaceful borderland, and was backed up by the rise of the ideology of 'Nordic countries' as a unifying theme in Scandinavian international relations. The membership of Sweden and Finland in the European Union since 1995 further boosted this development, with cross-border cooperation being one of the official targets of the EU cohesion policies.

Indeed, it can be noted that the Tornio River Valley has much to show when it comes to official cross-border cooperation. The municipalities on both sides have engaged in synergetic relations for several decades, and the towns of Haparanda and Tornio are cooperating on issues ranging from the common use of a swimming pool (since 1960) to the establishment of a supranational body, *Provincia Bothniensis* (1987), for coordinating issues of common interest across the national boundary. Forms of practical cooperation include agreements on joint waste water treatment (1971), joint language education services (1989), joint district heating system (1993), joint tourist information office (1998) and joint preschool (2002) (*Provincia Bothniensis* 2008). Furthermore, the Euro has become a commonly accepted currency also on the Swedish side, despite the fact that Sweden decided to stay out of the European Monetary Union (Zalamans 2002).

Haparanda and Tornio's notable achievements in international cross-border cooperation have been acknowledged in several studies (e.g. Zalamans 2002; Ioannides et al. 2006). However, the persistence of the divisive effect of the international boundary has also been noted. For example Lundén and Zalamans (2001) point out that while political and governmental actors show a great deal of willingness to cooperate across the boundary, similar enthusiasm cannot be found among business actors or large sections of the citizenry. In studies of the youth in Haparanda and Tornio, Jukarainen (2003) notes that despite the many forms of cross-border cooperation, nation-specific identities prevail. This factor can be

explained by the effective use of school education as a tool of Finlandization and Swedification since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indicative of just how persistent the boundary is as a cultural divider, the results of a recent study show that even students attending the jointly operated bilingual school in Haparanda tend to socialize only with their own nationals outside the school activities (Teppola and Mustajärvi 2006).

The nationally divisive effect of the Tornio River presents a challenge to establishing cross-border networks of trust. This has been pinpointed, for instance, in a document prepared as a proposal for the Tornio River Valley Interreg III program.

In all, the national boundary and disparate state legislations have hindered or at least slowed down the emergence of effective transboundary systems. [...] the main obstacles to cross-border cooperation have been the following: language problems [...] suspicious attitudes [...] dissimilar practices of politics and government [...] lack of knowledge and contacts [...] national regulations for the use of resources [...] Finland's membership in the European Monetary Union (Tornionlaakson neuvosto 2008; author's own translation).

The problem of trust can be seen to culminate in an observation by Lundén and Zalams (2001, 42) that, among many groups in both Haparanda and Tornio, there is a feeling that “what is good for them is bad for us.” Along similar lines the Interreg III program document notes that the hindrance is not so much the unwillingness to cooperate, but suspicions about “the neighbor benefiting more” (Tornionlaakson neuvosto 2008, 4; author's own translation). It is within this cultural landscape of (mis)trust that the Tornio River has come to act as a boundary object with significant effects on the cooperation across the Swedish-Finnish boundary.

### **Trust-building through boundary objects: the *På Gränsen – rajalla* project**

In discussing the role of boundary objects in scientific cooperation Star and Griesemer (1989) found that elements performing the mediating function between communities of practice were of different kinds. They distinguished four types ranging from material representations (such as maps and diagrams) and settings of action (museum as a common referent) to virtual orders (ideal types, standardized forms), all of which were helpful in resolving the problem of heterogeneity in cooperation between intersecting social worlds. In what follows I describe the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project (Figure 8.1) as a form of cooperation characterized by the challenge of bridging social worlds set apart by social and cultural heterogeneity. I set out to trace elements that have performed the function of boundary object by settling some of the social, cultural and material complexity of the project.



Figure 8.1 The logo of På Gränsen – Rajalla project

Methodologically I follow the example of Star and Griesemer (1989) who based their analysis of Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology on various documents produced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and stored at the Museum. In exploring the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project I focus on the documentation related to the planning and realization of the project as it stands in the spring of 2008. While the materials to be analyzed carry certain limitations, including their emphasis on the visual and verbal at the cost of direct observation, they nevertheless enable reflection concerning the means that have been utilized to facilitate communication and cooperation across intersecting social worlds at the international borderland of Haparanda and Tornio.

The *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project (literally meaning “on the border project”) is an effort at coordinated community planning between Haparanda and Tornio, with the aim of physically uniting the two towns by constructing a common town center. The project idea is presented to the public as follows:

På Gränsen - Rajalla is co-operative project of two cities located in two different countries, Haparanda (Sweden) and Tornio (Finland). In the middle of the border line we are building a center where you can find – besides commercial services – also apartments, educational possibilities, jobs, culture, and free-time options. Building started at spring 2003. Into the new centre we are building senior apartments, common police station and a shopping center across the border line. The local streets are also rebuilt to cross the border between Finland and Sweden. The new traffic circle makes the traffic easier. [...] Do you want to build borderless future with us? Don't hesitate to contact us! (På Gränsen 2008)

The background of the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* initiative lies in the many geopolitical changes that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the European Union membership of Sweden and Finland brought to the European North in the early 1990s. Together with a growing concern for the population loss and stagnant economic development in the Haparanda-Tornio region, new possibilities for cooperation and mobility across the Swedish-Finnish boundary encouraged the towns to become active in strategic planning (Santasalo and Heusala 2002). Important momentum for the project was given by the existing forms of institutional cooperation such as the *Provincia Bothniensis*, which had shown that Haparanda and Tornio may indeed benefit from joining forces. Yet, collaboration in the area of physical town planning was unforeseen, a point emphasized in a document reporting the results of the design competition which launched the project in 1997.

[Haparanda and Tornio] have, since several years, been engaged in extensive cooperation, but until now cooperation regarding the physical planning has not been far-reaching. [...] The new situation without hindering formalities has inspired to a new and more extensive cooperation regarding the physical planning. [...] The two municipalities together with Road Administrations in both countries, therefore decided to arrange an architectural competition (Arkitekturtävlingar 1998, 16).

On the basis of two winning designs, a Development Plan which focused on the unbuilt, idle land between the existing town centers of Haparanda and Tornio was drafted in the spring of 2000. At this stage the key actors in the binational cooperation network were Seppo Pelttari (the chairman of Tornio town council), Gunnel Simu (the chairman of Haparanda municipal council), Bengt Westman (the chairman of Haparanda local government), Raimo Ronkainen (the acting mayor of Tornio), Janerik Reyier (director of the department of roads, Region Norr, Sweden), and Tapani Pöyry (director of the department of roads, Lapland, Finland) (Utvecklingsplan 2000, 1). These persons also acted as the jury of the design competition and thus were in a very strong position to set developmental guidelines for the project (Arkitekturtävlingar 1998, 2).

Within the steering group of the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project, cooperation was carried out without much friction. In an article published before a consultative referendum on the project was held in Haparanda on September 15, 2002, Bengt Westman, one of the leading figures in the project network, noted that the members of the steering group had already voted 'yes' and this has brought the project both political and financial support. He also pointed out that the project had been ongoing for several years and would require further commitment for years to come (Westman 2002). Obviously the long history of interaction within the jury that later became the project's steering group had established an atmosphere of trust among the core members (cf. Poutiainen & Häkli in this volume).

However, the problem of cross-national (mis)trust was accentuated after the planning stage when the project met the challenge of engaging new supporters from the ranks of local politicians, business communities, and most importantly, ordinary citizens in both Haparanda and Tornio. In anticipation of an unwelcome reception of the *På Gränsen - Rajalla* project among the Haparanda citizenry, Bengt Westman lamented that

Unfortunately, most unfortunately, there are people who have mistaken [the project's] illustrations for descriptions of what exists instead of what they really are, imaginations among certain architects and consultants. Communication [concerning the real state of affairs] has also been hampered by some town council members who in wishing to show their political competence and secure their re-election have chosen to publicly portray the illustrations as reality. I utterly regret this (Westman 2002, author's own translation).

Westman's fears were not groundless. Symptomatic of a broader problem of (mis)trust impeding cross-border cooperation, the referendum in Haparanda rejected the *På Gränsen - Rajalla* project (På Gränsen archive 2008). Perhaps fortunately for the project, no referendum was held in Tornio, and because the Haparanda referendum was only consultative, both towns decided to continue working on the project. Hence, despite the lack of popular support on the Swedish side, the master plan was accepted by both town councils in February 2003. Since then the plan has started to materialize in the actual border landscape, albeit at a varying pace (Figure 8.2).



**Figure 8.2** Aerial photo of the Pää Gränsen – Rajalla project planning area

The first concrete measures in 2003 were related to earth-moving work aiming to make the ground more suitable for building. In 2005 the project was given a boost by IKEA, a multinational furniture and accessories company, which announced its plan to open an outlet at the border between Haparanda and Tornio. The company's decision to invest in the planning area was an important step forward for the *Pää Gränsen – Rajalla* project, that for the critics seemed little more than waste of public funds and lacking support among the local business actors and citizens (Asemakaava 2003). Somewhat surprisingly, the *Pää Gränsen – Rajalla* project is currently a lively development scheme that has been capable of attracting the interest of dozens of companies willing to follow the lead of IKEA (Enberg 2006).

How, then, should we understand these successful efforts to transcend the Tornio River as a national boundary by building a transnational centre that unites the towns of Haparanda and Tornio? IKEA's major investment in the area definitely took the project to a new level, but it can hardly explain how the project got through the rocky road of its early stages which were characterized by lack of support and confidence among the political and business elite, as well as the general population. To account for the success of the Steering group in enrolling new 'believers' to support this ambitious project, I suggest a close re-reading of the *Pää Gränsen – Rajalla* project documentation in order to trace the uses of the Tornio River as a trust-building boundary object. In what follows, I propose three different forms or guises in which the river has come to acquire this function: 1) the Tornio River as a *physical entity* vested with a degree of agency in relation to the human communities that inhabit its banks; 2) *representation* of the Tornio River as a means of overcoming the dividing function of the border; 3) the national boundary as a *symbolic space* in the border landscape.

This three-fold typology of boundary objects follows Henri Lefebvre's (1991) distinction between spatial practice, representation of space and lived

space. In referring to Lefebvre, I wish to emphasize the spatially intertwined nature of the three aspects of the Tornio River as a boundary object (cf. Star & Griesemer 1989). Seen as a physical entity, the river is related to social and material processes that Lefebvre terms 'spatial practice', thus underlining the fact that, by necessity, all individual and social existence makes use of space. 'Representation of space' points at the useful quality of images and maps as selective and modifiable abstractions that help reduce the complexities that characterize the social, cultural and physical world. Representation of the river as a boundary may foster cooperation simply by showing how the two national sides can be brought together by means of physical planning. In Lefebvre's terminology 'lived space' means simply the spatially ubiquitous symbolism that characterizes all lived human experience. In the case of the Tornio River, this refers to the boundary as the river's affective kernel and locus of passion – as spatial symbolism that unites differing experiences in lived situations.

#### *The flooding river and its counter-measures*

Due to melting snow, the outflow of water in the catchment area of the Tornio River usually causes flooding that raises the river's water level by not more than 2.5 meters above sea level. However, unusually warm weather and heavy spring rain coupled with ice jams in critical locations may occasionally cause flooding that exceeds the normal level. This was the case in the spring of 1990 when the water level in the Tornio River rose to the record high of 4 meters above sea level, causing damage in Tornio to some buildings and streets that were covered by water (Utveclingsplan 2000, 2).

From the point of view of the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project, the flooding of the Tornio River comprises two aspects that make it a prime candidate for a boundary object. First, it is a phenomenon that occurs regularly, albeit with varying degrees of intensity, so that all actors related to the river share by necessity the consistent unpredictability of the flooding. Second, while the causes of flooding are beyond human control, its consequences can be regulated by water level surveillance and physical structures built to protect areas threatened by flood-related damage. Together these two aspects imbue the flooding river with the capacity of being simultaneously loosely structured and flexible, as well as specifiable in the context of particular practices without altering the underlying consensus. In other words, the flooding river is at once an actor and a boundary object bridging the gap between alternate social worlds that meet in the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project.

The physical planning area of the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project is boggy lowland between the town centers of Haparanda and Tornio. From early on, the planning has had to contend with the fact that the new joint urban center belongs to areas most vulnerable to flooding, and thus requires special protective measures in order to be at all viable as a construction site. In commenting on one of the winning designs (shared first prize) the jury composed of the members of the core network reasoned as follows:

The design is based on a rigorous analysis of the landscape, traffic network and existing urban structures. [...] The new park joining the towns [...] utilizes seasonally changing water levels in a controlled way by building a series of water basins that make the park unique (Arkitekturtävlingar 1998, author's own translation).

Interestingly enough, while the competition assignment called for designs to construct a centre for cooperation, the jury clearly hesitated to award proposals that contained ideas of concrete urban building that would unite Haparanda and Tornio. Instead, the three winning designs all suggest that the area between the towns be developed as a park (Arkitekturtävlingar 1998). To some extent this can be accounted for by the more moderate level of ambition that first characterized the project, but arguably the threat of flooding also played an important role in raising caution among the jury and the competing architects about the possibilities for large scale construction in the area.

The situation changed with the next stage of the project when a more ambitious Development Plan was drafted, comprising the idea that the town centers be actually built together by locating some 105.000 square meters of newly permitted building area in the vicinity. However, on top of extensive land fill needed to secure the required amount of building sites, a system of canals, basins, embankments and dams had to be designed for regulating the fluctuating water levels in the vicinity of the planning area (see figure 8.3 that shows the arc-shaped embankment dominating the plan).

The buildings in the [new joint] town centre will be protected from flooding by building walls and embankments. The area that is subject to flooding is [considered] from the point of view of highest water level (4.0 meters in 1990) and normal water level (2.5 meters) [...] To prevent water from pouring into the planning area from the Tornio River [...] the canals will be furnished with floodgates located at the outfall of the flues (Utvecklingsplan 2000, 27; author's own translation).

While certainly more expensive than building on more solid ground, the idea of joining the two towns physically was now too precious to be subjected to economic critique. In the Development Plan, the steering group of the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project states (much too optimistically, as it turned out) that

[t]he demand of soil resources needed for land filling is estimated to reach 415.000 cubic meters. This makes possible the easy relocation of both towns' excess soil masses in the area. Most of the materials will naturally be taken from the proximate neighboring areas (Utvecklingsplan 2000, 27; author's own translation).

However, before any ideas presented in the Development Plan could be realized, the plan would have to be developed into an Executive Plan accepted not only by the authorities in both countries but also, as an actor in a key position regarding the success of the project, by the Border River Commission between Sweden and Finland. The Commission is a transboundary, governing body in charge of monitoring the use of the Tornio River as regulated by the border treaty between Finland and Sweden dating back to 1972. Until 2004 its jurisdiction included issues related to the building and alterations of the river basin and, hence, Haparanda and Tornio had to submit an application for permission to realize the Tornio River related parts of the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project.

In a decision on June 28, 2002 the Commission granted Haparanda and Tornio the right to carry out their joint water construction project on the condition that special measures be taken to protect the building site against even the most extreme flooding, estimated to occur at the rate of no more than once in a hundred years.

The Finnish-Swedish Border River Commission concludes that permission to the applied water construction project can be granted on the following conditions. [...] Flooding

embankment must be built so that the water-resistant layers of the dam reach the height of 4.00 meters above normal sea level, and on top of that, the surface layers of the dam will sustain at least one day against a flood rising to the height of 4.35 meters above normal sea level (Border River Commission 2002, 5; author's own translation).

In pinpointing the flooding and the well-planned measures to control it as decisive factors favoring the approval of the project, the Commission was not only able to communicate with the steering group on an equal plane, but it could also retain a degree of specificity in framing the issue in its own terms. Herein lies the moment of the flooding Tornio River acting as a boundary object. In bridging the gap between the governmental steering group and the legislative Commission, the flooding river reduced the socio-material complexity of the project to the level where a critical decision could be made in order to realize it.

In the Executive Plan of 2003, the Border River Commission's decision was referred to as an authoritative statement obligating Haparanda and Tornio to supervise that all water construction work fulfills the conditions set by the Commission. Again the flooding river acquires a key role in the realization of the plan because the ability to control the river's water level is the single most important prerequisite to any other building activities in the area. Hence, the Executive Plan states the following:

In the Executive Plan the project has been divided into stages that will be realized incrementally over 10-20 years' time, or even faster. The first stage comprises infrastructure building that facilitates the further development of the area [...] In the area embankments will be built so that excavation work can be carried out on dry land (Toteuttamissuunnitelma 2003, 3, 20; author's own translation).

The actual water construction work commenced in Tornio in April of 2003 and has been ongoing since then. This may also be important when considering the interface between the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project and the general citizenry. A somewhat alarming observation about the lack of popular interest in the project was made on the basis of the fact that merely 17 persons attended a discussion organized by the Tornio town planning department on June 25, 2002 (Asemakaava 2003, 11). The task of moving the earth as a countermeasure against flooding is where the broader citizenry have seen the first concrete traces of the project on the border landscape. Arguably the project has gained more support among the citizens simply because of the general perception of the usefulness of such public works. A growing positive attitude towards the project is evinced by the outcome of a recent local survey where nearly two thirds of the respondents reported that they believe the project to be useful (Niska 2005). Again, it is the flooding river that acts as a bridge between different social worlds. For ordinary town dwellers, as well as for the Border River Commission and the Steering Committee, the flooding river presents a common denominator that enables each social domain to frame the issue according to its own concerns while retaining a degree of consensus about the object's identity.

#### *Cohesive representation of divided space*

In a statement concerning the design competition that launched the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project, the jury explicitly referred to the importance of maps in representing the planning area.

Coordinated physical planning in the borderland between Haparanda and Tornio has been practically nonexistent. Maps and charts have often ended at the border (Arkitekturtävlingar 1998, 2; author's own translation).

This simple notion points to the situation that characterizes most international borderlands all over the world: the border effectively separates two nationally constructed social and political systems from each other. The division often culminates in the 'peaceful coexistence' of two distinct jurisdictions, separated by the international boundary that marks the absolute end of national authority (Häkli & Kaplan 2002). Despite extensive cross-border cooperation between Haparanda and Tornio, the Swedish-Finnish boundary makes no exception. Both towns have actively sought to establish a transnational body for the joint exercise of public powers to handle their shared projects, but as is the case with similar aspirations elsewhere, neither the Swedish nor the Finnish state has considered this as a possibility (Rajakuntayhteistyö 2002).

Overcoming the dividing function of the boundary between Sweden and Finland has not been easy in the area of physical planning. The extensive, joint planning activity notwithstanding, Haparanda and Tornio have to carry out the actual zoning as two separate processes politically regulated by two different legislations. Hence, besides the joint *På Gränsen – Rajalla* planning process that has been ongoing since 1997, both towns are zoning their own parts of the planning area respectively (Asemakaava 2002).

In these circumstances it is not surprising that images, maps and charts representing the transnational planning area as one unity have emerged as an important set of boundary objects that bridge the two communities of practice composed of nationally constituted social, juridical and political systems. As pointed out by Star and Griesemer (1989, 411), coincident boundaries represented on maps enable work at different sites to be "conducted autonomously while cooperating parties share a common referent". In this regard the maps of the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* planning area have been extremely important facilitators of the two systems' conjoint action.

Quite expectedly, the importance of maps and images is reflected in their large number in the existing planning materials (see *På Gränsen – Rajalla* 2008). Even a cautious estimate of the number of images and maps portraying the *unity* of the planning area comes to 250, which means that, on average, each page of the available planning materials contains more than one such image. In more qualitative terms, the importance of the cohesive representation of divided space can be judged from the almost iconic nature of some of the cartographic representations depicting the area. Portrayed consistently and repeatedly throughout the documents that have been disseminated among the local population both materially and through the project's website, the map of the planning area has become a symbol in its own right, with meaning and significance that go well beyond merely instrumental (Figure 8.3). Particularly revealing is the choice by the Steering Committee to place this particular map on the front cover of the marketing brochure aimed at the business world and the general public. It is as if the transnational space, renounced by the two national governments, had been literally drawn into existence by a persistent group of enthusiasts.



**Figure 8.3** Iconic map of the På Gränsen planning area

Despite the transboundary nature of the envisioned space, from early on the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project has sought a careful balance between the ideas of obscuring and symbolizing the national boundary. The jury of the design competition made a clear point about the need to retain a specific attitude towards the border.

The boundary has lost its earlier meaning but nevertheless it is still a border between two states and, thus, there is a need to take a particular stance toward it. This sentiment should, at least symbolically, be visible to all those who cross the border (Arkitekturtävlingar 1998, 15; my translation).

This liminality, a border visibly dividing what is to become a transnational space, is carefully taken into account in the design solutions of the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* Development Plan. Throughout the planning area the boundary line is clearly marked in the physical space by means of water channels and other indicators, even in the market square that is one of the focal points of the plan (Utvecklingsplan 2000). This already suggests the third way in which the Tornio River functions as a boundary object in the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project.

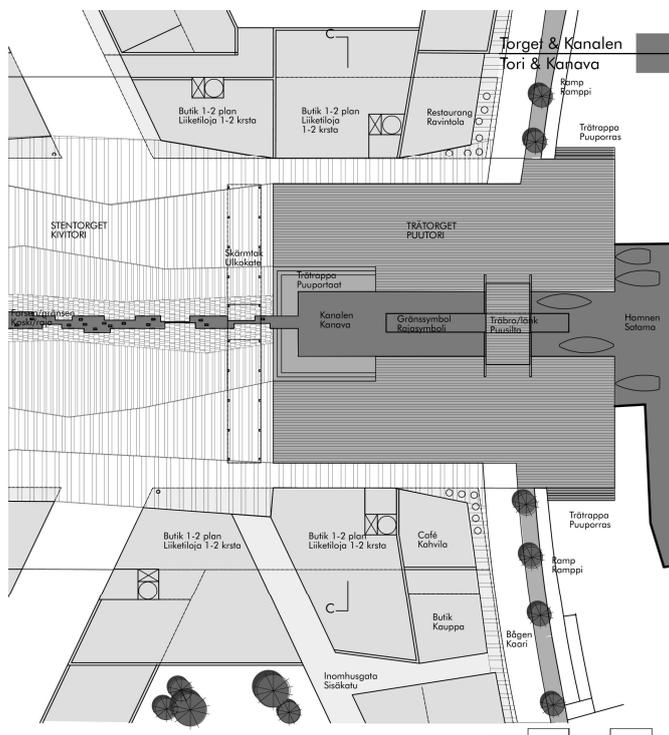
### *A border that unites*

In envisioning a transnational space between Haparanda and Tornio, the jury of the design competition was clearly aware of the international boundary's symbolic power and significance as a tourist attraction too. The jury pointed this out in setting up the competition task.

In the competition programme aims are stated: "it is an idea competition", "to develop the two cities to a unity where the border does not divide but unite" [...] "to gather information on communications and tourism and to host major public events" (Arkitekturtävlingar 1998, 16).

The goals of at once dissolving and emphasizing the boundary appear contradictory, but when understood in terms of lived experience of the boundary as a boundary object, it is possible to move beyond this apparent paradox. In fact, as part of lived space, boundary acquires a symbolic function in the original Greek sense of *sýmbolon*, which means "throwing things together," or "contrasting." The symbolically unifying sense of the border is explicitly underlined in the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* Development Plan.

On the border a unique site for private companies, public and commercial services, knowledge center and culture will be built. The special border town will even become an important tourist attraction. The boundary will be used as a point of contact in all respects [...] Even though the towns will be physically united the border will continue to be visible. The border will be highlighted in built environment, parks and market square by means of architecture, landscaping and environmental art [...] differences in building styles will be observable when moving from one country to another (Utvecklingsplan 2000, 3; author's own translation).



**Figure 8.4** Plan for the market square

While the Tornio River cannot represent the border because of intensive building in the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* planning area, it is nevertheless the water from this

river that marks the boundary. In this sense the steering group saw that the Development Plan would uphold the historical experience of the Tornio River as a border river (Figure 8.4). To make sure that the physical marker will actually become part of the citizens' lived experience, the Development Plan contains elements that aim at providing opportunities for ordinary people to meet and interact within the transnational space.

Services and free time activities will be placed on the border and its immediate vicinity so that the citizens from both towns can use them, together with workplaces where contacts across the border occur daily. In the park the border is formed as a channel where it is possible to paddle, row and fish in the summer time.[...] In the winter time shared skating and curling tracks will be made on the ice. [...] The border remains visible but several bridges will be built everywhere to make its crossing easy (Utvecklingsplan 2000, 7).

It is in the lived spaces of the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* area that, once the work is completed, the Tornio River is expected to function as a boundary object, symbolically unifying the two sides of the boundary. While the work is still ongoing, at this stage it is clear that the steering group has been able to build trust among the key actors in the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project network. By enacting their social capital they have also successfully mobilized a resource that has helped overcome the social, cultural and material complexities that pertain to the production of transnational space. A question for further research to settle is whether the steering group's goal of constructing a "border that unites" will actually be attained when the new center eventually becomes a lived space.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have assessed the social, material and cultural complexity that characterizes a cross-border cooperation project called *På Gränsen – Rajalla*. I have suggested that the project can be suitably viewed by focusing on trust-building boundary objects that perform the important function of bridging communities of practice that inhabit different social and cultural domains. Despite some conceptual similarity, my assessment breaks critically with Robert Putnam's (2000, 22) thought in which a distinction is made between "bridging" and "bonding" forms of social capital. For him bridging refers to connections among heterogeneous people spanning "diverse social cleavages" and constituting useful connections across social roles, interests, spaces and worldviews. The latter term he reserves for inward-looking social networks that conjoin similar kinds of people and reinforce exclusive identities. Moreover, Putnam (2000, 22) contends that bridging networks help actors to link with external assets and to diffuse information, both of which foster projects related to development and economic performance.

However, I assert that even though Putnam (2000) notes that bridging and bonding are not strict categories but rather dimensions along which different forms of social capital can be placed, the distinction is an oversimplification that is based on false separation between social relations that in reality always appear mixed (see also Leonard 2004). It thus provides inappropriate tools for analyzing the complex conditions under which development projects are carried out. A case in point is the long-term effort to envision, design, plan and build a joint center for Haparanda and Tornio as a new kind of transnational space. Whereas Putnam

(2000) never explicates what he considers as evidence of bridging social capital, I have striven to show that boundary objects, existing simultaneously as social, material and cultural entities, can be pragmatically seen as trust-building mechanisms that, in the words of Star and Griesemer (1989, 414), “are not simply the imposition of one world’s vision on the rest [but rather] act as anchors or bridges, however temporary.”

In assessing the role of the Tornio River as a boundary object that helps build trust among the participants of networks of cross-border cooperation, I have stressed the original unity of ‘the social’ and ‘the material’ that in many strands of social thought have been treated separately. To this end I have sought resources from actor-network theory (e.g. Callon 1991) and Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial triad, both of which emphasize the complex intertwinement of social, material and cultural worlds.

In the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project the representations of the Tornio River, showing its role as a boundary in images, maps and graphs, are not just abstractions but also material imprints that exist and circulate as objects among other objects in the social world. Hence, maps and images exist materially just like the objects that they represent. Conversely, the materiality of the Tornio River, as expressed for example in its yearly flooding in the springtime, is abstracted whenever the threat of flooding is taken up as an issue to be dealt with. The flood, then, is a discursive event just as it is a material one, occurring with some regularity. The experience of the Tornio River as a lived space, again, brings together its symbolic and material aspects, thus condensing into the experience the historical evolution of national narratives and discourses, the sense of the overwhelming material presence of the river’s water and banks, and the meanings these may acquire as part of contemporary social life in all its complexity.

It is this complexity that the three types of boundary objects, each belonging to the fundamental spatiality of human existence and related to the Tornio River, have helped reduce by showing how actors inhabiting different domains can all approach what they may consider as essentially the same, but nevertheless, specifiable in ways that reflect the needs of each social world (Star & Griesemer 1989). If successful, the new center of the twin-town Haparanda-Tornio will one day emerge as a transnational landscape – a symbolic space that people from both towns can identify with and feel comfortably part of. In such a case, people may experience a sense of belonging in their living environments instead of merely consuming the representations, master narratives and gleaming images through which the landscape is depicted in official discourses.

If international trust is likely to prevail in places where people do *not* feel alienated from the landscapes they live in (cf. Olwig 2005), the critical question is whether transnational trust can be successfully built from the top down, as is still much the case with the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project. I have proposed that the Tornio River has successfully fostered mutual trust as a three-fold boundary object. However, in the case of the Haparanda-Tornio twin-town it appears that, while personal trust may be on a high level between key actors of the steering group of the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project, the ordinary borderlanders may be living in a very different world, one marked by distrust toward the official efforts to gradually diminish the Swedish and Finnish national identities. In the case of the Tornio River Valley, this is exemplified by the fact that the plan to physically

unite the towns of Tornio and Haparanda was rejected in a referendum in Haparanda, but still pushed forward by both town councils.

This, in fact, is not unusual at European borderlands. Instead of a passionate will to exploit the possibilities of the increasingly open EU internal boundaries, many ordinary borderlanders remain indifferent toward the market opportunities "on the other side" (van der Velde & van Houtum 2004). Moreover, there typically exists a gap between institutional cross-border activities and the borderlanders' interests toward and knowledge about these activities (e.g. Häkli 2001; Kramsch 2002; Sidaway 2004; Strüver 2004). The discrepancy between official and popular views may have the consequence of diminishing the significance of the personal transboundary trust among the professionals of cross-border cooperation. Thus, whatever the achievements of cooperation at the official level are, these may not reverberate much in the broader social sphere, leaving the achieved transnational landscape hanging in the air and without deeper rooting in the borderlanders' social and political fabric. This in itself may hinder the emergence of transnational trust in Haparanda-Tornio.

Is the *På Gränsen – Rajalla* project, then, likely to fail? This is not necessarily the case. IKEA's surprising decision to invest in the Haparanda-Tornio area may turn out to be one of the most important occurrences capable of bringing the project to fruition. IKEA has great potential in this respect, largely because its image fits well in the transnational town center, and by attracting new investments in the area, it has greatly increased confidence in the project. Moreover, IKEA's products build concrete links between homes as people's most intimate spaces and the emerging transnational landscape. It is well known that IKEA deliberated upon locating its new store and eventually decided in favor of Tornio-Haparanda instead of more southern locations in Tampere and Turku. Playing along with this northern preference has certainly helped the company in winning over peoples' hearts and it may well be that IKEA eventually acquires a decisive role as a boundary object in the transnationalization of Haparanda-Tornio.

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